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Frontline



As the Congress(I) under Sonia Gandhi launches itself on a tough campaign, keeping its options open in respect of its post-election leadership and possible coalitional arrangements, questions about the party's electoral fortunes loom large. 4



India votes for the second time in less than 20 months, and for the first time in five phases, spread over a month. A look at the line-ups, electoral mood and prospects in the States that go to the polls on September 5 and 11, some of which have simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly..... 115

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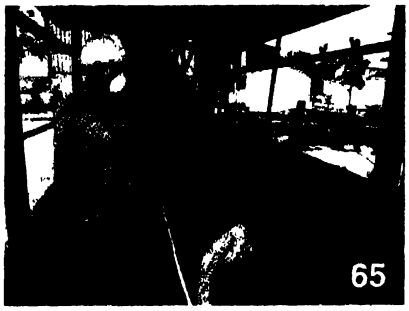
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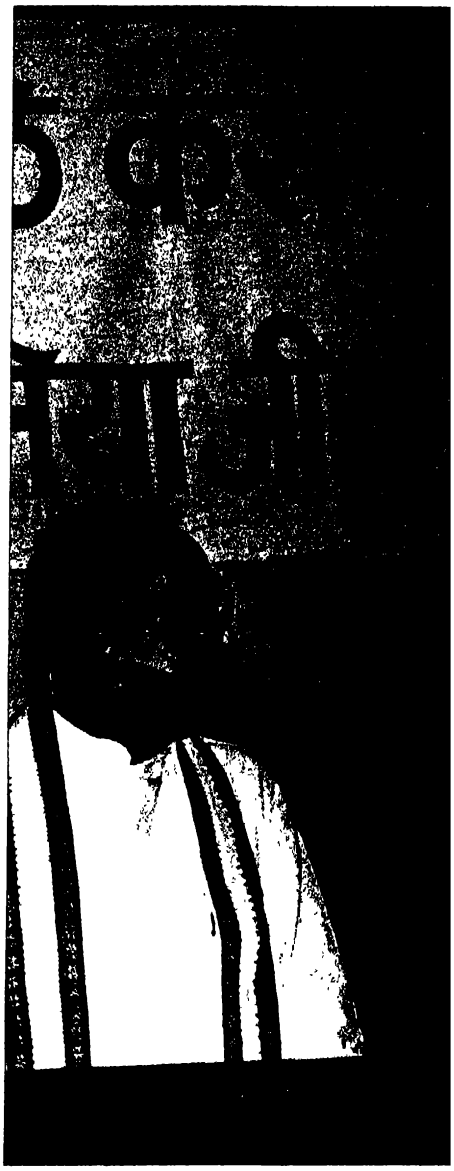
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INTO BATTLE



As the Congress(I) under Sonia Gandhi launches itself on a tough campaign, keeping its options open in respect of its post-election leadership and possible coalitional arrangements, questions about the party's electoral fortunes loom large.

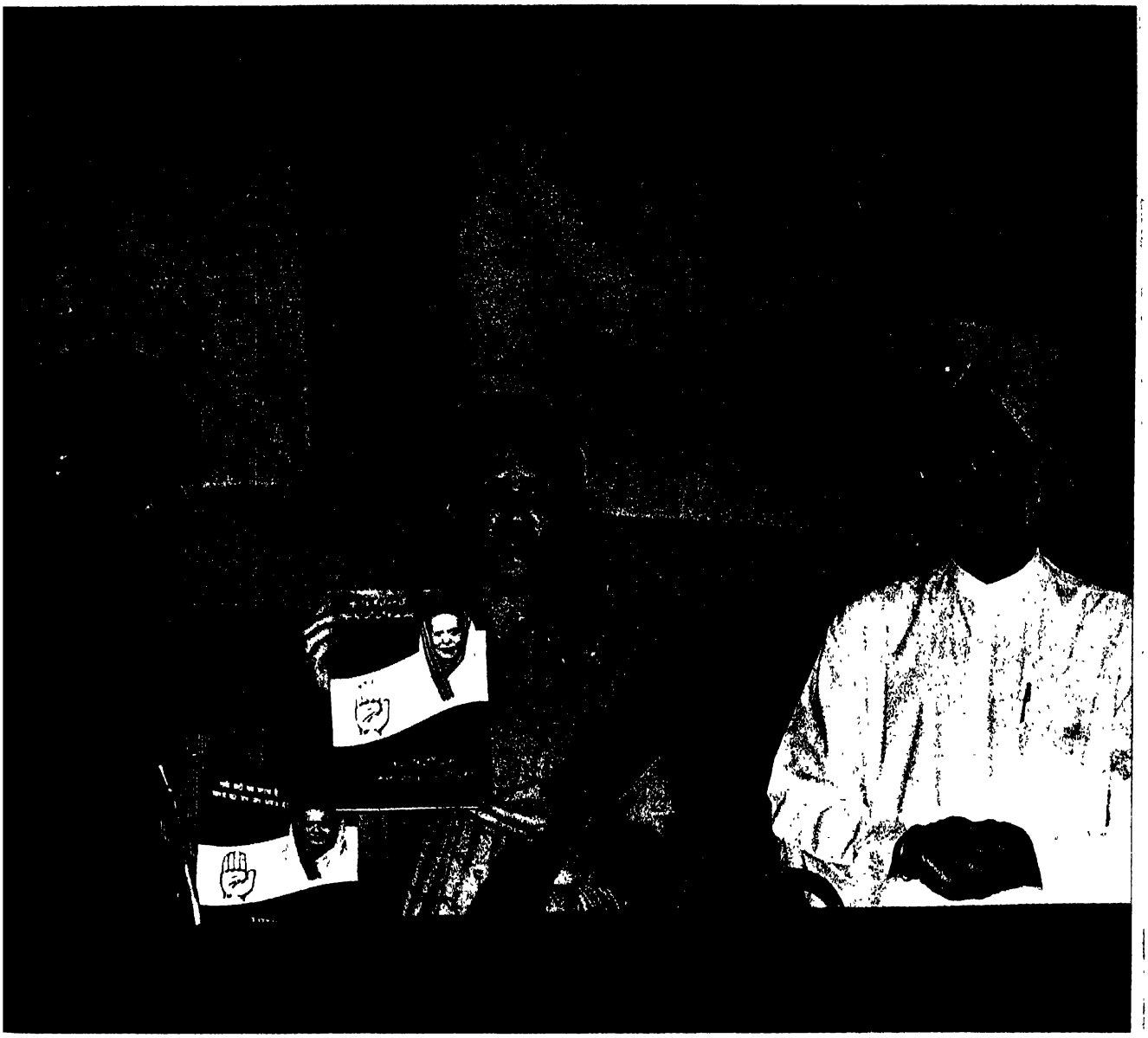
VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in New Delhi

ON August 19, an atmosphere of intense gloom, witnessed never before in the 17 months that Sonia Gandhi has been Congress(I) president, enveloped 24 Akbar Road in New Delhi, the headquarters of the All India Congress(I) Committee. Everyone present, from grassroots-level workers to middle-level leaders to senior members of the Congress(I) Working Committee, was in its spell. Huddled in groups inside and outside the AICC office were hundreds of them, discussing only one topic: the pointless and politically damaging hide-and-seek drama that had preceded Sonia Gandhi's filing of her nomination for the Lok Sabha election from Bellary in Karnataka the previous day. There was much loud tut-tutting and expressions of disbelief that their leader, whom they looked up to to lead the Congress(I) to the leading position in national politics, had exhibited political naivete and virtually advertised her electoral insecurities. Some even made bold to raise serious doubts about Sonia Gandhi's leadership qualities.

At one clumsy stroke, the Bellary episode had inflicted damage at several levels to the party and its organisational apparatus. It also sent out the message that the Congress(I) and its leader suffered extreme political diffidence in the run-up to the elections. By resorting to a hide-and-seek stratagem to try and keep her nomination from Bellary a secret, Sonia Gandhi had exposed her insecurity *vis-a-vis* the Congress(I)'s chances in the Lok Sabha elections. That the whole charade was intended to ensure that the leader, who was being projected as a tough-as-nails political battler, would have an easy passage into the Lok Sabha and not face a strong a challenge from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party was not lost on anyone. Congress(I) workers were left wondering how their top leader could lead the party to victory if she was not sure of her own personal victory and was looking for weak opponents.



That the attempt to mislead media-persons and political opponents into believing that Sonia Gandhi would file her nomination for the Cuddappah Lok Sabha constituency in Andhra Pradesh had fooled nobody except Congress(I) workers all over the country too came as a setback. On August 17, Congress(I) leaders, including CWC members Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad, who had accompanied Sonia Gandhi to Hyderabad and later to Bellary, pointedly said that the Congress(I) president would contest from Cuddappah. If this feint was intended to throw the BJP off-track, it clearly failed. The BJP, which had evidently got wind of the Congress(I)'s ruse, despatched former Delhi Chief Minister Sushma Swaraj to Bellary in order to challenge Sonia Gandhi. Sushma Swaraj filed her nomination minutes after Sonia Gandhi did.



Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi with party leaders (from right) Manmohan Singh, Shivraj Patil and Pranab Mukherjee at the release of the party's election manifesto in New Delhi on August 13. (Facing page) Filing her nomination in Bellary on August 18.

For Congress(I) workers, the inability of the party leadership to carry out a "secret mission" successfully was highly demoralising.

At another level, the fiasco showed up the party organisation in poor light. The script, including the plan to offer Cuddappah as a red-herring, was known only to a handful of people who are considered close to 10 Janpath: the majority of CWC members were themselves in the dark about it. This reinforced the message that had gone out on numerous occasions – that the party organisation was not overly important for Sonia Gandhi and that she continued with her "coterie politics" despite the criticism it had drawn in recent times.

Apart from all this, the Bellary misadventure has dealt a body blow to the Congress(I)'s claim that the party is undergoing a "great revival" in the North Indian States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Party workers wondered how if Sonia Gandhi herself was not confident of contesting from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh, considered the pocketborough of the Nehru-Gandhi family and represented in the past by Rajiv Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi, the party could talk of such a revival? Party workers, who had gathered at the AICC office on August 19, debated these questions over and over again and repeatedly gave expression to their extreme sense of dejection.

IN the wake of all this, Sonia Gandhi loyalists moved into the damage-control mode and promptly announced that she would contest from Amethi too. However, this announcement was not enough to clear the mood of despondency.

At a personal level, the Bellary episode eroded Sonia Gandhi's stature as a serious politician and the regard she received from associates and fellow politicians. Signals of this erosion were aplenty in the next few days. The Bihar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee virtually revolted against Sonia Gandhi when it said that the seat-sharing deal brokered by her with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Laloo Prasad Yadav was not acceptable to it. This compelled Sonia Gandhi to go back on the word given to the RJD leadership and initiate fresh discussions on a seat-sharing

formula (see accompanying story on alliances).

More humiliation was in store for the party president. On August 22, the Congress(I)'s alliance partner in Tamil Nadu, the mercurial Jayalalitha, who was to have addressed a joint meeting with Sonia Gandhi in Villupuram, failed to turn up for the meeting. After being kept waiting for a while, Sonia Gandhi gamely addressed the meeting, son Rahul Gandhi by her side. No Congress(I) president, in particular one from the Nehru-Gandhi family, had been treated with such disdain by any fellow politician.

The Bellary episode also served to heighten the aura of secrecy and inaccessibility surrounding Sonia Gandhi and is certain to add to the swadeshi-vs-videshi slogan raised by the BJP and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Such a campaign, which portrays Sonia Gandhi as a political entity who is not seriously committed enough to India's interests and causes, will place her in a position where she is the party's star campaigner and simultaneously a major political liability.

A CWC member who is known for his forthright views on party affairs told *Frontline* that the Bellary episode could prove a costly mistake in Sonia Gandhi's political career. Coming on top of a series of blunders since March, "it could even prove to be the proverbial last straw," he said. Another senior leader, who shared this perception, said that these "blunders" had first manifested themselves in the days following the first anniversary of Sonia Gandhi's takeover as party president and had progressively become more frequent and more grave. This leader pointed out that right up until the November 1998 Assembly elections in four States and Delhi, Sonia Gandhi had consistently said that she would not topple the BJP-led government but would instead concentrate on rebuilding the party machinery. "During the post-anniversary period," the leader said, "along with a plethora of mistakes there were some initiatives that seemingly sought to correct them. But their net result was not positive." There were several highs and lows during this period, all of which left the party disoriented: as one CWC member termed it, a "Trishanku feeling" existed in the party. Even so, there was the hope that the Congress(I) would still be able to get its act together ahead of the elections. However, the Bellary misadventure has dashed all such hopes.

The first of these mistakes, party leaders say, came immediately after the fall of

Questions of leadership

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

AN acute leadership deficit is an obvious reality of the election scene today. The Bharatiya Janata Party claims to be on a roll towards victory, and by its own admission made a serious error of judgment in seeking to recruit the authority of the armed forces commanders for its political campaign. What is most striking about this supposed error is the tacit acknowledgment that even a Prime Minister who has been anointed, in the imagination of his adoring flock, as a leader to be "trusted in war and peace", has to prop up his claims by invoking extraneous authorities.

Overlooking the glaring impropriety of press-ganging the military into a political campaign, the mural that provided the backdrop to Vajpayee's public meeting at Karnal, Haryana, on August 20 could be interpreted in different ways, none of which would do any credit to the government or the party he leads. It could be viewed as an effort by a political leadership that has presided over the erosion of various institutions to garner the vicarious benefit of identification with the armed forces. Among all the instrumentalities of the state, the armed forces today enjoy unprecedented public acclaim as a consequence of the war in Kargil. The mural depicting the three armed forces chiefs (as well as assorted objects including the Prithvi missile) either signified the recruitment of the military command as co-equals of the political leadership or, more alarmingly, as patrons and benefactors. Either way, the representation of the armed forces commanders at a political rally can only be construed as a serious embarrassment for a country that has always kept the military isolated from political partisanship and set great store by the principle of civilian control over the soldiers of the republic.

As in the case of the brutal manhandling by the police of a college girl at one of his election rallies in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Vajpayee was quick to express his regret at the lapse. Under pressure from the Opposition, the BJP in its turn owned up to its mistake without further evasion or equivocation. But the admission of leadership infirmities has not been undone.

Within the Congress(I), occupation has often been considered the entire basis of legitimacy. P.V. Narasimha Rao could weather every manner of adversity during his tenure as Prime Minister and Congress(I) president without facing serious challenge from within the ranks of his party. It was, finally, judicial stricture and indictment in several cases of corruption that laid him low.

Even the less-than-compelling claims of Sitaram Kesri managed to pass internal scrutiny, including the first leadership contest in decades, although he plunged the party into one reckless misadventure after another without gaining for it any dividend. He was finally cast aside by the restoration of dynastic legitimacy. Evidently, dynasty is the only force that can overturn the legitimacy of occupation within the Congress(I).

DYNASTIC associations do not, however, confer an abundance of political discrimination or judgment. As the contest for the party ticket for the Lok Sabha elections sharpened, there were several people within the top hierarchical structure of the Congress(I) who were prepared to question the soundness of Sonia Gandhi's judgment. The buzz grew still louder after the grossly mismanaged drama of Bellary.

The Congress(I) strategy is premised upon a restoration of its role as the central pivot of Indian politics – the party that represents the nation in microcosm and is hence the presumptive party of governance. The absolutist claims of dynastic legitimacy mesh easily with this intent to restore single-party dominance in the Indian polity.

At the same time, there are queries about how credible a candidate for Prime Minister Sonia Gandhi really is. While a natural politician like Vajpayee revels on a public platform and finds himself most comfortable in addressing a large assembly extempore, Sonia Gandhi has to seek protection under layers of access control by her zealous followers and stick to carefully scripted speeches. A recent survey of the electorate found that more than her foreign origin, Sonia Gandhi's lack of political experience was perceived as the more serious disqualification as far as her credentials for high office were con-



SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Manmohan Singh campaigning in South Delhi.

cerned.

For the Congress(I), the subtle projection of Manmohan Singh is an insurance against the miscarriage of the Sonia effect. The former Finance Minister serves a multitude of functions for the party. First, he is recognised as a reluctant politician, one who entered the hurly-burly only in order to revive an economy that seemed to be headed towards terminal illness. He introduced a deeply controversial package of policies without attracting any acrimony towards himself. In a milieu where political passions are often raised to fever pitch over marginal differences on substantive issues, Manmohan Singh seems to embody the virtue of bureaucratic neutrality. With politicians as a class generally being in disfavour with the general public, Manmohan Singh's special characteristics may well prove attractive.

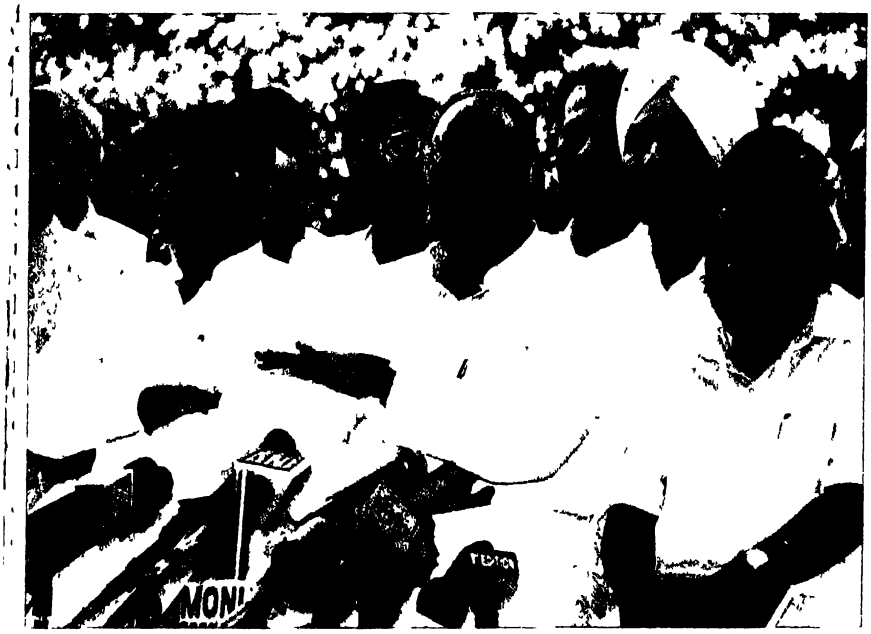
Acknowledging the claims to leadership of the former Finance Minister – who has, incidentally, served in every senior official position connected to economic policy, from Chief Economic Adviser to the government to Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission – would involve certain hard choices for the Congress(I). First, it would institute a situation of dyarchy within, which has never served the party well. However ardent Manmohan Singh may be in expressions of loyalty to the Gandhi dynasty, occupation of high office is known to confer a certain self-belief that could run contrary to the absolutist principle on which the Congress(I) runs. This could threaten the secure hold of the dynasty on the party and make for a situation of endemic instability.

Sonia Gandhi's rather unequivocal disavowal of any intent to field either of her children as candidates for the Lok Sabha renders the family's hold just that bit more tenuous. There are expectations, however, that both Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi will go to work in the family's traditional constituencies of Rae Bareli and Amethi in Uttar Pradesh. They could involve themselves closely in the Congress(I) campaign from these constituencies, seeking to establish their credentials for a future contest.

THE thinking within the Congress(I) is that in the remote eventuality of the party gaining a near-majority in the Lok Sabha, Sonia Gandhi would be an axiomatic choice for Prime Minister. But if the Congress(I) falls well short and the rival BJP-led coalition is also unable to put together a viable government, then Manmohan Singh could become a pivotal figure in the construction of new alliances. Prospective allies may have reservations about Sonia Gandhi's leadership. But precisely because of his seeming bureaucratic neutrality, Manmohan Singh is expected to be a more agreeable figure across the political spectrum.

Even the Left parties could submerge their serious reservations about the economic philosophy that Manmohan Singh represents, in certain conditional assurances of support.

As always, the Congress(I) is far from being internally united on these strategic perspectives. There is a section within that which is dependent for its political sustenance on the patronage of the dynasty and may have reason to feel threatened by the emergence of alternative power centres. This section would have a vested interest in pre-empting the former Finance Minister by setting in motion the kind of inscrutable forces that have often in the past turned certain Congress(I) victory into ignominious defeat in particular constituencies. A Manmohan Singh who fails to gain entry into the Lok Sabha would hardly be a candidate for party leadership. His initial campaign appearances seem to indicate that the bureaucrat is beginning to find his political feet. But in the Byzantine inner processes of the Congress(I), there are enough instrumentalities available to cut the ground from under his feet. ■



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

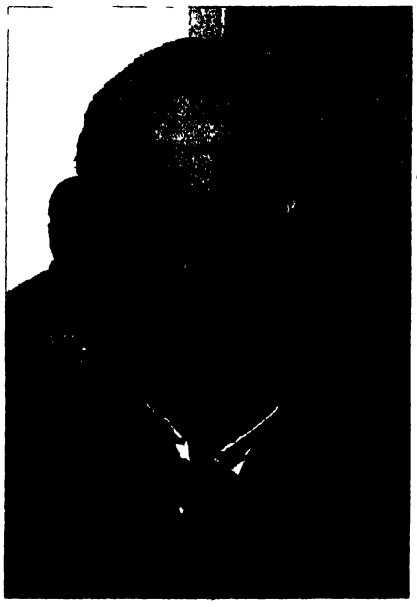
Sharad Pawar with P.A. Sangma (right) and Tariq Anwar. The three were expelled from the Congress(I) after they questioned the appropriateness of Sonia Gandhi being projected as the party's prime ministerial candidate. (Below) Pranab Mukherjee and Arjun Singh, who pushed hard for the expulsion of Pawar and Co., who raised the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin.

the Atal Behari Vajpayee-led government when Sonia Gandhi claimed that her party had the support of 272 Lok Sabha members and would be able to form a minority government. The CWC member said: "It was this faux pas that upset the party's chances of being invited to form the government on the strength of its being the second largest party." Had Sonia Gandhi desisted from making this claim, the CWC member added, she would not have faced the ignominy of having to tell President K.R. Narayanan later that the Congress(I) did not have adequate support in the Lok Sabha and was giving up its claim.

In the perception of several leaders, these mistakes came about because Sonia Gandhi was misguided by a coterie in 10 Janpath, particularly former Union Minister Arjun Singh. Following growing criticism on this count within the CWC and elsewhere, Sonia Gandhi made some moves in late April and early May, evidently to send across the message that she was not bound by coterie politics. As part of these moves, leaders with a mass base, such as Sharad Pawar and A.K. Antony, were given a key role in party affairs. Pawar



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Dr. Manmohan Singh has none of the trappings of a politician. His official residence at 19 Safdarjung Road, New Delhi, lacks the security paraphernalia that many politicians like to flaunt, and hence the former Finance Minister is one of the most accessible leaders around. As the Congress(I) candidate for the South Delhi parliamentary constituency, Manmohan Singh's campaign is also unique for its simplicity. Unlike the average Congress(I) candidate who would not set out for campaigning without a motorcade in tow, he starts off from his house in an Ambassador car that may or may not be joined by other vehicle-borne activists. Still his campaign has been deemed both by supporters and opponents as one of the most impressive in terms of popular response.

Venkitesh Ramakrishnan accompanied Manmohan Singh on one of his campaign trips on August 22, and in between meetings and mass contact programmes asked him questions on a variety of subjects including his chances of emerging as an alternative prime ministerial candidate. Although he negated such a possibility during the conversation, there are many people in the Congress(I) itself who perceive his new status as a mass leader as an indicator of his being positioned for the top job. Excerpts from the interview.

▶ *You have been perceived as an "intellectual politician" rather than one with mass appeal. As the Congress(I) candidate in South Delhi, how do you see your new experience in mass politics?*

When the party leadership said that I should fight for the Lok Sabha, I decided to abide by it. Personally too, I had thought that one day I should experience what it is like to go to the people directly. And I can say that this is a great education for me. I have come to understand the problems and aspirations of the people not merely from the macro level but from the micro level too. People hope that when politicians go to them some of their problems will be addressed. And these are serious and basic problems like that of shortage of power, of water, neglect of sewerage systems, public health and so on.

▶ *From these micro experiences, what is the macro solution that you see for these problems?*

I think that we need more active

'Seeking a vote for the Congress, not for a coalition'

involvement by the government in developing basic infrastructure. I do not think that this is a task which can be left entirely to market forces. When people are living on the edges of subsistence, market signals have no meaning for them. To address these issues satisfactorily, the face of our politics has to change. India needs a new type of politics. I think that politics has ceased to be a servant of social sympathies. It is no longer a creative mechanism to mediate between societal tensions. It has become too much of a preoccupation with self-preservation and self-promotion. And the state has become largely dysfunctional. Instrumentalities that could have given great potency to solve our problems have been used to promote partisan ends. The politicisation of the system in a perverse manner is a factor in corroding people's faith in politics as an instrument of purposeful social change.

▶ *But the Congress(I) has also contributed to this.*

Of course, the Congress(I) has been in power for so long that you can say that for anything which happens in the country. But the point is to look beyond that. As Karl Marx used to say, we have studied history for long but the challenge is to change it.

▶ *So the messiah of economic liberalisation is quoting Marx now...*

I have always admired Marx. There are a lot of good things in Marx too.

▶ *The perception is that you are being groomed as an alternative candidate for the Prime Minister's post in case the Congress(I) fails to get an absolute majority and seeks to depend on other parties for support.*

All this is media speculation. Hypothetical questions that exist in a vacuum.

▶ *There were reports that you had refused to contest if some of the accused in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots were given the ticket.*

These are all highly exaggerated reports that came in the media. Newspapers have invented discussions in the Congress Working Committee when there was no discussion at all.

▶ *It is being said, even within the party, that the Congress(I) has committed a series of mistakes after the fall of the Vajpayee government, leading to a reversal of its fortunes. That while the Congress(I) was on a winning wicket during the November 1998 Assembly polls, it is no longer the case now.*

I do not think that there is a perception like this. I have not come across any of these things. In any case, the Congress(I) worker does not bring up this issue. He is concentrating on the administrative task of managing the elections now. It is another matter that he does talk about the euphoria of November 1998. But he also knows that this cannot last forever. The Congress(I) represented a new hope from the declining standards of governance that the BJP had provided till then. The Congress(I) organisation was facing its first major election under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi. And the party workers fought hard, knowing full well that they had a chance to wrest the administration from the BJP...

▶ *The contention is that it has all died down. And that the chances of the Congress(I) making it have receded.*

It is a different type of enthusiasm now. I do not think that the chances are any less now. The BJP might be harping on nationalism and the nationality issue. They could have created a different media atmosphere. But the people understand things in their totality.

▶ *Do you think that Kargil is the single most important issue in this election?*

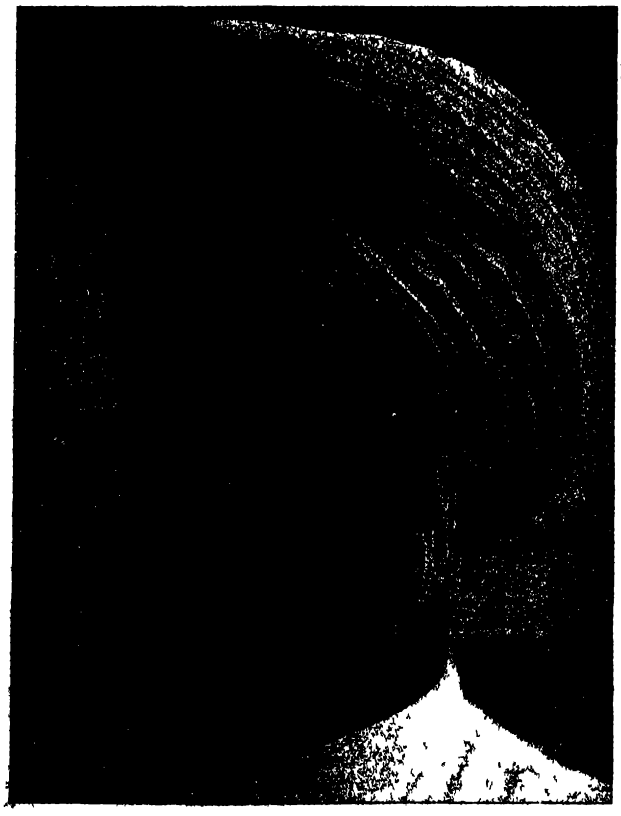
People are certainly worried about Kargil. And also about the reasons behind it. It is not that people just accept whatever the BJP establishment is putting out. When we explain to them that these intruders had come many months ago and this government slept, people nod with approval.

▶ *But according to the BJP, it is the Congress(I)'s nationalism that is being questioned when the government is criticised on the Kargil issue.*

I have not come across any such thing. In fact, the common feeling is that the government needs to explain its conduct on the Kargil issue.

▶ *What about Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin? This issue has put the Congress(I) on the defensive.*

Nobody has brought up the nationality issue anywhere during my campaign. In fact, among the ordinary people there is a lot of sympathy and affection for Sonia Gandhi.



RAJEEV BHATT

▶ *There is the argument that the Congress(I)'s insistence on equating single-party rule with stability is counter-productive, especially in the context of the BJP's success in forming a formidable coalition.*

It is true that we are seeking a vote for the Congress(I), not for a coalition. We believe that single-party rule alone can provide the stability it needs. We are going to the people with that slogan. If the people endorse that, well and good, and if they do not, that will be a different situation. But what kind of stability has the formidable coalition of the BJP given in the last 17 months?

▶ *What would be the Congress(I) strategy if it does not get a chance to form a single-party government but can form a coalition Ministry?*

We will cross that bridge when we come to it. ■

Behind the scenes

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

WHO exactly are Sonia Gandhi's advisers? This question had no clear answer until November last year, when as Congress(I) president she started a process of restructuring the party organisation and formed various task forces and committees for the purpose. It was already known that her personal assistant Vincent George and Congress Working Committee (CWC) member Arjun Singh had a special advisory role. During this phase, Sonia Gandhi apparently adopted a classical academic approach by entrusting specific jobs to various leaders on the basis of their interest and areas of specialisation. Thus Manmohan Singh was in charge of a committee to look into economic policy, P.A. Sangma and A.K. Antony had responsibility for a task force entrusted with the restructuring of the organisation, K. Karunakaran headed a committee to review the party constitution, and Sharad Pawar, then the party's leader in the Lok Sabha, had a role in parliamentary affairs.

However, after the November Assembly elections, in which the Congress(I) registered thumping victories in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi, the priority shifted from restructuring to taking proactive measures against the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government. Realpolitik games were a natural part of these, and it is at this point that her set of advisers became more and more visible.

According to sources close to 10 Janpath, there are three layers of advisers around the Congress(I) president. The most proximate group is what is termed the gang of four, comprising Arjun Singh, former Minister M.L. Fotedar, Vincent George and former bureaucrat R.D. Pradhan. This group apparently handles day-to-day matters. There is no specific job description for any of them – they handle everything from correspondence to the formulation of political strategy.

The second layer essentially comprises CWC members R.K. Dhawan, Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad, who are supposed to organise special trouble-shooting operations. Dhawan and Azad performed similar jobs for former Congress(I) presidents P.V. Narasimha Rao and Sitaram Kesri. Sometimes this involved putting "troublesome" leaders such as Pawar, Rajesh Pilot, J.B. Patnaik and A.K. Antony in their place during crucial meetings or while deciding important issues.

The members of the third layer, consisting of K. Natwar Singh, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Jairam Ramesh, prepare speeches, articles and other policy documents. The one distinguishing characteristic that members of all three layers share is their lack of a mass base.

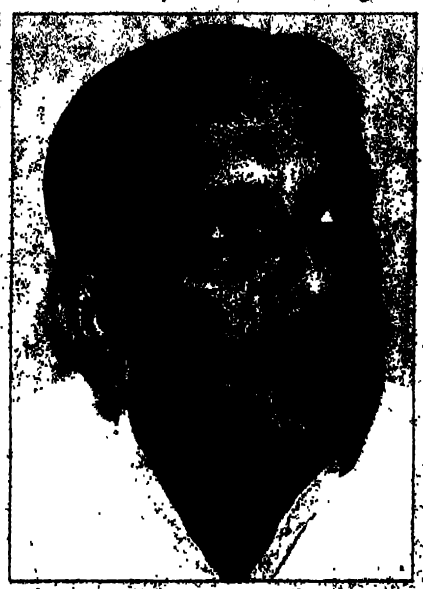
At the May 15 CWC meeting that paved the way for the expulsion of Pawar, Sangma and Tariq Anwar, Dhawan's trouble-shooting skills were in evidence. It was he who cut short the arguments of Pawar and Co. and made the suggestion that the CWC record its approval to making Sonia Gandhi the party's prime ministerial candidate.

Dhawan played his part in organising many of the dramatic scenes of agitation after Sonia Gandhi's resignation from presidentship following the Pawar-led revolt. Mukherjee handled the legal and constitutional issues involved in the expulsion of the rebels.

The first layer is the most influential one. Most of the problems that have faced the Congress(I) and its president recently can be traced to the members of this layer. The list starts with Sonia Gandhi's erroneous claim after the fall of the Vajpayee government that she had the support of 272 Lok Sabha members to form a minority Congress(I) government and includes the recent Bellary nomination fiasco. Many Congress(I) insiders say that it was Arjun Singh who gave the feedback to Sonia Gandhi, which made her stake her claim to form a government. Vincent George and Azad, the general secretary in charge of Karnataka, managed the Bellary expedition. The suggestion to file the nomination in stealth was reported to have come essentially from the duo and later approved by Arjun Singh and Pranab Mukherjee. The idea was to take the BJP by surprise so that it would not be able to field a strong candidate.


V.V. KRISHNAN

M.L. [illegible]


N. SRIDHARAN

R.K. Dhawan.


SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

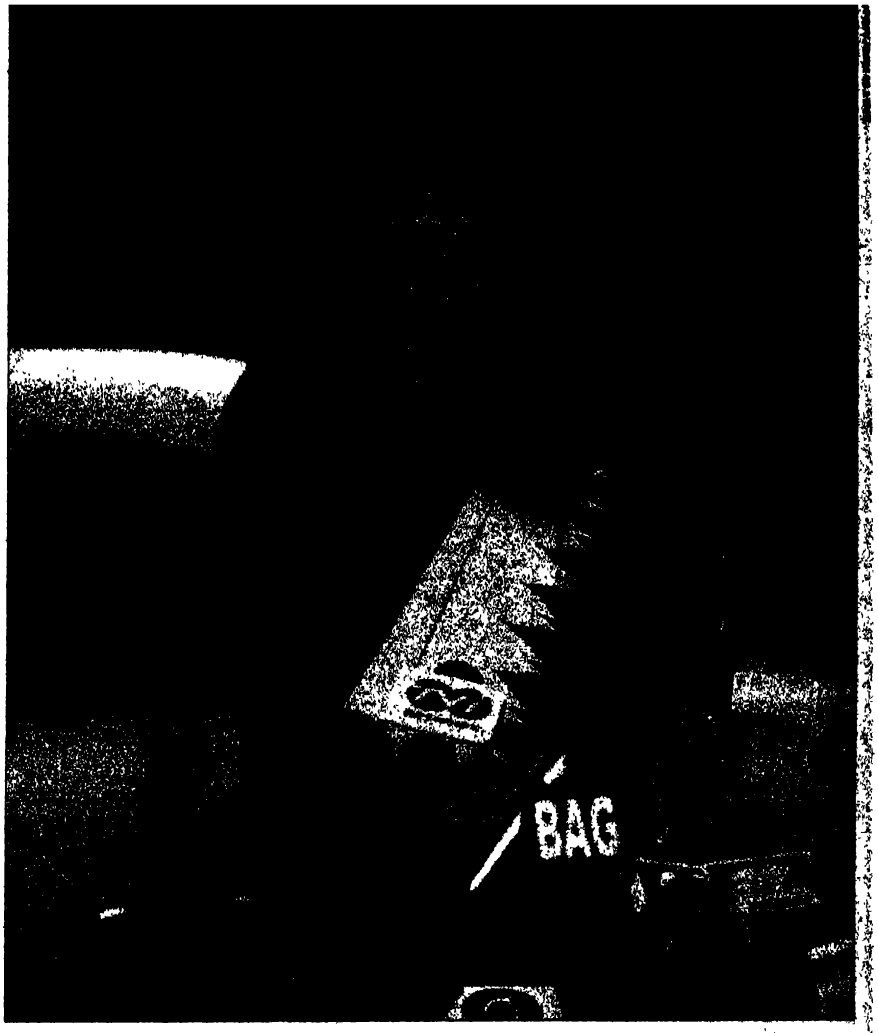
[illegible] Nath Azad.

Arjun Singh's role in messing up the efforts to form an alternative government after the fall of the Vajpayee Ministry had caused some Congress(I) allies to take a strong position against him. These included All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam supremo Jayalalitha and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Laloo Prasad Yadav. Consequently, Arjun Singh was not included in the team to negotiate electoral deals. Manmohan Singh and A.K. Antony were deputed to Tamil Nadu, and Madhavrao Scindia and Pranab Mukherjee were in charge of Bihar.

But the Arjun Singh-led group's influence in ticket distribution was evident in States such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan and in Delhi. Even in a State like Kerala, where the Congress(I)'s organisational machinery almost matches that of the Left parties, Arjun Singh managed to nominate someone like M.P. Gangadharan, though the former State Minister has not been in active politics for quite some time. However, neither Arjun Singh nor the other members of the group were able to wield much influence in the selection of candidates in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, where second-time Chief Minister Digvijay Singh and Pradesh Congress Committee president Amarinder Singh respectively called the shots.

The free hand given to leaders such as Digvijay Singh in the selection of candidates and certain developments before and after the Bellary fiasco have been interpreted by some Congress(I) insiders as a bid by Sonia Gandhi to free herself from the group's influence. The appointment of Ahamed Patel as a special authority at 10 Janpath and the diminution of R.D. Pradhan's role in policy discussions are seen as part of this effort.

There are also reports that Sonia Gandhi is increasingly consulting Dr. Manmohan Singh. How far this stage would last for Manmohan Singh is to be seen, especially in the background of Sonia Gandhi's own insecurity *vis-a-vis* leaders with a mass base. Incidentally, Pawar too had gone through a similar phase of increased proximity with the Congress(I) president before being overcome by the party. ■



Sonia Gandhi outside Rashtrapati Bhavan in April 1999, after she informed the President of her party's inability to form the government, after having first claimed that she had the numbers.

was appointed chairman of the election strategy committee and given the responsibility of negotiating alliances with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, the RJD in Bihar and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Then came the revolt by Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar, who raised the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, and once again Sonia Gandhi flipped. The theatrics that followed – Sonia Gandhi's resignation from the party president's post, her supporters' show of sycophancy which came in the form of self-immolation attempts and assaults on senior leaders such as Sitaram Kesri – did not go down well with the public, which found the events farcical. Her return as party president at the May 25 AICC session without much demur only served to heighten this perception, although she was able to assert her supreme control over the Congress(I).

The principal issue raised by Pawar and Co. was what they described as the inadvisability, owing to Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, of projecting her as the Congress(I)'s prime ministerial candidate. With hindsight, many senior leaders point out that the party would not have been enfeebled by a split if the present decision not to project anyone as the prime ministerial candidate had been taken at that time. Sonia Gandhi loyalists such as Arjun Singh and Pranab Kumar Mukherjee pushed hard for the expulsion of the dissident leaders. Many in the party believe that the handling of the Pawar revolt was steamrolled by Arjun Singh and Mukherjee in order to settle scores with their opponents. Whatever the truth, the net result of the Pawar-led revolt is that the Congress(I), apart from being weakened in Maharashtra and the northeastern region, is now wary of projecting Sonia Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate.

The Congress(I) was in much the same predicament ahead of the 1998 elec-



V SUDERSHAN

With physically handicapped children at her residence on August 20, the birth anniversary of Rajiv Gandhi.

tions, and this showed in the verdict: it won fewer seats than it had in the previous elections. As it did then, the Congress(I) leadership says that the party will decide on its choice for Prime Minister after the elections. Under normal circumstances there would have been no doubt on this score: Sonia Gandhi would have been the obvious choice. But the possibility of having to depend on pre- and post-election allies, if at all the party comes within striking distance of power, has compelled the Congress(I) to give up any idea of projecting her as its candidate. The decision to nominate former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh from the South Delhi constituency is significant in this connection (see separate story on the leadership question, and interview).

Some senior Congres(I) leaders have been critical also of Sonia Gandhi's responses to the Kargil crisis in its initial stages. Former vice-president Jitendra Prasada and others are reported to have said in private that Sonia Gandhi had rushed to criticise the government even as the war was on. According to sources close to Prasada, his view was that the party should have waited for the crisis to be resolved before questioning the government's failure to prevent the infiltration.

NOTWITHSTANDING all this, however, the party was able to formulate a well-conceived strategy to fight the elections. The strategy, which was evolved at the July 20-21 meeting of the CWC, focussed on four political-organisational tasks: 1. to expose as false the claims of the BJP and its allies on the government's role in the victory achieved by Indian soldiers in Kargil; 2. to project the Congress(I) as the only party equipped to form a stable government and emphasise the importance of a stable government in safeguarding national security; 3. to initiate moves to neutralise the organisational damage caused by the Pawar-led revolt and by faction feuds in various States; and 4. to finalise poll alliances and seat adjustments in regions where the party is weak.

However, on each of these issues, the party was unable to match promise with performance. Its initiatives betrayed a lack of ideological and political cohesion and organisational integration. This was visible in almost all areas, barring the formulation of the election manifesto. What was particularly galling was its efforts to harmonise two concerns – of projecting the idea of single-party rule and of entering into alliances in States where it is organisationally weak such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tamil Nadu (see separate story on alliances).

Immediately after the CWC session of July 20 and 21, some efforts were made to expose the government's failure to prevent the infiltration in Kargil. On July 22, the party revealed, with documentary evidence, that the government had specific information about the intrusion in Kargil as early as August 1998. Party spokesperson Kapil Sibal disclosed the reference number of a letter written by the Brigadier who was in charge of the Kargil sector at that time, which talked about "enhanced threat perception" in the region. However, this initiative was not pressed further as the Army establishment denied the existence of the letter.

Similarly, the party backtracked on its pledge to streamline the organisational network. The process of choosing candidates was bogged down in the usual allegations of favouritism, nepotism and corruption. The AICC office witnessed protests by different groups, and also occasional fisticuffs, which were discounted as "not serious" in the charged election atmosphere. Protests by various groups, such as backward castes in Andhra Pradesh, the Youth Congress(I) in

Karnataka and a large section of the party in Uttar Pradesh, marked the selection process. In between all this, former Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran, Punjab Congress(I) president Amarinder Singh, Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) president Salman Khurshid, Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang and former Union Minister K. Natwar Singh ensured that a few of their relatives were given the party ticket.

The special organisational plan that was to be implemented in areas such as Maharashtra, the northeastern region and certain parts of Rajasthan, where the NCP had dented the Congress(I)'s organisational structure, failed to take off. The selection process in the northeastern region was held up by allegations that some persons who sought the party ticket were mafia leaders. In the meantime, the NCP leadership tied up alliances with various Opposition groups and disgruntled sections within the Congress(I). Clearly, the Congress(I), which has traditionally won a sizable number of seats in the northeastern region, faces a challenge this time.

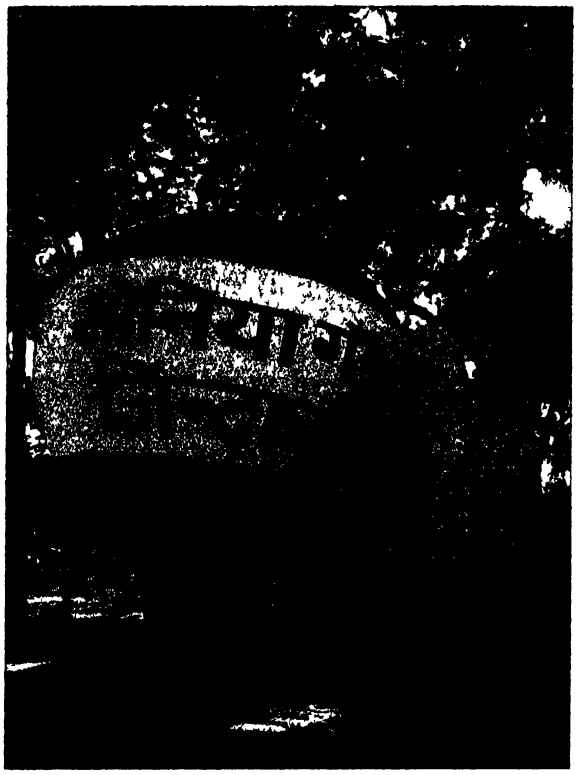
In Maharashtra too, insufficient attention was paid to the need to forge alliances with like-minded parties and select good candidates in order to counter the NCP's growing influence. An understanding was finalised with two groups of the Republican Party of India (RPI), but the method adopted by the Congress(I) in the allocation of seats to these parties led to strains. Many winnable seats were denied to alliance partners, and a section of the State party leadership felt that the entire exercise was self-defeating.

Party leaders complained that there was no effort to settle faction feuds and address other problems in the party units in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The most serious situation was in Rajasthan, where the Ashok Gehlot Ministry's failure to deliver on its promise to extend the benefits of reservation to the influential Jat community has led to an erosion in the party's support base.

AMIDST all these developments, there was one area where the Congress(I)'s campaign was elevated beyond the mundane level: the release of the manifesto by Sonia Gandhi on August 13. The manifesto, which was drawn up with the help of academicians after interactions with various sections of society, is quite a comprehensive document. It addresses vital questions in respect of the need for a stable government, the promotion and preservation of secularism, social justice, panchayati raj and fiscal discipline. In keeping with the line adopted at the CWC on July 20, the correlation between national security and stable governments was taken up as the central theme of the manifesto. As for the minorities, it promises constitutional changes to enable the establishment of a commission for minority educational institutions. The pledge to give 33 per cent reservation to women in legislative bodies is repeated.

A special feature of the function at which the manifesto was released was the manner in which Sonia Gandhi handled the media: she showed no signs of floundering and gave direct and bold replies to questions. Seasoned leaders of the party and many observers said that the manifesto and Sonia Gandhi's performance were a confidence-booster and an appropriate launch-pad for the party.

However, from all indications, it was one of Sonia Gandhi's statements at this function that was at the root of Jayalalitha's snub on August 22. Asked if the Congress(I) would form a coalition government if it did not get a majority on its own, Sonia Gandhi replied in the negative.



ANU PUSHKARNA

Outside the AICC(I) office in New Delhi.

With reverses being the order of the day and even allies playing oneupmanship games, the Congress(I) has moved far away from Sonia Gandhi's spirited statement of May 6, in which she said that "we are riding the wave of victory". Personally, she has come a long way since the time she was hailed – during the first anniversary of her elevation as party president – as the person who transformed the Congress(I) from a "moribund, non-creative, leaderless and directionless establishment into a vibrant organisation capable of leading the country on the right path by taking up important national and global concerns."

A leader close to former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao conceded that Sonia Gandhi's leadership had revived the party at the national level but said that the coterie around her had more or less frittered away any gains that may have accrued to the party. The Congress(I) organisational network has improved all over the country during the last 17 months and this has raised hopes that the party will improve its position in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But these gains may be more than offset by losses in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the northeastern region, which accounted for 64 of the 141 seats won by the Congress(I) in the 1998 elections.

According to independent estimates by a group of party leaders, the party may gain an additional 45 seats in the seven States but lose between 30 and 35 seats in the other three regions. The net result may be that the party will make no significant gain despite the fact that a viable organisational machinery has been developed all over the country. And if misadventures like Bellary get repeated, the party's image will be dented further.

In this context, Sonia Gandhi's repeated assertions that the Congress(I) is well on the road to victory and is set to provide single-party rule do not sound plausible. The scene as it exists today leaves the Congress(I) with only two possibilities; either support the idea of a non-BJP coalition government or accept the role of a responsible Opposition party by conceding defeat to a BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime. The latter scene seems to be far more likely to unfold. ■

Alliance qualms

Innately uncomfortable with coalitions and electoral alliances, the Congress(I) struggles to come to terms with the new realities.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

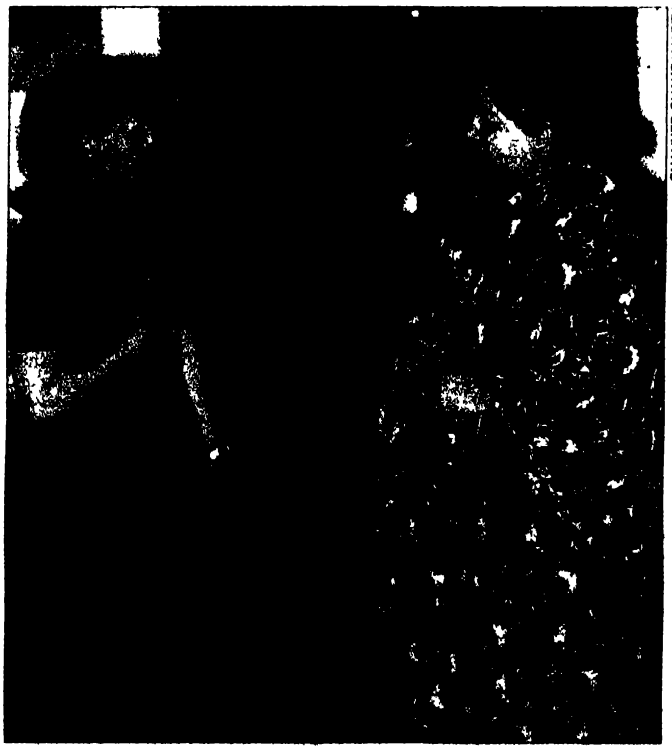
ALL through the recent years, the Congress(I) has been bogged down by a certain elemental flaw in its attempts to pursue coalition politics. This relates to its basic political slogan of stability, which the party argues can be attained only by single-party governance. The party leadership has found it difficult to suborn this idea to the essential need in the context of many States to form coalitions or reach an understanding with other parties. And even on occasions when the party has tried to do so, much of the time it has ended up without being able to forge an effective coalition or understanding.

The case this time is no different. The Congress(I) has functioning coalitions or understandings only in a few States such as Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Kerala. In Gujarat, the party was spared the trouble of forming a problematic alliance when former Chief Minister Shankarsinh Vaghela's Rashtriya Janata Party (RJP) merged with it. While proposed alliances with forces such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have failed to materialise, those with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Republican Party of India (RPI) have been stormy and ineffectual. This dismal show is all the more evident in the background of the Bharatiya Janata Party's success in firming up the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), notwithstanding that formation's many infirmities and woes, such as that relating to the entry of the Janata Dal (United) into the combine. Simply put, the BJP has adapted itself better to the era of coalitions.

In the Congress(I), such adaptability has been conspicuous by its absence. What has characterised the Congress(I)'s manoeuvres on this front since the fall of the Atal Behari Vajpayee government is a lack of clarity in analysing the party's own strengths and weaknesses, accompanied by a tendency to flip-flop. Thus one saw party leaders such as P. Shiv Shankar admitting after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha that the Congress(I) should have agreed to form a coalition government after the fall of the Vajpayee Ministry, and following up the statement with talk about pre-poll alliances on the basis of a common manifesto.

However, by the time the Congress(I) Working Committee held its first meeting in the context of the elections, all talk about alliances on the basis of a common manifesto had vanished. It had been replaced by the discourse on the "momentous" Pachmarhi declaration of September 1998. The Pachmarhi declaration had advanced a line against coalitions and made it clear that in special cases coalitions could be considered but only if the Congress(I) had supremacy within them. Protestations from leaders such as A.K. Antony, Sitaram Kesri and Rajesh Pilot that it would be unrealistic in the present context to hang on to the Pachmarhi declaration were brushed aside by Sonia Gandhi loyalists such as Arjun Singh, Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and R.K. Dhawan.

Much of the discussions on coalition formation was held in the background of this "ideological entanglement" within the party. The difference in the approach of individual leaders got reflected in these discussions. The Tamil Nadu-Pondicherry deal negotiated by pro-coalition CWC members Antony and Manmohan Singh resulted in an arrangement that involved the Congress(I) accepting 12 seats out of 40, leaving 23 to the dominant partner, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). In negotiating this deal, the Congress(I) gave up its Pachmarhi position that it would not accept the role of a junior partner. The deal reflected a realistic assessment of the party's present strength in Tamil Nadu.



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Sonia Gandhi with AIADMK leader Jayalalitha in New Delhi on April 15, days before the Vajpayee government lost the confidence vote in the Lok Sabha.

BUT this was not the case during negotiations the Congress(I) had with the BSP and the RJD in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively. In both cases, the local Congress(I) leaderships showed a tendency to overestimate their own strength and put forward unreasonable demands before alliance partners. When the negotiations with the BSP started, the Congress(I) demanded half of the 85 seats in Uttar Pradesh. The BSP, which secured 21 per cent of the popular vote in the State in the last elections as opposed to 6 per cent by the Congress(I), naturally would not agree. Claims about the Congress(I) having since undergone a revival were not acceptable to the BSP leadership. In particular, its vice-president and former Chief Minister Mayawati would have nothing of that kind.

When it became clear that the BSP would not offer more



RANJEET KUMAR

RJD president Laloo Prasad announcing details of the seat-sharing arrangement with the Congress(I) and other parties, in Patna on August 21.

than 25 seats, the Congress(I) steadily climbed down. Finally it accepted what was on offer. The Congress(I) also agreed without protest to other preconditions laid down by BSP supremo Kanshi Ram, such as the extension of the alliance to the Assembly polls and projection of Mayawati as the chief ministerial candidate.

However, the party did try to add one rider to the agreement: that the alliance should not be confined to Uttar Pradesh but should be extended to Madhya Pradesh. Clearly, the Congress(I) wanted to benefit even more from the potential of the BSP leadership to transfer its votes in any direction it deemed fit. This proposal, however, was not acceptable to the BSP, partly because its Madhya Pradesh unit had felt betrayed by the Congress(I) in the last Assembly polls. On that occasion, the BSP had supported the Congress(I) in more than half the seats in the State on the basis of an understanding that a leader from among the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes would be considered for the position of either the Chief Minister or Deputy Chief Minister. After the elections, the Congress(I) failed to do this.

As the talks with the BSP failed, in Uttar Pradesh the Congress(I) was compelled to have a minimal understanding with Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). The RLD was given eight seats and the Congress(I) retained the remaining 77. Although this means that the Congress(I) gets to contest more seats, there is not much hope of winning most of them in the absence of an alliance with the BSP.

SIMILAR is the situation in Bihar, where at the beginning of seat negotiations with the RJD the Congress(I) demanded 25 of the 54 seats in the State, although the party had won only five seats and 7.27 per cent of the vote in the previous elections as compared to 17 seats and 26.58 per cent of the vote won by the RJD. Significantly, 10 Congress(I) candidates forfeited their deposit in the last polls.

RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav initially offered 11 seats. But the Congress(I) would have none of it. Finally, after repeated discussions involving CWC member Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, the RJD leader offered the Congress(I) 13 seats. This was apparently acceptable to the Congress(I) central leadership, including Sonia Gandhi. However, following threats of a revolt in the State unit, Sonia Gandhi asked Laloo Prasad Yadav for more seats and the RJD leader agreed to add one more seat to the Congress(I)'s quota. Still the State unit of the Congress(I) held out, claiming that its level of popular support entitled it to a minimum of 17 seats. If this was not granted, they would leave the alliance, warned the Congress(I) State leadership. This has caused a deadlock in the Bihar alliance and created bad blood among the RJD cadre, whose wholehearted support is essential for the Congress(I) to be able to improve its position in the State. The RJD, on its part, is of the view that it has shown utmost flexibility in the interest of uniting the secular vote in the State and that the Congress(I)'s demand for 17 seats is unjustifiable. Whatever the outcome of this impasse, it is certain that secular unity has been impaired in the State, and that does not promise a better deal for the Congress(I).

IN Maharashtra, the Congress(I)'s refusal to accept the fact that its strength has diminished in the wake of the departure from the party of Sharad Pawar and his supporters has put its alliance with two groups of the Republican Party of India – the Prakash Ambedkar and Gavai groups – in jeopardy. Claiming to retain its strength despite the split, the Congress(I) has denied the RPI groups many seats including one in Nagpur, which has a high concentration of Dalits. Observers are of the view that such a stand would cost the party dear all over the State.

IN the midst of this dismal picture on the alliances front, the only sources for optimism for the Congress(I) are its time-tested coalition in Kerala and the new understanding reached with the Left parties in Punjab. In Kerala, the party was able to win back the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), which had vacillated towards the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front initially, and complete the seat arrangements in quick time to get a head-start in the campaign. In Punjab, the understanding with the Left parties is working smoothly. This situation is bound to help the party in both the States.

However, in its proclivity to turn even favourable circumstances into a situation of adversity, the Congress(I) leadership, including party president Sonia Gandhi, has been making several mistakes that could impair the party's prospects even in these States. Sonia Gandhi's statement while releasing the party's manifesto to the effect that the Congress(I) has no plans to form a coalition government after the elections is a case in point. There are apprehensions within the Congress(I) that it would affect the party's chances in Tamil Nadu. For it is evident that AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha's basic purpose in forging an alliance with the Congress(I) was to get a share in power if and when the Congress(I) is in a position to attain it. So the party leadership has added an air of uncertainty even into an advantageous situation because it is unable to see the writing on the wall. ■

Unclear nuclear identity

The draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine proposed by the National Security Advisory Board is a remarkable document for the things unsaid and for the vague or confusing statements.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

AFTER months of deliberations, the 27-member National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), headed by defence analyst K. Subrahmanyam, has come out with a document, the Indian Nuclear Doctrine (IND) that is perhaps not worth the paper it is written on. The document, which was released on August 17 at a press conference by National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra, in the presence of Subramanyam, was labelled as a "draft nuclear doctrine" pending discussion and approval by the National Security Council (NSC), a council of the key Cabinet Ministers concerned with national security.

According to Mishra, the document was being made public to show "greater transparency in decision making". When asked why the document did not spell out the specifics and why he was being secretive about it, he said it was for "reasons of security". The doctrine "is a step necessitated by the security environment", he said, adding quickly that it was "not country specific". As the doctrine was aimed at achieving "an element of strategic autonomy", he said that it was based on the concept of an "effective credible minimum deterrence". He emphasised that the policy of "no first use" was central to the doctrine and that it incorporated the "cardinal principle of civilian control" in the use of nuclear weapons.

On his part, Subrahmanyam asserted that it was a "consensus document" even though individual members of the NSAB might have disagreement on individual elements. A point which has not been highlighted sufficiently is that the NSAB is not a statutory body. Its term expires with the present government. The next government may not even have such an advisory body. Does it mean that national security ends with this draft on nuclear doctrine and the yet-to be-released document on national security strategy? Also, the document does not indicate the timeframe in which the nuclear force structures it has recommended are to be put in place.

The preamble says: "This document outlines the broad principles for the development, deployment and employment of nuclear forces. Details of policy strategy concerning force structures, deployment and employment of nuclear forces will flow from this framework and will be laid down separately and kept under constant review." This implies that a separate body – not identified in the draft doctrine – will have to go into these issues but given the vagueness and the general nature of the doctrine, which does not even address the issue of threat perceptions, arriving at a nuclear force structure based on this document would seem impossible and implementation could become arbitrary.

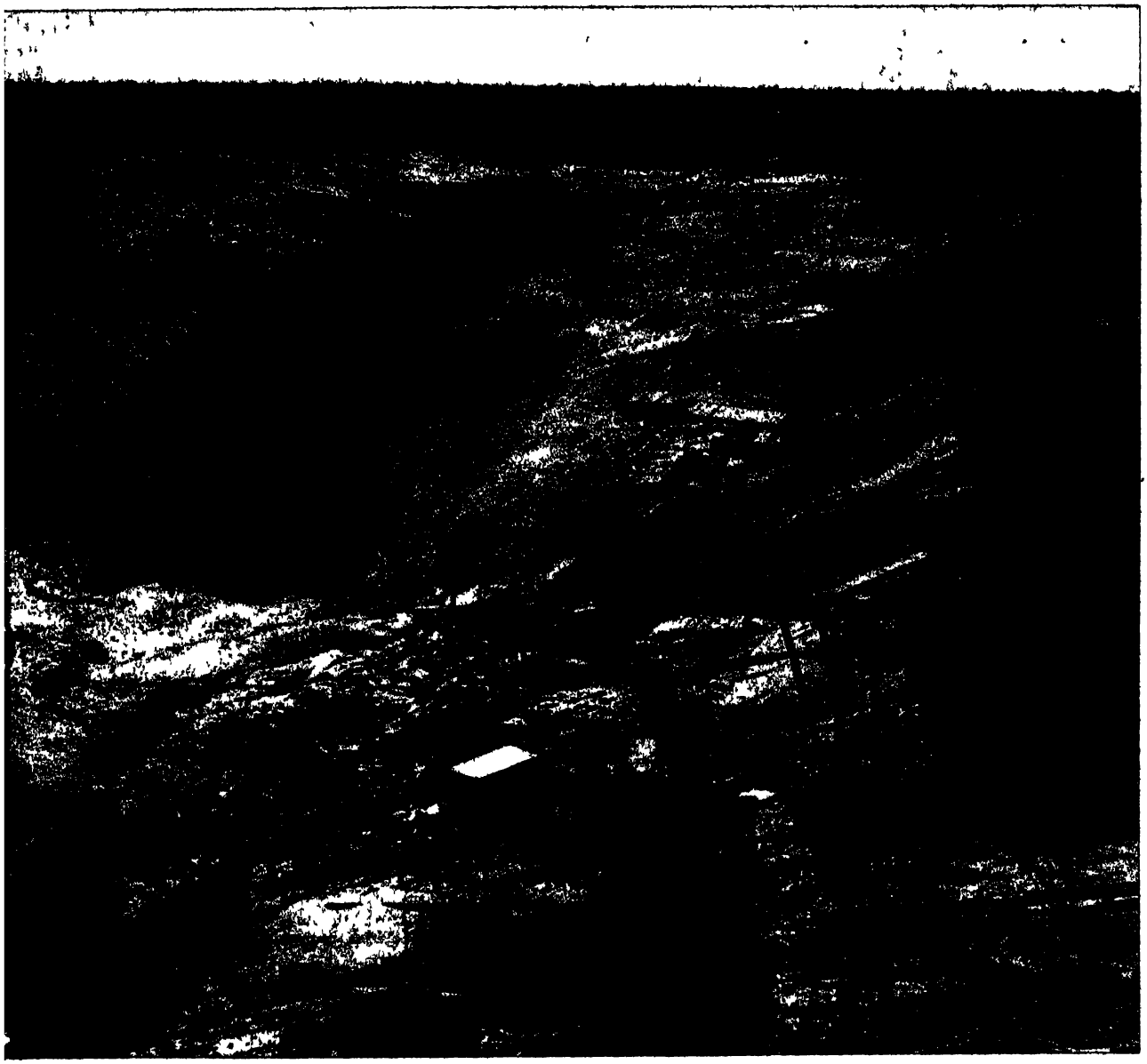
While the fact that a doctrine has been articulated would imply that the process of weaponisation is being carried forward beyond the claimed capabilities after the Pokhran nuclear tests in May 1998, the content of the draft leaves one in doubt whether any substantive thinking had gone into the making of the document, the credentials of the NSAB members notwithstanding. In substance, it goes slightly beyond Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's December 1998 statement on India's Nuclear Policy.

The Prime Minister's statement had pronounced the doctrine of "no first use" of nuclear weapons, which is the only clear-cut doctrinal element in this new document produced by the NSAB. The other clear-cut statement concerns the so-called "nuclear button" – the control of nuclear weapons will rest at the highest political level and the authority to release nuclear weapons for use will reside in civilian control in the person of the Prime Minister or "designated successor(s)". However, who these "designated successor(s)" may be is unclear.



At Pokhran, after the nuclear tests on May 11, 1998.

The document is remarkable for the things unsaid and for the vague or confusing, sometimes even contradictory, statements. The unqualified use of the phrase "effective credible minimum nuclear deterrence" might pass in the Prime Minister's policy statement, but not in the enunciation of a national nuclear doctrine. Unless qualified by appropriate quantitative elements including an assessment of the threat perceptions and the force numbers for an "adequate retaliatory" capacity (which in turn needs to be quantitatively defined in terms of a second strike or third strike capability), such a phrase carries no meaning for operational



significance or even evolving a nuclear strategy. Indeed, the concept itself is a dubious one and largely rhetorical.

Self-evidently, deterrence is no deterrence unless it is credible; in that sense, the use of this adjective is superfluous. Similarly, a deterrent force, by definition, has to be effective. As far as minimality of deterrence goes, it makes sense only against a quantitative assessment of the adversary's nuclear strike capacity. Moreover, no nuclear weapons power has ever admitted that its stockpile is more than the minimum level. What may be regarded as minimum by one may not be perceived as such by the adversary.

As General George Lee Butler, the former Commander of the U.S. Strategic Command, pointed out in a recent interview (*Frontline*, June 18), this is what makes deterrence a false notion that is conceptually flawed because "you will never know what the enemy is thinking".

Nuclear weaponisation requires a nuclear doctrine and a well thought out and formulated nuclear strategy (in military terms). As has been pointed out by the former Naval Chief, Admiral Ramdas (*Frontline*, July 17, 1998), the doctrine and the strategy should address the following questions: What are our threat perceptions? Are our nuclear adversaries regional or global? Under what set of circumstances or scenarios are the nuclear weapons to be deployed and employed? For the NSAB, it would seem, these issues are not important in arriving at a nuclear doctrine. A careful and rigorous analysis of an effective deterrence capability in the Indian context, as has been done by Dr.G. Balachandran, an independent analyst (*The Hindu*, February 15), shows that the existing capabilities in the nuclear field will not suffice to build such a nuclear deterrent capacity.

Equally significant is the document's silence on the expected costs of such a weaponisation programme. The draft document makes a general statement (Article 3.1) that "nuclear forces will be effective, enduring, diverse, flexible and responsive" and they will be "based on a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets" in keeping with the above objectives. Specifics, such as whether sea-based assets will include nuclear-capable submarines, are not spelt out but to a question Subrahmanyam replied that the "language of the doctrine allows it". If submarines do form part of some unwritten nuclear strategy, the cost of weaponisation will increase dramatically because of the high cost of submarines.

The document speaks of enhancing the "survivability of the forces" with a combination of multiple redundant sys-



National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra addressing mediapersons in New Delhi on August 17 during the release of the draft document on India's nuclear doctrine.

JOHN CHERIAN
in New Delhi

THE release of the draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine was purposely timed by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led caretaker government to be as close to the general elections as possible. The document was reportedly cleared by the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) about two months earlier. Obviously, the idea behind releasing it on August 17 was to put the nuclear issue back on top of the election agenda. Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, told mediapersons that the document had no official validity as it had not been approved by the government. He said that the purpose was to place it "before the public for debate and discussion".

Brajesh Mishra said that India would pursue a policy of credible nuclear deterrence. India, according to the document, will use nuclear weapons only in retaliation for a first strike: "Any nuclear attack on India and its forces will result in punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor." According to the draft, "India's peacetime posture aims at convincing any potential aggressor that any threat of use of nuclear weapons against India will invoke measures to counter the threat." He says that nuclear weapons will be under tight supervision and will be released with specific authorisation from the Prime Minister. There is no mention about the possibility of India signing either the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) or the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Opposition parties are furious at the caretaker government's decision to release the document at this juncture. The Congress(I) expressed the "apprehension" that the "irresponsible" observations contained in the document could spark an arms race. Party spokesman Pranab Mukherjee said that a caretaker government had "no business, politically and morally, to bring out a document of this nature which will affect the life of the entire subcontinent". The government was attempting to fool the people of India by talking of "credible deterrence", he said.

Mukherjee noted that established nuclear powers such as the United States, Russia and France had conduct-

tems, mobility, dispersion and deception. A survivable nuclear force itself has been defined (Article 4.3) as one that will be "designed and deployed to ensure survival against first strike and to endure repetitive attrition attempts with adequate retaliatory capabilities for a punishing strike which would be unacceptable to the aggressor". It also states (Article 2.3) that "survivabilty" is a dynamic concept related to strategic environment, technological imperatives and the needs of national security and that the "actual size, components, deployment and employment of nuclear forces will be decided in the light of these factors". A perfectly general premise that seems to defy a definition of "minimum deterrence" and ensure stockpile and attendant cost escalation.

It may be pertinent to highlight some of the ill-conceived elements of the doctrine. Consider Article 2.3 (a) which says "any threat of use of nuclear weapons against India shall invoke measures to counter the threat." What are these measures? With the "no first use" posture, and given the asymmetry of some nuclear weapon states not declaring a "no first use", what does this element of the doctrine mean? Article 2.5 says: "India will not resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against states which do not possess nuclear weapons or are not aligned with nuclear weapon powers." This a redundant statement given the "no first use" and "retaliation only" policy.

Mishra, while releasing the document, made a strange remark that he did not elaborate upon. He claimed the Kargil conflict and its resolution had vindicated India's nuclear deterrence policy. The question is how? In fact, it is clear that after it achieved nuclear parity with India, Pakistan could venture into a conflict with India and India's superior conventional force was not any more sufficient to deter Pakistan from military adventurism.

Article 2.7 is, further, contradictory. It says: "Highly effective conventional military capabilities shall be maintained to raise the threshold of outbreak both of conventional military conflict as well as that of threat or use of nuclear weapons."

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Subrahmanyam clarified this point by saying that it implied greater expenditure on conventional forces. But it may be recalled that reduction in the expenditure in conventional military forces was given as a rationale for going nuclear. Now, with India hav-

Playing the nuclear card

ed a large number of tests before they could acquire "credible deterrence". He observed that Pakistan sent in troops to Kargil despite India having "credible nuclear deterrence". Mukherjee questioned the rationale behind bringing out a document when the Prime Minister had declared a moratorium on nuclear tests last year. Such an important issue, asserted Mukherjee, should have been first discussed in Parliament.

Former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral said that what the government did was "immoral" and that this instance was symptomatic of its unilateral way of formulating foreign policy. The BJP-led government, he said, had given up the tradition of having a national consensus on important foreign policy issues.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) described the circulation of the draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine as an "illegitimate act". CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Prakash Karat said: "The caretaker government has no business to act on such a critical matter having serious implications for national and international security, just for petty electoral gains. This illegitimate nuclear doctrine must be rejected for what it is: nuclear sabre-rattling to garner votes for an irresponsible and jingoistic party."

According to Karat, the so-called nuclear doctrine advocates "full-fledged" nuclear weaponisation. "This is the real meaning of credible minimum nuclear deterrence," he said. As a result, there would be a nuclear arms race in the subcontinent and "the crushing burden of this nuclear adventurism will have to be borne by the ordinary people," he observed.

In a tit-for-tat response, Pakistan announced on August 19 that it was giving "final touches" to its own nuclear doctrine. Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz said that his government's nuclear doctrine would be based on the proposed strategic nuclear restraint regime discussed between India and Pakistan during the Secretary-level talks last year. Aziz said that the Pakistan government was studying the Indian document. Pakistani officials, however, accuse India of resorting to gamesmanship by trying to show the international community that India has developed its minimum nuclear deterrent as well as a command and control system. Pakistan's representative at the United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Munir Akram, said that the draft "indicates that India is about to embark on further and even more dangerous escalation in the nuclear and conventional arms build-up".

Washington, which in recent months tilted towards New Delhi, was also quick to react. U.S. State Department officials have characterised India's move to develop a nuclear deterrent as "unwise". The U.S. spokesperson said that "nuclear weapons do not contribute to greater security in South Asia." He added that the draft document could be discussed when External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh met U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in New York in September. Jaswant Singh will be in New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly session.

The Clinton administration seems to have adopted a tough stance on the issue. The U.S. spokesperson said that the possession of missiles and nuclear weapons would give India and Pakistan "less and not more security". "We don't think it is in the national interest or the security interest of these countries to develop nuclear weapons capability, to develop an elaborate doctrine, and then to encourage an arms race by both India and Pakistan." In the second week of August, President Bill Clinton wrote to the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers urging them to exercise restraint and resume the Lahore dialogue process.

The Clinton administration's stance is getting tougher by the day. U.S. State Department officials now say that the Indian nuclear doctrine is against the interests of global security. The U.S. spokesman dismissed out of hand India's contention that it needed a nuclear deterrent to avert "possible nuclear blackmail by China". The Clinton administration is still of the view that India's decision to go nuclear was based on other factors. The Pentagon spokesman was more specific, saying that a nuclear conflict was possible in the Indian subcontinent if tensions between India and Pakistan continued. "We have urged both sides to show restraint. It is an area where the damage would be extraordinary because of the large populations of the two countries," the Pentagon spokesperson said.

Other Group of Eight (G-8) member-countries have also reacted adversely to the draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine. The U.S. State Department once again reiterated the G-8's decision to continue to defer funding by international financial institutions of India's non-basic human needs.

China has expressed its misgivings about the nuclear policy document. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson "urged" India not to induct nuclear missiles into its arsenal and to renounce its nuclear weapons programme by implementing U.N. Security Council Resolution 1172 "in earnest and comprehensively". In his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee asserted that India would induct the Agni-II ballistic missile into its arsenal. The missile is capable of reaching many cities in China. The Chinese spokesperson said: "On the South Asian nuclear issue, the Security Council unanimously adopted by consensus Resolution 1172, which reflects the will and embodies the position of the international community." Among the permanent members of the Security Council, China is the only country that has consistently emphasised the need to abide by Resolution 1172. "This is conducive to the prevention of an arms race in the region and to maintain security and stability. This also serves the fundamental interests of the people of South Asia," the Chinese spokesperson asserted in the third week of August.

Reacting to mounting international criticism, Jaswant Singh, as was to be expected, discounted concerns about a possible India-Pakistan nuclear conflict. He has also insisted that India is not engaged in an arms race. At the same time, he has expressed his willingness to discuss the draft Nuclear Doctrine with U.S. officials when he visits New York. "I am fully confident that we will be able to assuage the concerns that have been expressed in Washington and Beijing," he told journalists. He also asserted, rather ingeniously, that the release of the document on the eve of the general elections was not a "politically contentious issue". He said that the document was not a National Security Council doctrine but a document of the National Security Advisory Board. He, however, admitted that the document said nothing new. It only reiterated what had been said earlier by Vajpayee and other senior officials, he said. ■

ing gone nuclear, the proposed doctrine advocates greater investment in conventional force structures "to raise the threshold of conflict".

The doctrine differentiates between "peace-time deployment" and "fully employable forces in the shortest possible time" without giving any measure of what this "shortest possible time" should be – a few hours, a few days, a few months? For example, coupled with the requirements of "safety" and "security" of the nuclear stockpile (Article 6), does the doctrine envisage that warheads will be kept separate from weapon systems and delivery vehicles that will be assembled in case of nuclear threats or attacks?

Security and safety for nuclear materials and nuclear weapons, during their manufacture, transportation and storage, have to be orders of magnitude more stringent than what is maintained for conventional forces. Even an agency like the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), with years of experience with nuclear materials, does not have a grand track record of safety in civilian nuclear installations (*Frontline*, March 26). As Dr. A. Gopalakrishnan, the former chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), commenting on safety issues has pointed out (*Frontline*, June 4, 1999) that in countries such as the United States, a defence nuclear facilities board for independent external overseeing of all nuclear weapon activities from the viewpoint of safety exists.

During his tenure, Gopalakrishnan highlighted the fact that even the R&D programme of the nuclear submarine or the Advanced Technology Vehicle (ATV) project, had been kept outside the purview of the AERB. In fact, in the Indian context, the AERB does not even have an entirely independent authority to regulate civilian nuclear activities. The Indian defence establishment, even the Defence Research and Defence Organisation let alone the Services, has absolutely no experience in handling nuclear activities. No agency has been or is being created for defence nuclear activities under the Ministry of Defence – unless, of course, the doctrine is envisaging the defence nuclear activities too to be managed by the DAE. The regulatory aspects of a nuclear weaponisation programme need to be addressed first before building up an arsenal. The pious statement in *Article 6.1 of IND will not suffice. Remember that in India nuclear training is imparted only within the DAE system.* So even for defence requirements, the nuclear posture will have to draw on personnel from the DAE or a new defence nuclear establishment, with an instituted recruitment and training programme, may have to be established.

Safety of nuclear weapons includes prevention of "inadvertent activation/use" and risks of accident therefrom or even accidental nuclear material dispersion from failed missile launches. One of the criteria of safety against accidental detonation that is used in the U.S. is that "one point safety criterion" and the U.S. conducted a series of "hydro-tests" of yields commensurate with such one-point detonation accidents to ensure safety. Does it mean that such low-yield tests will be carried out violating the moratorium on nuclear explosive testing that has been declared? Even within the civilian programme, elements such as risk assessment are not entirely public. In the defence context, it most certainly will not be. Similarly, the document speaks of "disaster control" and merely says, "India shall develop an appropriate disaster control system capable of handling the unique requirements of potential incidents involving nuclear weapons and materials" without giving an idea of how this is to be done.

Aspects of Command and Control (C&C) have also been dealt with rather superficially. In fact, Article 5.3 is not very clear and the clarification that Subrahmanyam gave at the press briefing is not of much help. The Article says: "For effective deployment, the unity of C&C of nuclear forces, including dual capable delivery systems, shall be ensured." In the context of nuclear forces, what does the term "dual capable" mean when, according to the document, nuclear forces will be based on a triad of force structures. Or does it mean that, for example, an aircraft will at the same time carry both conventional weapons and nuclear weapons? According to Subrahmanyam, however, this statement means that both conventional and nuclear force structures will be under the same C&C umbrella but with different operational ground rules and command chain. If so, the language used leaves much to be desired because it is confusing, to say the least.

Besides the political factors that may have tempted the government to make the document public now, the thinking perhaps is that with the articulation of a doctrine the world will be forced to recognise India as a nuclear weapons state.

Speaking of technological back-up to C&C structure, Article 5.6 says, "space based and other assets shall be created to provide early warning, communication, damage/detonation assessment." Does the last element mean that the retaliatory response will be a function of damage/detonation assessment and will be carried out only after such an assessment? Article 7 talks of the need to step up R&D efforts in the field "to keep up with technological advances in the field". Does it mean that the doctrine advocates the launch of an R&D programme like the Stockpile Stewardship Programme of the U.S.? And what kind of investment does the NSAB envisage for such continued R&D in nuclear weapons? For good measure, the doctrine speaks of Disarmament and Arms Control (Article 8) and, interestingly, seeks an international treaty banning first-use of nuclear weapons and internationally binding negative security assurances by nuclear weapon states to non-nuclear weapon states.

Besides the political factors that may have tempted the government to make the document public now, even though it had been submitted by the NSAB nearly a month ago, the thinking perhaps is that with the articulation of a doctrine the world will be forced to recognise India as a nuclear weapons state.

The Vajpayee government may feel that mere discussion of the doctrine by world nations – witness reactions from the U.S. – is tantamount to such recognition. It might also have been done to upstage Pakistan, which has refrained from declaring "no first use". Having come out with an apology of a doctrine, the government may turn around and say, "Look, we are a responsible nation."

What this draft nuclear doctrine does is to provide at best grist to a whole new series of seminars on India's nuclear posture. But it does little to clarify for the armed services, not to mention the public and the policy makers, what nuclear weaponisation entails. ■

Dreaming India's nuclear future

N. RAM

THE first significant act of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government after it came to power in March 1998 was to hijack India's independent, self-restrained and disarmament-oriented nuclear policy and twist it out of shape – rendering it a menace, first, to the people of India and, then, to peace and stability in the region. Perhaps the last significant act of the caretaker government that has, illegitimately and in an anti-democratic way, made several forays into substantive decision-making and policy-making is the unveiling of an open-ended, non-accountable, three-quarters-madcap, one-quarter-inhibited vision of India's nuclear weaponised future. The six-page draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine (dIND) presented as a 'consensus' document in the name of 27 members of the hawk-packed but largely amateur National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) is an egregious exercise of bomb-rattling without responsibility.

The manner and timing of its unveiling has been attacked in Opposition political circles and criticised in the press, but this must be recognised as being entirely in character. The dIND is a worthy follow-up to the authoritarian decision made by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh(RSS)-BJP high command to explode five nuclear devices in Pokhran on May 11 and May 13, 1998 and to weaponise the nuclear option, a decision made pre-emptively, in the utmost secrecy, in the name of 'national security' – targeting especially Pakistan and China – and 'shakti', without any objective review or democratic decision, in clear violation of the promises made in the National Agenda for Governance, in utter disregard for both the consequences for the region and the basic interests of the Indian people. It is significant that the only reference to the nuclear issue made in the 1999 manifesto of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is the promise that the recently established National Security Council will advise the government on "the establishment of a credible nuclear deterrent". However, as part of a motivated post-Kargil, pre-election exercise to boost Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's image as a great leader in war and peace, the Prime Minister's Office has put out a draft that was not preceded by the long-promised "strategic review" and was not discussed by the Cabinet. The adverse reaction the NSAB document has drawn in the Indian press, from Opposition parties, and internationally has made the Vajpayee government go instantly on the defensive. It has claimed that the dIND does not signal any real change in the nuclear weaponisation policy in place and, in any case, is meant to be debated before a final 'consensus' national decision is arrived at after the general elections.

A CLOSE study of the hawkish document reveals first its pretentious, confused character: this is unmistakably the work of amateurs (mostly self-proclaimed strategic affairs specialists) playing nuclear games and a bit of star wars as well, not anything that reflects professional military, or serious security, thinking. The exercise involves an attempt to cover all bases and, in aggressiveness, goes well beyond the doctrine of 'credible minimum nuclear deterrence' presented in outline by Prime Minister Vajpayee in his statement of December 15, 1998 in the Rajya Sabha. In that statement, Vajpayee indicated that the main features of the weaponising nuclear policy were as follows: (a) India will deploy its nuclear deterrent; (b) India's nuclear doctrine includes a policy of 'No-First-Use' and 'Non-use against non-nuclear weapons states'; (c) a policy of 'No-First-Use' with a minimum nuclear deterrent "implies deployment of assets in a manner that ensures survivability and capacity of an adequate response," in other words the development and deployment of a deterrent with a second-strike capability; (d) by way of meeting the concerns of the United States and its allies, India was willing to join the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT)-to-come and to make its export control laws relating to "sensitive technologies" more stringent; and (e) India will continue its missile development programme and not accept "any restraints on the development of India's R&D capabilities".

The dIND is an attempt to seize the high ground of militarism in the Indian nuclear weaponisation debate. This is why it has assumed a significantly more aggressive posture than that indicated in Vajpayee's somewhat defensive statement made eight months earlier. The apologia of India's nuclear weapons programme being a minimal exercise in the development of instruments of self-defence forced by an insensitive world on a reluctant, peace-loving nation has been dispensed with. While paying lip-service to the formulation that "India shall pursue a doctrine of credible minimum nuclear deterrence", the dIND prescribes an open-ended, far-reaching programme of nuclear weaponisation with capabilities that will push the limits of the minimum.

The preambular section attempts to set out the context in which BJP-led India made its security-led choice: the continued reliance of the nuclear weapons states on their large nuclear arsenals; their proclaimed willingness to use nuclear weapons "even in a non-nuclear context"; their virtual abandonment of nuclear disarmament goals; and "the very existence of offensive doctrines pertaining to the first use of nuclear weapons and the insistence of some nuclear weapon states on the legitimacy of their use even against non-nuclear weapon countries." Out of such international threats to "peace, stability and sovereignty of states" sprang India's nuclear weaponisation. The job of the dIND, the Preamble explains, is to outline the broad principles for "the development, deployment and employment of India's nuclear forces".

The Objectives section leads off with the assertion that "India's *strategic* interests" (emphasis added) require in consequence "effective, credible nuclear deterrence and adequate retaliatory capability should deterrence fail" and it is even contended that the U.N. Charter allows such a course by sanctioning "the right of self-defence". Two things about this formulation are worth noting. The first is the reference to strategic – and not security – interests, a distinction that is of some importance. More important, it becomes clear that the grand inspiration for the dIND is deterrence theory.

The new-found official fascination

with the logic of deterrence marks a low point in the history of India's nuclear policy and indeed in the country's politics and international relations. It represents an abject acceptance of the cast-off intellectual rags of western nuclear weapons establishments at a time when the theory has been shown to be dangerously flawed and indeed false and when it has begun to be questioned by those (like Robert McNamara and General Lee Butler) who once held leadership roles in its practice. The lowest point perhaps came when Prime Minister Vajpayee, replying on March 15, 1999 to the Lok Sabha debate on the motion of thanks to the President, came up with his famous statement: "The nuclear weapon is not an offensive weapon. It is a weapon of self-defence. It is the kind of weapon that helps in preserving the peace. If in the days of the Cold War there was no use of force, it was because of the balance of terror." Not surprisingly, the dIND stands or falls by the theology of nuclear deterrence.

THE principal source of confusion in this document, its most damning failure, is the inability to answer in any rational, meaningful or logical fashion the questions: deterrence against whom? "Credible" or "minimum" or "effective" against whom? Driven partly by the reluctance to admit openly that the major preoccupation of the pro-nuclear weapons lobby is with Pakistan and China and driven partly by delusions of thermonuclear superpower status, the document presents the absurd proposition that India's nuclear weapons are directed against *all* possessors of nuclear weapons. To quote para 2.4 of the dIND: "The fundamental purpose of Indian nuclear weapons is to deter the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons by any State or entity against India and its forces."

The heart of the dIND is para 2.2, which is worth quoting in full: "The requirements of deterrence should be carefully weighed in the design of Indian nuclear forces and in the strategy to provide for a level of capability consistent with maximum credibility, survivability, effectiveness, safety and security." Although subsequently it is pleaded that the basic doctrine is one of "credible minimum nuclear deterrence" and "retaliation only", it is clear that the whole exercise is to raise the nuclear stakes by introducing the principle of maximising so-called minimum deterrence by emphasising second-strike (or even third-strike) capability and "survivability". It is this maximum and "dynamic" version of "credible minimum deterrence" directed against all nuclear weapons states (and their military allies), read along with the justification of the Indian misadventure in terms of a global rationale, that animates the open-ended, adventurist and unlimited programme of nuclear weaponisation recommended by the NSAB.

It is worth noting that the Objectives section of the dIND, while asserting the validity of the doctrine of deterrence, adds to the irrationality by emphasing the principle of "punitive retaliation to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor". The notion of unacceptable damage has often been promoted in the debate among Indian strategic affairs hawks, notably by K. Subrahmanyam, the conceptual father of the dIND, as a more rational basis for determining the size of India's nuclear arsenal than the principle of assured destruction. However, on closer examination, the principle of "unacceptable damage" turns out to be as nebulous as the notion of deterrence itself. In the first instance, just as in any other form of deterrence, the notion of unacceptable damage involves determining the state of mind of the adversary, a virtually impossible task as the history of nuclear deterrence shows. Secondly, the assertion that "the actual size, components, deployment and employment of nuclear forces", that is the nuclear force structure, will be aimed at "convincing any potential aggressor that... India... shall inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor" sounds as absurdly non-credible as the boast made (in a May 17, 1998 press conference) by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and the key figure behind India's ballistic missile programme, that with Pokhran-II India had acquired the "capacity to vacate" any nuclear threat to itself. Does this mean that India will build a nuclear force able to retaliate and do unacceptable damage to the United States after a U.S. nuclear attack on India, as worst case analysis suggests? Since the threshold of unacceptable damage varies considerably between, say, Pakistan and the United States and given the all-embracing nature of the target of Indian nuclear deterrence, the notion of unacceptable damage to "any potential aggressor" is virtually useless. What is worse, this means that the *minimum* in the "credible minimum nuclear deterrent" has less and less meaning.

IN India, democratic and secular public opinion has always regarded nuclear weapons with horror, as weapons of mass destruction of a genocidal character. The hawks of the NSAB are quite aware that their doctrine, which seeks to legitimise and even glorify nuclear weapons as acceptable means of achieving strategic goals, runs directly into conflict with this sentiment. The dIND has no inhibition in identifying the building blocks of Indian nuclear deterrence: "sufficient, survivable and operationally prepared" nuclear forces; a "robust" command and control system; effective intelligence and early warning capabilities; comprehensive planning and training for "operations in line with the strategy"; and, perhaps most important, the politico-military "will to employ nuclear forces and weapons". In other words, no moral qualms, no squeamishness, no falling back on Gandhian or Nehruvian values, no peace-oriented value system that has underpinned the country's foreign and nuclear policies since Independence can be allowed to come in the way of fulfilling this madcap vision.

Underlining the dIND's militarist vision of India's future is the formulation in para 2.7 that requires the maintenance of a high level of conventional capabilities. The claim that this will raise "the threshold of... threat (of use) or use of nuclear weapons" is demonstrably false. In fact, the opposite is true, as Munir Akram, Pakistan's Ambassador at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, pointed out recently: "Thus, although the Indian document states the purpose of a conventional arms build-up is to raise the nuclear threshold, in fact the conventional build-up will further lower the nuclear threshold and bring closer the danger of nuclear use in the sub-continent." At any rate, if this is the adversary's perception, it is clear that Indian deterrence thinking has got it hopelessly wrong.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the dIND deal with nuclear forces, credibility and survivability, and command and control. In this hawkish vision, "minimum" virtually fades away and "credible", "effective", "enduring", "diverse", "flexible" and "responsive" take over in a way that suggests that no real limit will be placed on the Indian nuclear programme in quantity, scope and quality. Thus Indian nuclear forces, according to para 3.1, will be based on "a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets in keeping with the objectives outlined..." Although nuclear-powered submarines as carriers of nuclear-tipped missiles are not mentioned, this is primarily because official

Indian policy is not to talk about India's supposedly secret nuclear submarine programme; the whole dIND approach makes it clear that submarine-based assets, considered the least vulnerable but the most complex and expensive, are envisaged. Survivability of all these forces will be "enhanced" by a combination of "multiple redundant systems, mobility, dispersion and deception". Clearly, this encourages the adversary (who may be different at different points of time) to target Indian nuclear and other strategic assets in a far more comprehensive fashion. In the sub-continental nuclear standoff that is bound to follow should the dIND be accepted by the government, the elements of mobility, dispersion and deception will add substantially to the risk of an actual nuclear exchange.

A notably irresponsible and dangerous feature of the recommended doctrine is that it will push what is claimed to be a 'No-First-Use' policy towards "launch-on-warning" or "launch-under-attack". Para 3.2 of the dIND envisages "*assured* capability" (emphasis added) to "shift from peacetime deployment to fully employable forces in the *shortest possible* time" (emphasis added). Timeliness of response is re-emphasised in para 4.2 that speaks about the need to maximise the efficacy of India's nuclear deterrent "through synergy among all elements involving reliability, timeliness, accuracy and weight of the attack." The matter is clarified further in para 4.3(i), which, addressing the issue of survivability, states that "India's nuclear forces and their command and control shall be organised for very high survivability against surprise attacks and for *rapid punitive response*" (emphasis added). Precisely how rapid is the response to be? It is here that the ambiguity and confusion begin. Future interpretations of this formulation may extend to the position that Indian nuclear forces should launch either on warning or under attack. The building of such a capability will mean that India must undertake a nuclear weapons programme with all the associated assets that will approach the levels of the advanced nuclear powers. While all this may seem as grandiose and unreal as it is irresponsible and dangerous, it is very much the dream of the hawks of the NSAB, who will not let us forget for a moment that India must be ready to "effectively employ nuclear weapons".

The dIND vision is unmarred by any acknowledgement of the realities of Indian nuclear capabilities or of Indian S&T in general. Nuclear forces and command and control need to survive even "repetitive attrition attempts", meaning more than one strike [para 4.3(i)], demanding a capability that it is not clear even the advanced nuclear weapon powers possess in practice. The emphasis on timeliness of response will inevitably lead to India's nuclear weapons being on alert status of increasingly high levels. The option of India keeping the fissile material for its weapons separate from delivery systems, a possibility suggested by Jaswant Singh in his last round of talks with Strobe Talbott, is clearly at odds with the prescriptions of the dIND. The NSAB is either unaware of, or not bothered by, assessments that Indian nuclear weapons are not adequately safety-tested given the limited range of tests conducted at Pokhran-II. The only way that the 'safety' of Indian nuclear weapons can be ensured with current technical capabilities is to keep the fissile material separate from the warhead assembly and the delivery systems.

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In keeping with its complete freedom from humanitarian concern, its total insensitivity to issues of economic, developmental and human security, the dIND does not even attempt a token discussion of a civil defence programme commensurate with the scale of nuclear weaponisation recommended. Nor has any economic cost consideration entered its ken. Earlier ballpark estimates by economists, notably the work of C. Rammanohar Reddy, suggested that the cost of India's "credible minimum nuclear deterrent" might run to Rs.50,000 crores over a ten year period. The open-ended, 'maximal' version of the nuclear deterrent proposed by the NSAB will render such numbers tremendous underestimates.

Indisputably, the dIND has caused deep anxiety and unease among India's neighbours and a tit-for-tat response from Pakistan seems guaranteed. In their enthusiasm for nuclear weapons, the confused luminaries of the NSAB have even amended official commitments, made for instance in the Prime Minister's December 15, 1998 statement in the Rajya Sabha, on non-use of India's nuclear weapons against "non-nuclear weapon states". The dIND, in a disturbingly ambiguous formulation, recommends that "India will not resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against States which do not possess nuclear weapons, *or are not aligned with nuclear weapon powers*" (emphasis added). As Admiral L. Ramdas, former Chief of the Naval Staff, puts it, what the dIND has done, for transparently partisan reasons, is to open "a Pandora's box to frighten the entire neighbourhood".

All this does not necessarily mean that the prescriptions of the dIND will remain unchanged when a new government takes over after the general elections. Nor does it follow that official nuclear policy has returned to a path of defiant independence. The essence of the strategy of the Hindu Right is to try and hang on to *de facto* nuclear weaponisation at any cost. Among other things, this will mean abandonment of the global nuclear disarmament agenda and all principled opposition to the discriminatory global nuclear order. As External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh told Arun Shourie in a remark quoted proudly by the latter in the Rajya Sabha debate of December 15, 1998: "Look at it as a crowded railway compartment. When you are trying to come into it, your perspective is one. When you are in it, you want the rules that will keep you in and keep the others out." From a democratic standpoint, the pursuit of nuclear weaponisation while surrendering to the CTBT and the FMCT that is being negotiated and being co-opted into the discriminatory global nuclear order as a minor partner must be recognised as the worst possible course for India's nuclear policy. Meanwhile, the hawkishness that has underlain Pokhran-II, the subsequent articulations of official policy relating to nuclear weaponisation, the test-firing of the extended range Agni II intermediate range ballistic missile and the explicit linking of this to nuclear weaponisation is likely to be modulated in accordance with perceived short-term political exigencies and the twists and turns of the evolving regional and international situation. Everything except *de facto* nuclear weaponisation is bargainable; the limits of acceptance/non-acceptance by the United States and its allies can be probed and tested. The aggressive posture signalled by the dIND must be understood only in this context. ■

Resistance in the valley

Activists and supporters of the Narmada Bachao Andolan allege that by arresting the anti-dam satyagrahis the government tried to create a situation that it hoped would draw attention away from the Sardar Sarovar Project.

LYLA BAVADAM

ON August 10, satyagrahis at Domkhedi village watched a tree, which carried the pale blue flag of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), sink in the rising waters of the Narmada. That marked yet another stage in the NBA's 14 year-old struggle to prevent the construction of big dams on the Narmada.

Domkhedi in Maharashtra and Jalsindhi in Madhya Pradesh were chosen for the satyagraha as they would be submerged this monsoon. The waters rose to 127 metres at Rajghat bridge, upstream of Domkhedi, forcing the police to stop all traffic. At Domkhedi water entered the satyagraha hut and homes nearby. Across the river, at Jalsindhi, fields were submerged and waters entered the satyagraha hut.

The next day 61 satyagrahis, including NBA leader Medha Patkar, were arrested. "It was a test of our commitment," said Anita S. from Kerala who was among those arrested. Medha Patkar and three dam-affected people had started the satyagraha on June 20 after the Supreme Court revoked a four-year stay on the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, the largest among the 3,200 dams planned on the Narmada river. It is estimated that 2,500 families in nearly 60 villages in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh will be displaced when the dam height is raised by five metres as a consequence of the court order.

Heavy downpour in the upstream regions of the Narmada Valley, particularly Jabalpur and Mandla in Madhya Pradesh, caused the water level to rise further, beyond the submergence level. Near Hafeshwar, the nearest access point to the villages involved in the satyagraha, the level was around 98 m. The situation worsened when water was released from the three large dams upstream: 30,000 cusecs from Bargi, 28,000 cusecs from Tawa and 30,000 cusecs from Barna.



JACOB JOE

NBA leader Medha Patkar and other satyagrahis at Domkhedi as flood waters enter their hut.

Arundhati Roy, author and NBA supporter, said: "The sad thing is that it was an artificially induced flood, a man-made flood. They waited for the rally to leave and then released water from the Bargi, Tava and Barna dams. The only heavy rain that had been recorded was in Jabalpur." Arundhati Roy, who had visited the same site a week earlier as part of the Rally for the Valley (*Frontline*, August 23) in which more than 300 anti-dam protesters participated, returned to the satyagraha sites on August 12, the day after the satyagrahis were arrested.

She said that she was struck by the "poignancy of the half-submerged and half-dry fields" of Luwariyabhai – "added evidence that the flood was man-made" – and by the "upbeat mood" of the people. "There were the Nimadis and adivasis standing together," she said. According to her, there have been attempts by the government to drive a wedge in the anti-dam movement by pit-

An activist's account

LYLA BAVADAM

AN activist of the Swasraya Vypeen Group from Kochi in Kerala, Jacob Vadakkachery, was present during the slow submergence and was in the same hut as Medha Patkar, Dadlyabai, Devrambhai and Ranyabhai, who had pledged to stay at the satyagraha site regardless of the water level. The following is his account of the events of two days when the waters rose.

August 10: "The water began to rise in the afternoon and by 2 p.m. the tree with the NBA flag sank. The day before that a police team had been shouting to us from afar to move to a safer place but we shouted slogans in return and stayed where we were. On the night of the August 10, Medha had returned from a meeting. By then the water was lapping at the flag post near the satyagraha hut. Medha, Dadlyabai, Ranyabhai and Devrambhai had decided to die in the waters if it came to that. Please understand that this was not a *jal samarpan*. They were sitting in a satyagraha, and the basic idea of this is that you do not run away from the situation.

August 11: The water came into the hut at 2 a.m. It was about one-foot deep. Medha asked all the volunteers to leave but we refused. In the lantern light I could see that every 20 minutes the waters rose about nine inches. The other people of the village were in a larger shed on higher ground. They did not know of the decision of Medha and others to stay at the satyagraha point if the waters rose. We were eight persons in the hut. The mood was peaceful. Some people were crying softly. Medha sang satyagraha songs and bhajans. She wrote a letter (detailing the basic issues surrounding the damming of the Narmada).

At 6 a.m. on August 11, the water was at chest level. Adivasi women came into the hut and stood with Medha. She tried to send them away. There was the danger of the hut collapsing. The poles were weak, erected as they were in slushy ground. A large branch of the mahua tree had broken off during the night because of the flood. After 16 hours in the water we were shivering, but Medha and the three others were calm. Ranyabhai and Devrambhai wore impassive expressions. I saw the real face of Gandhian satyagraha.

At 10 a.m. a person from the village came with a piece of paper, which said that the Collector and the Superintendent of Police were arriving. At 3 p.m., about 50 uniformed men and the S.P. arrived by boat. They sat on some stones on higher ground and observed us standing chest deep in water. At about 6 p.m. six women police personnel, wearing salwar-kameez, arrived. Then the arrests began. Adivasi women surrounded Medha but they were pulled away and kicked by the police women. One old man was treated quite brutally. He kept shouting: "Remember, this is not the fate of the Narmada. It is the fate of the whole nation."

We were taken in an open truck to the S.P's office in Dedgaon and charged under Section 68 of the Bombay Police Act and released the next day under Section 69 of the same Act. I am not sure what happened after we left but I know that the arrests were anticipated and some satyagrahis hid themselves. When we were taken away they continued the satyagraha. After our release we demonstrated in front of the tahsildar's office demanding a survey of the losses incurred by the villagers. Then we all returned to Domkhedi. ■

ting the Nimadis, essentially wealthy farmers of the Nimar plains of the Narmada Valley, against the adivasis. Arundhati Roy's two-day visit bolstered the spirits of NBA supporters. Anita S. said: "Her coming was an affirmation of her integrity and commitment."

Activists of the NBA allege that the flood was caused deliberately by the government to create an emergency situation in order to break the satyagraha, which was once again drawing attention to the beleaguered Sardar Sarovar Project. The timing of the satyagrahis' arrest they argue, shows that the Government had planned the situation carefully. The police waited for three hours on high ground, some metres from the satyagraha hut, while the satyagrahis stood in chest-deep water. When it became clear that the water level had not risen in the three hours, the police moved in to arrest them.

The police presence was confined to Domkhedi and Jalsindhi. The act of 'rescuing' Patkar and other satyagrahis, according to NBA activists, was a ruse to avoid embarrassment and a public outcry. They wonder why the same 'concern' was not extended to the villages such as Pipalchip and Sikka, which were also affected by the flood. The flood submerged four houses in Pipalchip, two in Sikka and two in Bharad. The NBA is conducting a survey of the effects of the submergence.

IT is not known how many people will be displaced eventually by the 139-m Sardar Sarovar dam. Four years ago the NBA pointed out that even as the construction of the dam proceeded at a healthy pace the resettlement of the displaced people was neglected. The Supreme Court ordered a stay on the construction until the displaced persons were rehabilitated.

Activists of the NBA allege that the flood was caused deliberately by the government to create an emergency situation in order to break the satyagraha.

The NBA said that misrepresentations by the governments of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat on the extent of resettlement achieved had led to the latest court order, which lifted the ban on construction. The reality, they said, was that the families that had been displaced when the dam height was below 80 metres were yet to be resettled.

On June 1 and 2, people of the valley approached the Narmada Control Authority (NCA), the apex multi-State body that monitors the project, and questioned it on the availability of land and the claims made by the State governments that they were ready to carry out the resettlement.

It is clear that there is not enough land to resettle all the displaced people from the three States as per the directives of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal or the Supreme Court. For instance, the

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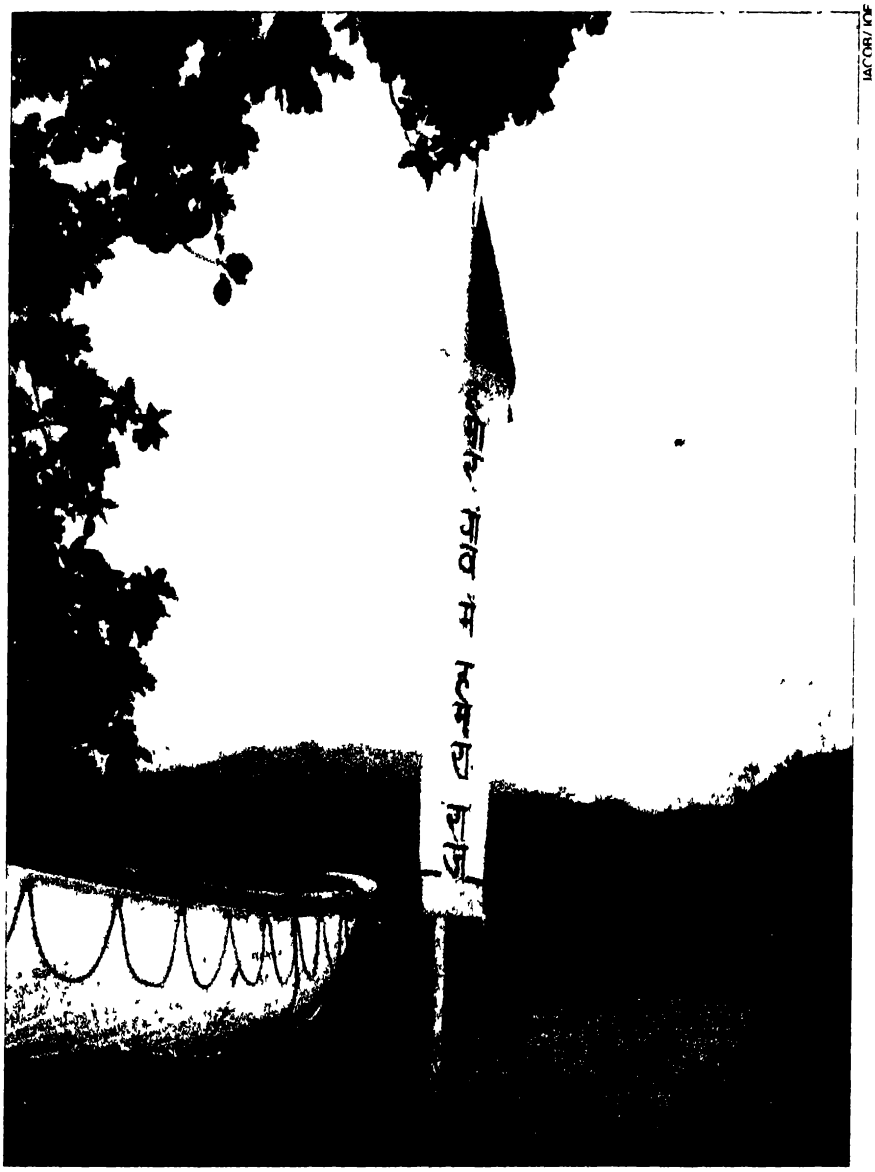
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Maharashtra Government claimed that only 220 families in the State would be affected by this monsoon; however, an NBA survey revealed that the number was 685. The State Government claimed that it had 456 hectares of land to resettle all the affected families. But the NBA found that only 285 ha was available – that too uncultivable land. In Rozwa and other areas, around 169 families, which had been shifted three or more years earlier to resettlement sites, had not been allotted land. Twenty-one families from Junane and Selagda villages returned home saying that they preferred to face submergence rather than stay at the resettlement sites.

In a suit filed in the Supreme Court, Madhya Pradesh has admitted that the quantum of power the State will receive from the project will be 23 per cent less than what was projected initially. New estimates for water availability reveal that the earlier estimate was higher by 18 per cent. Madhya Pradesh's suit has sought a new tribunal to re-evaluate and redesign the Sardar Sarovar dam.

Support for the NBA is growing in the valley and elsewhere. Residents of villages in the non-submergence zone came to the satyagraha site at Domkhedi and stayed there as the waters rose. Anita S. said: "Medha's strength comes from the people. They have given her strength and direction." The people have vowed to stay and fight.

Arundhati Roy said: "For them there are no options. They're not planning any move and they're very clear about that. All the confusion is outside (the area)." ■

A confrontation in the Kutch

The shooting down of a Pakistani maritime surveillance aircraft by the Indian Air Force escalates tensions between India and Pakistan to a new level.

JOHN CHERIAN

THE downing of a Pakistani maritime surveillance aircraft by a MiG-21 aircraft of the Indian Air Force over the Rann of Kutch on August 10 has exacerbated the tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad All 15 crew members on board the Pakistani plane died

According to IAF officials, at 10-51 a m on August 10, an IAF ground radar picked up an aircraft inside the Pakistani province of Sindh, approaching the international border on a south-easterly course The plane was moving at 370 kmph at a height of 900-1,050 metres After reaching the border at 10-54 a m , it carried out a series of manoeuvres over the area within or close to 10 km of the border This, IAF officials said, was a violation of a 1991 agreement between India and Pakistan on the prevention of airspace violations, which forbids combat flights by either side within 10 km of the international border

Officials of the IAF insist that the aircraft crossed the border initially at two points Two minutes after the aircraft violated Indian air space for the first time, two MiG-21 interceptors, which were kept in operational readiness at the IAF base at Naliya in the Kutch, were airborne, at 10-59 a m When the Pakistani plane entered Indian air space for the third time, at about 11-14 a m and penetrated 10 km into Indian territory, the MiGs went into action

The pilots of the MiGs sighted the intruding aircraft and identified it as a French-made Breguet Atlantique-1 One of the two MiGs, which had positioned itself between the intruder and the border then turned towards the plane to signal visually and if possible to communicate by radio asking it to land at the nearest IAF base According to the IAF, when the leader of the interceptors was jockeying into position, the Atlantique turned into it 'This," said a senior IAF official, was a hostile act As per international norms he ought to have maintained his course and height and in fact should have lowered his under-carriage as a sign of submission "

It was then that the MiG-21 fired an R-60 air to-air infra-red heat seeking missile The missile hit came at 11-17 a m. and, according to Indian authorities, the Pakistani plane was about 5 km south of



ZIA MAZHAR/AP

On the Pakistani side of the border, part of the wreckage of the Pakistani maritime reconnaissance plane that was shot down by fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force on August 10.



ANU PUSHKARNA

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, Defence Minister George Fernandes and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani view pieces of debris from the downed plane that were put on show at South Block in New Delhi.

the international border on the Indian side.

Ground radars of the IAF tracked the Atlantique for a while after it was shot: the aircraft headed 5 km inside Pakistani territory, turned left and approached the international border yet again before disappearing from the radar screen.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal A.Y. Tipnis, who briefed mediapersons at the IAF base in Nalia on August 11, gave a blow-by-blow account of the downing of the Atlantique. He dismissed Pakistani claims that the plane had been on a training mission. Tipnis said that although the aircraft that was shot down was probably unarmed, the Atlantique had the capability to carry torpedoes, mines and sonobuoys. He described the downed plane as a "combat military aircraft" which had "no business" flying over Indian territory.

Officials of the IAF state that the Atlantique had operated for approximately 18 minutes in the earlier part of the sortie; according to these officials, this confirmed that the plane was not lost and that its violation of the border was not inadvertent. One of them said: "The possibility of the plane having been on a training mission is ruled out by the profile it followed." According to the official, the relevant fact is that the Pakistani plane was "a military combat aircraft" which entered Indian airspace illegally on an operations mission. The intruder complicated matters by acting in a hostile manner. "There was no alternative thereafter but to shoot down the Atlantique to prevent it from running away after being caught doing an illegal operational mission in Indian territory," the official said.

Islamabad, however, insists that the plane was on a routine training mission and well within Pakistani airspace when it was shot down. Much of the debris from the downed plane was found inside Pakistani territory.

PAKISTAN has been using the Atlantique and the United States-made U.S. P36 Orions mostly to keep tabs on the Indian Navy. Senior Navy officials say that the Pakistani side has regularly "buzzed" Indian ships. India uses Tu-142s, Il-38s, Dorniers and Sea Kings to shadow ships of the Pakistani Navy. But as such incidents took place at sea, things did not get out of hand. An aircraft such as the Atlantique, with its array of radars and electronic support measures (ESM), can be used to map enemy air defences.

Responding to the incident, Defence Minister George Fernandes said that the Pakistani plane was on a "spying mission". He added that India and Pakistan were "not on the brink of war" following the incident, but stated that India was "ready for any eventuality".

A Defence Ministry statement said that between May and July, there had been eight incidents in which Pakistani planes intruded into Indian airspace. A statement put out by the External Affairs Ministry said that the Atlantique was a "combat aircraft" in the context of the 1991 agreement and should therefore not have flown within 10 km of the border. It is nevertheless true that the air forces of both countries have not been strictly adhering to the agreement.

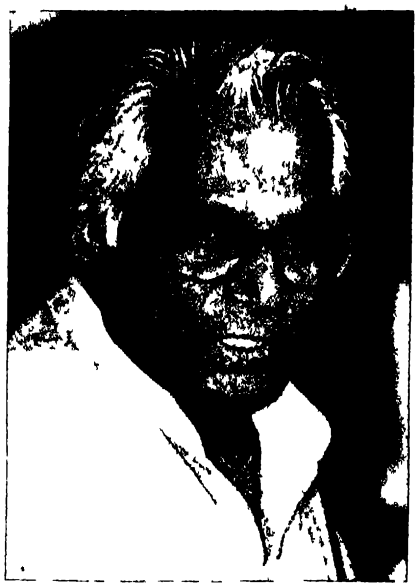
The Kargil conflict appears to have made the armed forces of both countries a trifle edgy, which has increased the possibility of their being involved in flashpoint situations. Early on in the Kargil conflict, Pakistani forces shot down two IAF fighter planes. The Indian side claims that its planes were shot down over Indian airspace. Senior IAF officials said that in late May an IAF Canberra reconnaissance plane was shot at in the Kargil sector, on the Indian side of the Line of Control but within the 10-km zone. The plane returned to base with only one engine functioning. However, IAF officials were quick to add that in the shooting incident over the Kutch, the Pakistani plane had intruded into Indian airspace, after crossing the 10-m buffer zone on the Pakistani side.

The shooting incident, however, raises some questions. The 1991 agreement stipulates that in the event of a violation, a prompt alert is to be sent through diplomatic channels to the headquarters of the other country's air force. Even if it is conceded that the Pakistani aircraft intruded into Indian airspace with devious intent, could it not have been forced to land, by firing a warning shot if necessary, considering that it was an unarmed and slow-moving plane? Tipnis told mediapersons that in such situations the reaction time was limited and decisions had to be taken "in a split second" as the pilot did not know whether the aircraft was armed or not. The general opinion voiced in the international community was that the plane should not have been shot down even if it had strayed into Indian airspace.



ZIA MAZHAR/AP

At the Pakistan Air Force base in Karachi, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and civilian and military officials offer prayers for the Navy personnel who died when the plane was shot down.



JOHN McCONNICO/AP



B K BANGASH AP

Defence Minister George Fernandes, and (right) Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz.

The Clinton administration urged both India and Pakistan to honour the 1991 agreement, which sets out specific guidelines and procedures for military flights near their common borders. Apportioning blame even-handedly, the U.S. State Department spokesman said that both countries had violated the agreement

China appealed to India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and urged the two countries to resume bilateral talks so as to avoid a worsening of the situation

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan deplored the loss of life in the downing of the aircraft His spokesman said that Annan "is increasingly concerned at the repeated incidents between India and Pakistan and urges that the differences between them be resolved by peaceful means'

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that the shooting incident would further complicate" the tense situation between the two countries and set back the prospects for an early resumption of peace talks

THERE is no doubt about the fact that the shooting down of the Atlantique has worsened the situation A cycle of revenge attacks could follow along the long border that the two countries share The incident on August 11, in which an IAF helicopter carrying a media team to the site of the Atlantique wreckage was allegedly fired upon by Pakistani gunners (see box), is illustrative enough

India has rushed a large number of troops, including marine and army commandos, into the Rann of Kutch area to bolster the strength of the Border Security Force troops The Indian Navy has also increased its presence in the area The IAF has been placed on high alert

The Rann of Kutch area, rich in oil and gas deposits, is strategically important for India The area has seen military skirmishes between the two countries on earlier occasions The long-standing boundary dispute between the two coun-

A mid-air drama

JOHN CHERIAN

THIS correspondent was part of a media team from New Delhi that was taken by the Indian Air Force on August 11 to the marshy Rann of Kutch to have a look at the debris of the Pakistani maritime surveillance aircraft that had been downed the previous day. The mediapersons, who had to start on the journey at short notice, were told that there was a possibility of seeing some of the debris, which the IAF claimed was on the Indian side of the border. The day's newspapers carried reports of the shooting incident, but details about the location of the debris were sketchy.

The mediapersons were taken in three helicopters from the IAF base at Naliya. Two Mi-8s and an Mi-17 took off at around 4 p.m, flying in formation. Two MiG-29s gave the three helicopters air cover.

The helicopters turned northwest with the intention of flying within 1.5 km of the international boundary, from where the wreckage could be sighted. (Under the 1991 agreement between India and Pakistan on the prevention of airspace violations by the two sides, helicopters are allowed to fly up to 1 km of the international border.)

There were no signs of any trouble looming over the horizon. It was obvious that the IAF did not take seriously Islamabad's assertions that the plane had been shot down over Pakistani territory and that the IAF had "stolen" parts of the wreckage from the Pakistani side of the border. The helicopters were also getting close to the area where, Pakistan claimed, IAF planes had intruded. Pakistani troops had aimed small-arms fire at IAF helicopters that had been hovering near the site of the wreckage on August 10.

As the helicopter carrying the media team approached the site of the crash, one of the crew members told this correspondent that the debris would be visible in a minute's time. Suddenly, the three helicopters veered off-course and went into a steep, headlong dive. One of the helicopters virtually skimmed the waters. The helicopters banked sharply, taking a 180-degree turn to port.

None of the mediapersons could make out what was actually happening. When the media team returned to base, Group Captain P.B. Bhangu, Station Commander of Naliya, who was in one of the choppers, told the mediapersons that the helicopters had been fired upon by Pakistani troops. "We were approaching the crash site when a flash was spotted," Bhangu said.

The pilots had spotted a single flash, followed by a plume of smoke that had emanated from the Pakistani side of the border. An IAF official said that a single flash meant that in all likelihood a shoulder-held surface-to-air missile had been fired. He said that the missile was spotted about 400 metres away from the helicopters and in all probability exploded 400 metres away from the target. One mediaperson duly reported that he had been "only 0.25 seconds away from death".

Pakistan denied that its troops had fired on the helicopters carrying the media team. A Pakistani military spokesman said that Pakistani forces had fired a missile at two IAF fighters that had "intruded" into Pakistani airspace. ■



One of the three IAF helicopters carrying mediapersons, which allegedly came under attack by Pakistani troops near the site of the wreckage over the Rann of Kutch on August 11.

tries over the Sir Creek area in the region remains unresolved despite several rounds of talks (*Frontline*, December 4, 1998). In April 1965, the two countries waged a month-long battle in the Rann, following which a cease-fire agreement was signed in June 1965. Two months later a full-scale war erupted.

In the wake of the Kargil conflict, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government has adopted a hardline stance *vis-a-vis* Pakistan, with an eye on the elections. And following the downing of the Atlantique, there has been a blatant display of triumphalism: pictures of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee posing with the debris of the downed Pakistani plane testified to this. Such displays, however, have a tendency to boomerang. The dispute over Sir Creek is now back in the limelight, and another area of conflict could once again be opened up. There are reports that Pakistan is planning a physical intrusion into the Sir Creek area to focus international attention on the territorial dispute. The shooting of the Atlantique could provide it with a pretext. ■

An aborted deal?

If an agreement between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kargil crisis as early as June 27 was indeed aborted, clearly, some people in New Delhi wanted to flourish a military victory for electoral ends, in preference to an early diplomatic solution.

A G NOORANI

WAS there indeed an Indo-Pakistan agreement to resolve the Kargil crisis which was upset' as a consequence of talks between India and the United States? On July 28, *The Hindu* published a brief excerpt from a report in *The News* a Lahore daily edited by Maleeha Lodhi about a four-point agreement which Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was to sign with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in New Delhi while the former was on his way back from Beijing *The News* wrote 'It was on the afternoon of June 27 that it all appeared to have been finalised On his way to Beijing Nawaz Sharif would fly over Indian territory While doing so he would send a goodwill message to his Indian counterpart In response to the Pakistani Prime Minister's message, Vajpayee would invite him to visit Delhi, to make a technical stop Responding to Vajpayee's invitation, Nawaz Sharif would stop in Delhi on his way back from China In Delhi the two Prime Ministers were to sign the four-point finalised agreement"

In fact, Sharif's emissary, Niaz Naik, came to New Delhi on June 26, so did Gibson Lanpher, the U S Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, after talks in Islamabad. In fact the quotation was from an article by a respected columnist, Nasim Zehra. Five days earlier *The Guardian* (of the United Kingdom) had published a report from Islamabad by a correspondent of repute, Suzanne Goldenberg India and Pakistan arrived at a secret deal to end the fighting in Kargil three weeks before their generals met (on July 11) to put peace in motion – a delay that cost hundreds of lives Mushahid Hussain Pakistan s Information Minister, told her that by the 19th or 20th, there were the makings of some sort of understanding"



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, with Nawaz Sharif standing by, shakes hands with Niaz Naik at the Wagah border in February 1999.

It was arrived at in the back-channel' parleys of Niaz A Naik, former Foreign Secretary and High Commissioner to India and R K Mishra of *The Observer of Business and Politics*, with Vivek Katju, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, to aid him

In order to appreciate the significance of these reports it is necessary to recall the background (vide the writer s article, Kargil diplomacy *Frontline*, August 13) Both countries were parleying with the U S also while their back channel was at work, and Nasim Zehra's and Suzanne Goldenberg s accounts vary on minor points. Nasim Zehra reports "The back channel collapsed in the last days of June when the identity of the secret negotiators was leaked to the Indian press' She alleges that it was New Delhi that inspired the disclosure by the Press Trust of India (PTI) from Islamabad

PTI revealed Naik's trip to India under an Islamabad, June 27, dateline "Stung by the U S pressure to pull out of Kargil, the Nawaz Sharif Government has despatched former Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik as its special emissary to India on a mission with a set of new proposals The mission, which the authorities wanted to keep secret, was leaked by elements in the establishment opposed to the U S pressure" Thus PTI attributed the leak to Pakistani sources But it strains ones credulity that

Pakistani sources would have recklessly compromised themselves by leaking to an Indian news agency when they could very well have used the Pakistani media for the same result.

On June 29, Pakistan confirmed the Naik visit but added that R. K. Mishra had been to Islamabad and met Nawaz Sharif and Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed on June 18.

Niaz Naik's authoritative disclosure to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on June 29 removes all doubt. Even after the cover was blown, he was upbeat. "I think the situation will be resolved... We are trying to arrange the first meeting of what we call the Directors of Military Operations. The Prime Minister is up in China, he's coming back tomorrow (June 30) evening. I think things will start moving once he comes back to Islamabad." Nawaz Sharif cut short his trip to China on June 28 even as Vajpayee rushed back to Delhi on June 25 to meet Lanpher and Niaz Naik.

According to Nasim Zehra, around midday on June 27, Niaz Naik returned from New Delhi "with what was a finalised plan of action".

Both Brajesh Mishra and R. K. Mishra were present when Naik met Vajpayee earlier that day.

Nasim Zehra added: "Agreement was reached on four points: appropriate steps to be taken by both sides to mutually respect the LoC determined under the Simla Agreement of 1972; immediate resumption of the composite dialogue initiated under the Lahore process; Islamabad to use its influence on the Mujahideen to request them to disengage; find an expeditious solution to the Kashmir dispute within a specified timeframe. It was also agreed that following the agreement, Pak-India dialogue would resume involving the Foreign Ministers. For immediate military de-escalation, the Directors-General Military Operations of the two countries were to hold a meeting.

"The agreement on the text was evolved during the five R. K. Mishra's Pakistan trips (sic). Mishra would carry back and forth amendments in a draft form in which amendments were made based on input from both sides. As a special envoy of the Indian Prime Minister, the businessman R. K. Mishra met with the Pakistani Prime Minister during all his trips to Pakistan."

R. K. Mishra had visited Pakistan five times since June 1. Nasim Zehra adds: "The Americans were completely kept out of back-channel negotiations. Washington did not even know that any such negotiations were taking place until around late June, a senior Cabinet Minister in passing mentioned to the American Ambassador in Pakistan that contacts with Delhi had been established through a back channel."

Vajpayee was very much a party to the deal... He owes an explanation to the nation, and that duty is not discharged by bland denials such as the one by the official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs on August 19.

On June 27, around 5 p.m., the text of the proposed "goodwill message" from Sharif was faxed from Islamabad to New Delhi. Nasim Zehra wrote: "The return message was coming in later than expected. The Indians were requested to fax the message at the Prime Minister's Model Town residence. The message came at around 10 p.m. And like a bombshell, Vajpayee was not inviting Nawaz Sharif to visit Delhi. Instead he was asking to "withdraw" the intruders from Kargil so that bilateral dialogue could be resumed. Telephone contacts with the Indians at the highest level did not help. India's principal interlocutor blamed Delhi's going back on a 'done deal' first on some misunderstanding on what had been agreed but subsequently conceded that the hawks in the Indian establishment had won out. There was a sudden panic amongst those who were the principal actors of Pakistan's back-channel diplomacy. The trip to China had still to go ahead. However, a decision was taken to cut it short."

News of Niaz Naik's secret trip was leaked to the Islamabad-based correspondent of PTI by Indian hawks opposed to the deal, Nasim Zehra alleges. On some points, however, she skates on thin ice. The pro-Indian stand of the G-8 and the U.S. could not have contributed to the failure: nor Lanpher's trip to New Delhi as she suspects. There was at least one element in the deal which could have spelt its doom. That Vajpayee promised Niaz Naik that he would discuss Kashmir once Pakistan withdrew from Kargil is clear. The Lahore process would be "accelerated", Naik reported. "He twice used the word accelerated." But which Indian Prime Minister could or would possibly agree to "find an expeditious solution to the Kashmir dispute within a specified time-frame?"

The ground situation was tricky for both. Pakistan knew it would have to quit. India, while being confident of success, knew the price it would have to pay. On June 30, L. K. Advani talked of success only by September. Tiger Hill was retaken on July 4, the day Sharif met President Bill Clinton. The DGMOs wrapped up the deal concluded there only on July 11.

Bar that bit on a time-frame, the rest of the four points were unexceptionable. The time-frame stipulation could have been dropped on India's insistence, for it was an altogether new element. The deal would have survived, and its effect on the climate of opinion in both countries would have been dramatically sobering. Had the deal gone through on June 27, the result would have been vastly better than the one that came after July 11. Bilateralism would have received a powerful boost. Evidently, some people in New Delhi wanted to flourish a military victory for electoral ends, in preference to a diplomatic solution. Obviously the people who leaked Naik's visit to PTI on June 27 hoped to wreck the deal. Significantly, the leak was to the Indian, not Pakistani, press. His interview to the BBC on June 29 shows that it was still possible to salvage the deal. Pakistan has revealed the details of the negotiations with dates and the time. The Vajpayee government's silence is deafening – and eloquent.

Having refused to summon the Rajya Sabha, the least the government can do is to publish a White Paper on the diplomatic record, especially on the aborted deal of June 27.

Vajpayee was very much a party to that deal not only telephonically, as mentioned in this writer's earlier article, but also by fax. The Clinton-Sharif draft was faxed to him, and he returned it with his approval, adding the word 'sanctity' (in respect of the Line of Control) written in his own hand. The detail none could have invented and risked exposure (Amit Baruah, *The Hindu*, August 19). Vajpayee owes an explanation to the nation, and that duty is not discharged by bland denials such as the one by the official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs on August 19. It is too preposterous for words. ■

An Army caught napping

The minutes of a crucial meeting of the Unified Headquarters, the apex body of organisations managing security in Jammu and Kashmir, show why the initial stages of India's response to events in Kargil were confused and directionless.

PRAVEEN SWAMI

THE truth, like murder, will out, goes the maxim. Through the three months since the Kargil war began, military officials have insisted that they were prepared for Pakistan's aggression and that the campaign was conducted to a well-thought-through plan from its early stages. 15 Corps Commander Lieutenant-General Krishan Pal had, in an interview, even described the campaign as an example of "generalship unparalleled in the history of warfare". Now documents obtained by *Frontline* have disproved such claims. The Army knew next to nothing about the scale and character of the intrusion, even less about the structure of the war that was to follow, and it was entirely unprepared for a full-scale conflagration involving the Pakistan Army in Kargil.

The minutes of the crucial first meeting on the Kargil war of the Unified Headquarters (UHQ), the apex body of organisations managing security in Jammu and Kashmir, cast light on events in the weeks that followed the detection on May 3 of Pakistan's aggression. Disturbed by the blase reaction of the Army at that meeting to the occupation of some 1,500 sq km of Indian territory by Pakistani regulars, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah flew to New Delhi on May 24, accompanied by Chief Secretary Ashok Jaitley and Director-General of Police Gurbachan Jagat. There he discovered that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and top government officials were unaware of the events unfolding on the Kargil heights. It was a day of desperate pleading before the Cabinet Committee on Security met on May 25. (This sequence of events was reported in *Frontline*'s July 2 issue.)

On May 19, a fortnight after Pakistan's intrusion was detected on the Batalik heights, the UHQ met in Srinagar. The emergency meeting was called to discuss the intrusion and, its minutes record, the "emerging security scenario". The UHQ is chaired by the Chief Minister. His Security Adviser, the 15 Corps Commander, could by custom chair UHQ meetings in the Chief Minister's absence, and thus he played a special role in its deliberations. That this meeting was an unusual one is evident from the fact that almost the entire security establishment in Srinagar attended it.

Farooq Abdullah was accompanied by Minister of State for Home Mushtaq Ahmed Lone, Chief Secretary Jaitley, Principal Secretary B.R. Singh, Principal Secretary (Home) C. Phunsog, Information Director S. Pandey, Divisional Commissioner Khurshid Ahmed Ganie and Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Tanveer Jahan. The Border Security Force sent two Inspectors-General, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police two Deputy Inspectors-General and the Central Reserve Police Force a Deputy Inspector-General and an Additional Deputy Inspector-General. The Director-General of Police led a team consisting of Additional Director-General R. Tikoo, three Inspectors-General and a Senior Superintendent of Police. The Intelligence Bureau (I.B.) Joint Director was present, as were a Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner from the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

A.K. Chopra, Brigadier-General (Staff) of the 15 Corps, initiated the proceedings with a general briefing on the events in Kargil. The contents of the briefing are not recorded in the minutes, but officials who attended the meeting say that it was a sketchy account lasting only a few minutes, of the presence of infiltrators in the sector. Pal then took over from his subordinate. Paragraph 4 of the minutes record that he made six observations. The first two were routine. "The areas of infiltration were unheld ones," Pal said, "by both India and Pakistan and dominated by patrols and aerial surveillance by both sides, due to the rugged and extremely difficult high altitude terrain conditions." He then proceeded to outline the "sequence of infiltration in various subsectors and actions taken by the Army."

The term "dominated by patrols and aerial surveillance" passed unchallenged: no one at the UHQ apparently saw it fit to ask how thousands of infiltrators could thus enter and hold such an area. Pal pro-



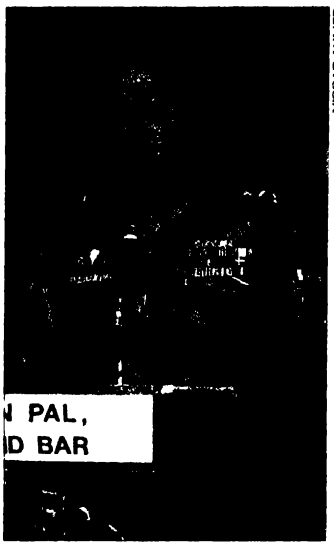
Brigadier-General A.K. Chopra of the 15 Corps displays weapons seized from Pakistani infiltrators in June.

ceeded to make four assertions that proved even more damning. First, he insisted that "no voids were created in the CI (counter-insurgency) grid due to the movement of troops in Kargil Sector and deployment in the valley was fully balanced." The remark was intended to reassure security officials in the State who were disturbed by the gaps created in counter-insurgency deployments by the movements of troops to the borders. The Army, Pal's remarks make it clear, did not expect that events in Kargil would suck in larger numbers of troops from security duties in the State. This was a massive error of judgment, for by the end of the Kargil war, 58 battalions had been moved to guard the borders vacated by troops headed for Kargil.

But this error was the outcome of even larger errors of judgment. Paragraph 4(iv) of the minutes record Pal asserting that there was "no concentration of troops on the Pakistani side and no battle indicators of war or even limited skirmishes." The language used make at least two things clear. For one, the Army did not realise that there was already a concentration of Pakistani troops, from the Northern Light Infantry and Gilgit Scouts, pushing soldiers into Indian territory. Several additional brigades were to be used in the weeks to come. Pal himself is on record as claiming that Pakistan used upwards of 10 battalions, including units of its elite Special Services Group, in the Kargil War. Clearly, at this stage the Army had no idea of these deployments.

Even more serious, Paragraph 4(iv) leaves little room for doubt that the Kargil intrusion was not seen as a conventional military engagement at all. Pal's remark that there were "no battle indicators of war or even limited skirmishes" now seems absurd. The massive artillery exchanges that were under way through the Kargil sector, from the Mushkoh Valley in the west to Turtok in the east, were evidently misinterpreted as routine duels. By this time, Pakistan was funnelling entire brigades into Kargil, anticipating a massive Indian retaliation across the Line of Control. India, too, was to prepare for such a possibility, but at this stage its Army clearly had little idea of where the Kargil engagement was headed. The UHQ reports explain just why the initial stages of India's response to events in Kargil were confused and directionless.

Pal proceeded to underline his thesis that the intrusion would be contained with ease. Paragraph 4(v) notes his claim that the "situation was local and would be defeated locally". At least five brigades of the Indian Army, made up largely of troops from outside Jammu and Kashmir, had to be shipped in before containment was achieved. As such, Pal's assertion at the UHQ meeting illustrates a complete failure of comprehension. The 15 Corps Commander even seemed unaware of the threat to troop movements from Pakistan artillery fire on the Srinagar-Leh highway, directed by observation posts set up by infiltrators above Drass, notably on Tiger Hill and Tololing. "The Army convoys were moving unhindered," he noted, "and soon the civil convoy would also commence." It only started after the Pakistani withdrawal was near-complete.



NISSAR AHMED

Lt.- Gen. Krishan Pal, Commander of the 15 Corps.

HOW does one account for a spectacular misjudgment of the military character of the Kargil intrusion? It is important to note that these judgments were not just made by Pal, but the Army as a whole. Chief of the Army Staff General V.P. Malik, for one, saw no reason to cut short his week-long visit to Poland in May when he received news of the intrusion. One obvious possibility is that the Army did not have, as on May 19, a cogent picture of what was going on. But Pal himself has, in a tape-recorded interview to *Frontline*, ruled out that possibility. "Our final assessments were made when our frontline contacts and photo surveillance provided detailed inputs that tallied," he said. Those assessments were presumably made by May 17, when Pal claimed to have "a good degree of clarity about just what was going on." He added: "I distinctly remember making it clear when I first briefed the press in Srinagar on May 19 that the depth, extent, logistic support, fire support and magnitude left no doubt in my mind that it was a Pakistan Army-backed operation" (*Frontline*, August 27).

"Pakistan Army-backed operation" is the crucial phrase here. Army officials, the UHQ minutes make clear, may have understood that their Pakistani adversaries were supporting the intrusion, as they do through the Line of Control and the western international border. But the Kargil intrusion was clearly not understood as an Army-led conventional engagement. Others at the UHQ meeting disagreed, notably Farooq Abdullah. Paragraph 8(i) records his strong intervention. The Chief Minister argued that the "recent infiltration was not a short-term plan but a sinister design of Pakistan aimed to isolate certain areas and cut off Kargil-Leh from the valley as (was) being done in Rajouri-Poonch areas...He opined that these were not mere militants but supported by some Pakistani regulars too."

Farooq Abdullah's sources of information were presumably from his police force, whose warnings from mid-May about the presence of Gilgit Scouts and the Northern Light Infantry had generally been dismissed. Certainly, neither the Intelligence Bureau nor RAW did anything to dispel Pal's notions at the UHQ meeting. Paragraph 6 of the minutes record thus: "On being asked by the Chief Secretary about the intelligence input, Joint Director IB stated that since January this year it was reported that approximate(ly) 200 Al-Badr militants waiting in Kotli and Kel could not infiltrate due to effective counter-infiltration posture by the Army...'Accordingly, frustration had built up and thus possibly infiltration was effected in Kargil sector." Paragraph 7 notes that the RAW focussed, somewhat mystifyingly given the context of the meeting, on "activation of infiltration routes through Nepal and other areas".

Just why the I.B., in particular, chose to remain silent at the meeting is unclear. Its Joint Director must have been aware of reports coming from his Leh station since last October, reports which were made available to Frontline, warning that groups of Pakistani irregulars were being trained in Olthingthang with the express purpose of launching a thrust into Kargil this April. One possibility is that the I.B. chose to remain silent, leaving the job of engaging the 15 Corps Commander in argument to the Chief Minister. A second possibility is that his position, and for that matter Pal's stance, were not fully reflected in the minutes. But neither officer appears to have written to the UHQ Secretariat asking for the minutes to be modified, for no corrections were circulated to its members. As such, the min-

MINUTES OF UNIFIED HEADQUARTERS MEETING
HELD ON 19 MAY 1999 AT 1200 HRS

General

1 In view of the recent developments in Kargil Sector, resulting due to the infiltration by militants and the immediate action taken by the army against them, a meeting was convened on 19th May 1999 at 1200 Hrs under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Chief Ministers of J&K Dr Farooq Abdullah, to review the emerging Security Scenario

2 Besides MOS (Home) Mr Mustaq Ahmed Lone, Chief Secretary J&K Mr Ashok Jaitly IAS Advisor Security Lt Gen Krishan Pal PVSM, VSM and BAR, Sri Girdharan Jaya IPS, DGP J&K, the meeting was attended by the following officers

Review of Situation by HQS 15 Corps

3 HQS 15 Corps gave a briefing regarding the situation [illegible] in the Kargil Sector which had developed over the past few days

Remarks of the Advisor Security

4 The Advisor Security apprised the members of the [illegible] mentioned

i The areas of infiltration were mainly [illegible] dominated by pure Muslim settlements. Both sides due to the terrain [illegible] extremely difficult [illegible] undertaken [illegible] sequence of infiltration [illegible]

ii No voids were created in the defences due to the movement of [illegible] Army Supply and deployment in the depth was [illegible]

iii It was a well planned operation by the Pakistan Army [illegible] in pursuance of a well laid out plan with Pakistan's [illegible]

iv The situation was fluid and would be determined by the [illegible]

v The Advisor Security remarked that the main objective behind this infiltration [illegible] remarked that the possible aim of Pakistan at macro level could be to internationalise the situation, create war like hysteria [illegible] Party mediation in the Kashmir problem. All operational details [illegible] would possibly aim at disrupting the vital lines of communication in this sector to Khalsi and Leh, also create disturbances in the depth areas

Intelligence Inputs

6 On being asked by the Chief Secretary about the intelligence input, Joint Director stated that since January this year it was reported that approximately 700 Al Badr militants waiting in Kashmir and Kel could not infiltrate due to the effective counter infiltration posture by the Army. Accordingly trusht had built up and thus possible infiltration was detected in Kargil Sector. He added that the operation of intelligence sources in the area would [illegible] however these have been launched and effective intelligence also be[illegible]

7 The Addl Commissioner SB and Joint Director IB also gave their intelligence assessments including [illegible] activities of infiltration routes through Nepal and other areas

Remarks by the Hon'ble Chief Minister

8 The Hon'ble Chief Minister [illegible] the following points

i According to him the recent infiltration was not a short term plan but a summer [illegible] of Pakistan [illegible] Valley [illegible] He opined that militants were mercenaries but still [illegible] by some Pakistani regulars too

ii While agreeing with the assessment of the Advisor Security he stated that [illegible] as Kosavo (sic) problem would be over Pakistan would attempt to bring Kashmir [illegible] into the international limelight. He added that the additional aim could also be to keep the Army committed in such inhospitable terrain conditions and extend the areas of their employment by opening up new fronts

iii During the [illegible] taken by the Army a large number of militants have been killed and [illegible] their actions under most difficult conditions

iv He considered the [illegible] frequent interaction between security [illegible] intelligence agencies and [illegible] administration

v All [illegible] and media reports to [illegible]

vi Human [illegible] have declined. However any such incident [illegible] and [illegible] will dealt with by concerned authorities

Sections from the minutes of the meeting of the Unified Headquarters.

utes appear to be a plausible narration of the meeting.

Interestingly, Pal's assessment of Pakistan's objectives in Kargil was remarkably coherent. "On being asked the main objective behind this infiltration," Paragraph 5 of the UHQ minutes records, "the Advisor Security remarked that the possible aim of Pakistan at the macro-level could be to internationalise the situation, create war-like hysteria and attempt to strengthen their case for third party intervention." But he appeared unable to comprehend that Pakistan could act not only by creating a war-like hysteria but actually going to war. The infiltrators' tactics were interpreted firmly in the light of the experience of insurgent tactics in Jammu and Kashmir. "At the operational level, these infiltrators would possibly aim at disrupting the vital lines of communication in this sector to Khalsi and Leh, as also create disturbances in the depth areas."

This position reflected institutional myopia born of the belief that nuclear weaponisation in South Asia precludes the possibility of conventional engagement. As Pal recently argued, the Army continues to believe, along with the Bharatiya Janata Party's defence establishment, that after "nuclear status was acquired, it stood to reason, both military and strategic reason, that any possibility of a conventional conflict will decline." From this premise, he proceeded to argue that the Kargil conflict had "nothing to do with the nuclear scenario". "Perhaps," Pal concluded, "the linkages are more with the proxy war it is waging in Kashmir... That seems to me to be more plausible. What has happened seems similar to what Pakistan did in 1947 and 1965 when it used the facade of Mujahideens and Kabailis. The tactics are identical, too with what was done in Afghanistan."



Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

This politically driven sundering o events in Jammu and Kashmir from those events set off by Pokhran-II and the entirely ahistorical comprehension of how the Kargil war came about may well force India to pay for the mistakes with the lives of its soldiers. Interestingly, Farooq Abdullah seems more perceptive than the party he supports in Parliament. Paragraph 8(ii) of the minutes outlines his belief that "as soon as the Kosavo (sic) problem would be over Pakistan would attempt to bring Kashmir into the international limelight...He added that the additional aim could also be to keep the Army committed in such inhospitable terrain conditions and extend the areas of their employment by opening up new fronts." The use of the plural form "fronts" is obviously relevant. The UHQ minutes expose the dishonesty of the Army leadership on its conduct of the Kargil war, and that of the political establishment which has sought to shield the Army leadership from public scrutiny.

Even more disturbing, it makes evident the poverty of the Indian defence establishment's conceptual and doctrinal thought. ■

Changing strategies

A bid by the Army to redefine the structure of counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir sparks disputes within the security establishment.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Srinagar

THE end of the war on the Kargil heights has marked the beginning of a new phase in the larger war in Jammu and Kashmir. The week before this Independence Day saw a series of dramatic attacks on Indian forces through the State, the largest and most sustained offensive by terrorist groups in several years. The new offensive is certain to test the forces, thinned by the withdrawal of troops to secure the borders. When the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government assumed power in New Delhi last year, Indian troops and police and paramilitary personnel in the State were taking the lives of six terrorists for each fatality they suffered. Last year that figure fell below five, and it has dropped to two this summer.

Now the Army, with the evident support of the Union government, is advocating new solutions to reorder the structure of anti-terrorist operations in the State. Rashtriya Rifles Director-General Avtar Gill, who took charge of the Army's counter-terrorist operations after 15 Corps Commander Lieutenant-General Krishan Pal asked to be relieved of this charge, has demanded at meetings of the Unified Headquarters (UHQ) in Srinagar that paramilitary organisations such as the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) be placed under his operational command. But the move has sparked disputes within the security establishment, and could open the way for a disturbing transfiguration of the Army's relationship with civilian government.

The backdrop to Gill's demands is only too evident. The week preceeding August 15 was among the most bloody weeks in years. On June 6, terrorists occupied the village of Chak Nathusa in Kupwara and launched a massive assault on the nearby camp of 4 Rashtriya Rifles. Six terrorists and five soldiers were killed. A day later, 4 Rashtriya Rifles lost its commanding officer, Colonel Balbir Singh, in an ambush. Rockets fired on the Rashtriya Rifles encampment on June 7 claimed another life. Three Navy commandos were killed in an ambush near Bandipore on June 12, while a bomb went off at a BSF encampment in Tral killing one trooper. Yet another Rashtriya Rifles camp at Beerwah was attacked the next day and three soldiers were killed. Finally, on August 14, Rashtriya Rifles lost five personnel in attacks at Deewar-Lolab and Manasbal.

Neither the BSF nor the CRPF appear delighted with Gill's proposals. Highly placed sources told *Frontline* that BSF Director-General E.N. Ram Mohan had written to Union Home Secretary Kamal Pandey opposing the Army's proposals. Ram Mohan was stated to have argued that the move would disrupt the functional relationships among the security forces in the State, leading to an escalation of internecine feuds and rivalries. The Director-General said that Rashtriya Rifles, which is strictly not part of the Army, was in effect a central police organisation (CPO), just like the BSF and the CRPF. While BSF units deployed on the border are under the operational command of the Army, the organisation believes that the application of the same structure in the matter internal security duties would be inappropriate.



NISSAR AHMED

Lt.-Gen. Avtar Singh Gill, Director-General of Rashtriya Rifles.

Gill's proposals have their origin in a Concept Paper on administration in terrorist-affected States, including Jammu and Kashmir. (In a letter to *Frontline*, published in the issue of July 16, the Army denied the existence of the paper.)

"Management of Internal Conflict" is a 37-page document, illustrated with slides prepared by the Army Training Command in Shimla. It outlines proposals for drastic changes in the way Army deployments in terrorism-affected areas are carried out. Although the authors are not named in the document, it is learnt that the Concept Paper was prepared for presentation by Lieutenant-General Vijay Uberoi to Union Defence Minister George Fernandes on November 24, 1998.

The Concept Paper has five sections. It outlines perspectives on internal security, discusses the role of the Army in its maintenance, presents proposals for united action by security organisations and a recommended structure for managing internal security operations and finally gives a summary of the recommendations. The Concept Paper begins by fleshing out the thesis that insurgencies are the outcome of failures of governments, particularly State governments. It outlines existing and emerging threats in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern India as examples of these failures. The Army, the Concept Paper says on its very first page, has had to plough a "lone furrow" in ensuring peace where the State apparatus has failed.

There are more than a few curious conceptual elements in these assertions. For one, the authors of the Concept Paper do not see the Army as an instrument of government. Then the docu-



NISSAR AHMED

Army personnel with the bodies of seven militants killed in the first week of August in an encounter in Kupwara district.

ment fails to comprehend that terrorism is not the sole problem the Indian state has had to engage with, and that governments have without Army support dealt with class warfare, economic conflict and caste violence As important, the Army's successes and failures in those areas where it has played a key role have been no more or no less marked than those of other institutions in the State For example, the Army s successes in ending terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and in northeastern India have not been recognisably greater than those of successive Central and State governments

One key component of the paper is the demand for special legal protection for the Army in all counter-insurgency operations where it is deployed Currently such protection is available only in some areas, and a welter of considerations come into play before the imposition of these special laws The Concept Paper argues on page 4 that it is imperative "from the point of view of morale as well as operational efficiency to protect the rights of soldiers" The sole means its authors can apparently envisage to do so is the promulgation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act under the Disturbed Areas Act The imposition of these Acts where the Army is deployed in internal security operations, the paper claims, "becomes axiomatic".

The use of the term "axiomatic" is of some significance, suggesting as it does that an engagement with terrorism cannot be attempted without a generalised abrogation of democratic rights. While it is possible to argue coherently that such extraordinary laws are needed in some situations, the demand for blanket imposi tions reflects a lack of sensitivity to the political, cultural and even diplomatic considerations at play in counter-terrorist operations Nor is it clear that the Act pro tects soldiers from human rights prosecutions The example of the Kashmir Valley where the Act has long been in place makes clear it has neither ensured unqual ified operational efficiency nor protected soldiers from prosecution Interestingly, at BJP mobilisations in areas like Doda, before the party took power in Delhi the main demand was the imposition of the Special Powers Act

The paper points to the contrasting situations in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir and makes a larger distinction between insurgencies where the Army acquired a primary role and those where other organisations predominate The paper argues that where the security environment can be contained by the police and the paramilitaries, the Army s role should only be "highly selective' Under whose command units would be placed in these circumstances, it does not mention But where the Army has what the Concept Paper describes as a 'lead role , a situation which would come about in the case of full-blown insurgencies or externally aided wars, the paper suggests that all other security organisations be placed under its operational command

What this would mean in practice is evident. Paramilitary forces are currently attached to local police units, a system that is meant to upgrade their operational abilities. The paper is bitterly critical of this system, arguing that these district level attachments mean senior CPO officials have no real responsibilities. How simply transferring these attachments to the Army will solve this perceived problem is not clear, but what such a proposal would ensure is that local police involvement in counter-terrorist work would be subverted Given the repeated assertion in the "Management of Internal Conflict" that the Army wishes to minimise its involvement in counter-terrorist work, the Army s determination to take exclusive command of such operations at the same time is more than mystifying

The most dangerous of all are the Concept Paper's expansionist claims on the civilian administration It ends with a demand for Army representation in new coordinating mechanisms to be set up at all levels of the administration, mechanisms that would create an interface between civilian officials, the police and the military 'A coordination apparatus must exist in States down to district and even tehsil levels, the Concept Paper asserts in its eighth recommendation on pages 36-37 The structure should provide for joint planning, decision making, directions coordination and control For the committee to function effectively, there is a need for co-location of headquarters the establishment of joint control rooms, direct communication and liaison and ensuring that the administrative boundaries of the civil administration the police and the military merge as a last resort

The implications of these proposals, which in effect advocate the imposition of near martial law in terrorism-affected States, are enormous For one, the language of the proposal, in particular the use of the plural form of "States", leaves it open to interpretation whether this system would operate only in areas where the Army has a "lead role", or in other areas where emerging threats are apparent as well The proposal will also subvert the principle of military non-involvement in civilian administration as well as legal requirements mandating police and administrative autonomy Nowhere does the Concept Paper spell out how the Army's involvement in civilian management would improve administrative functioning, even less does it engage with the extremely serious issues that would emerge from such an interface

IN some important senses, all that the paper serves to illustrate is the profound poverty of doctrinal thought in India's internal security establishment Demands for new powers and authoritarian systems

Weapons recoveries in J&K: a sample profile

Period	RPV	AA/AT	MIS	ML	Pika guns	MTR	RL	GPMG/UMG	MMG	LMG	Gr L	AK
1988	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
1989	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48
1990	0	0	0	0	0	0	141	96	2	26	0	1,394
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	140	161	8	7	1	2,602
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	174	162	2	4	0	3,775
1993	0	0	0	0	1	12	95	157	1	8	10	2,424
1994	0	0	4	0	3	5	171	137	0	3	53	2,567
1995	0	0	1	0	9	4	100	79	1	10	60	2,348
1996	0	1	1	0	20	5	110	107	2	5	45	2,364
1997	0	2	6	2	41	14	177	74	0	5	69	2,059
1998	1	2	12	1	25	22	315	72	0	3	93	1,588
1999	3	0	3	1	22	7	63	18	2	3	60	639

RPV: Remotely Piloted Vehicles RL: Rocket launchers AA / AT: Anti-aircraft / Anti-tank guns
MMG: Medium machine guns MIS: Missiles LMG: Light machine guns
ML: Missile launchers Gr L: Grenade launchers MTR: Mortar
AK: AK series assault rifles GMPG / UMG: General purpose machine guns / Universal machine guns

Source Derived from Data with the Criminal Investigation Department, Jammu & Kahmir Police

Casualties in terrorism-related violence

Period	Attacks on security forces	Security forces killed	Hindus killed	Muslims killed	Terrorists killed	Terrorists killed per security force killed	Terrorists killed per civilian killed
1988	6	1	0	29	1	1.00	0.03
1989	49	13	6	73	0	0.00	0 00
1990	1,098	132	177	679	183	1 39	0.21
1991	1,999	185	34	549	614	3 32	1.05
1992	3,413	177	67	747	873	4.93	1.07
1993	2,573	216	88	891	1,328	6.15	1.36
1994	2,593	220	104	635	1,851	8.41	2 50
1995	2,253	258	97	1,013	1,338	5.19	1.21
1996	2,433	241	114	1,175	1,194	4.95	0.93
1997	2,116	203	64	717	1,177	5.80	1.51
1998	1,211	230	159	678	1,045	4.54	1.25
1999 Jan	78	17	5	33	43	2.53	1.13
1999 Feb	87	24	29	43	106	4.42	1.47
1999 Mar	91	29	4	41	95	3.28	2.11
1999 Apr	86	14	2	76	79	5.64	1.01
1999 May	97	27	8	48	101	3.74	1.80
1999 Jun	95	37	13	85	71	1.92	0.72
1999 July 15	58	17	10	34	34	2.00	0.77
1999 Total to July 15	592	165	71	360	529	3.21	1.23
Projected 1999 Total	1,184	330	142	720	1,058	3.21	1.23

Source Derived from Data with the Criminal Investigation Department, Jammu & Kahmir Police

of command substitute for serious debate on how the Army and other security organisations including the police and the paramilitary forces must evolve and transform themselves to engage with a rapidly transforming security landscape. Before Pokhran-II, much of the Indian Army doctrine was premised on its conventional superiority, an advantage that now has little meaning since massed tanks are unlikely to sweep across Sindh without inviting nuclear retaliation. There has clearly been little reflection on how the Army must reshape its doctrine in order to engage effectively with low-intensity, localised conflicts.

Since Union Home Minister L.K. Advani announced a "pro-active" paradigm for Jammu and Kashmir, there have been few tangible gains in the fight against terrorism. Casualities among neither the security forces nor civilians have shown any significant decline; indeed, there is more than a little evidence that with increasing numbers of heavy weapons being brought in and trained insurgents entering Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian forces are being pushed into a defensive mode for the first time since 1996. Faced with these stark facts, authoritarian doctrine is proliferating. These modes of thought are mirrored by the flirtation of a section of the Army leadership with the Hindu Right. Witness the decision of Director-General of Military Intelligence N.C. Vij and Air Vice-Marshal S.K. Malik to brief the BJP National Executive on the Kargil events on May 6, or 3 Infantry Division commander Lieutenant-General V.N. Budhwar's endorsement of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Sindhu Darshan festival in Leh last month.

No one is certain where Avatar Gill's demands for new powers will head. For the moment, the State Government appears to have fought off the Army's efforts to place itself at the apex of the security establishment. Gill has replaced 15 Corps Commander Krishan Pal as Security Adviser to the HQ chairperson, the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. But, unlike Pal, he does not hold the right to chair over its meetings in Abdullah's absence. That prerogative has



NISSAR AHMED

Personnel of the Special Operations Group of the Jammu and Kashmir Police display arms and ammunition seized from a Pakistani militant in Srinagar in May.

Arrest of an ISI gang

PRAVEEN SWAMI

THERE is growing evidence that fundamentalist groups in Pakistan are preparing to set off a new wave of terror across India. The operational strategy seeks to exploit communal fissures: fissures that the Hindu Right has had not a little to do with creating in the first place.

On August 20, the Jammu and Kashmir Police announced the arrest of an 11-member Lashkar-e-Taiba cell, whose operatives were active in Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi. Its top operative, Amir Khan, Pakistani national, was tasked to recruit Indians whose immediate family members had been killed in communal violence. At the time of his arrest, Khan was engaged in building a cover identity. Having obtained Indian educational documents and a driving licence from India, he planned to marry into a family living in Bhiwandi in Thane district of Maharashtra.

The Lashkar-e-Taiba cell was busted after the Jammu and Kashmir Police and 5 Grenadiers regiment picked up Islam-ud-Din, a resident of Tirwara Ka Nangla village in Gurgaon district of Haryana, on the Samba border in Jammu while waiting for key a Lashkar-e-Taiba operative, Abu Ilyas. Islam-ud-Din was not aware that Ilyas had been killed in an encounter while attempting to cross through Samba on July 31. Codenamed Abu Khalid, Islam-ud-Din told his interrogators that the cell had been ordered to carry out a series of explosions ahead of Independence Day.

Amir Khan's arrest, based on Islam-ud-Din's interrogation, rapidly led to the arrest of other members of the cell - the result of a coordinated operation between the State police and the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.). The most important operatives were based in Mumbai and Bhiwandi, places hit hard by Shiv Sena terror and anti-Muslim pogroms. Bhiwandi residents Usman Khan and Mohammad Ismail had obtained for Amir Khan educational documents and a driving licence and even loaned him an autorickshaw. Abdul Salam, Ismail's brother, arranged Khan's wedding through a local moulvi. Another Bhiwandi resident, Mohammad Mobin, was engaged in finding accommodation for Khan, without knowing his real identity. Funds for this cell were routed through Jamal Ahmad, a resident of Mumbai's Mazagaon areas.

The rest of Khan's recruits were scattered across the country. Abdul Adil, a resident of Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, worked for the cell even as he studied at Jamia Milia Islamia in New Delhi. Muzaffarnagar resident Mohammad Mustafa and Baghpat resident Mohammad Mustafa were roped in too. Wali Mohammad Zahid, originally a resident of Islam-ud-Din's tehsil, was assigned the task of building a base for the group in Hyderabad, where he lived in the Qazi Gali area near the Golconda Fort. Zahid had been instructed to obtain fake travel documents to facilitate movement out of India when instructed to do so by the Lashkar-e-Taiba leadership. One of Zahid's recruits, Mohammad Sharif, had been arrested three months earlier.

Jammu and Kashmir Police officials say that Islam-ud-Din was trained at the Lashkar-e-Taiba's Abu Bashir camp in Bhawalpur, Pakistan. The Abu Bashir camp, one of five major Lashkar training centres, specialises in bomb-making. The Umar Kuka camp puts volunteers through a basic, three-month insurgency course, while the Abdullah bin Masood camp nearby offers more specialised training. The Taiba camp at Muridke engages in basic ideological indoctrination, after which recruits are sent for a rigorous six-month course, the Daura Khasta, in the mountains. Another Muridke camp, Aksa, focusses on training volunteers from several countries, including Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria and Pakistan, for the war in Jammu and Kashmir.

Islam-ud-Din left Pakistan in early 1999, with cash to help set up the cell. More money came from Ilyas. Both visited several cities to gather recruits, using the infrastructure of the revanchist religious organisation, the Tabligh-i-Jamaat. Islam-ud-Din also arranged for Khan to work at the clinic of a doctor in Punhana, Faqir-e-Alam, by introducing the Lashkar operative as his relative. Faqir-e-Alam, a recent migrant to Haryana from Bihar, did not know Khan's real identity.

The latest arrests affirm that the Lashkar-e-Taiba's pan-Indian network is exploiting Muslim insecurities fuelled by the rise of a regime with no commitment to secularism. In the March 26 issue, *Frontline* had reported on the arrests of several important members of the Lashkar's Abdul Karim 'Tunda' cell, including Pakistani nationals Mohammad Salim Junaid from Hyderabad and Abdul Sattar from Delhi along with Indian nationals Shoaib Alam, Mohammad Faisal Hussain and Aamer Hashim Kamran. Saifullah Chitrali, a top operative of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and the Hizbul Mujahideen's Ali Mohammad Dar had also set up networks outside Jammu and Kashmir. Organisations such as the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front had even liaised with Abdul Razzak Memon, a key accused in the Mumbai serial bomb blasts.

The BJP's pro-active policy, an ill-conceived militarist response to growing violence in Jammu and Kashmir, fails to address the changing character of terrorism and the forces that drive it. As long as Hindu revanchism continues to fuel tensions in India, any number of soldiers will not be enough to engage with the Islamic Right. ■

been made over to Chief Secretary Ashok Jaitley. For the moment, civilian authority remains firmly in place. That in itself is not an adequate response to the larger challenges of discovering new means of engaging with terrorism, and ensuring peace. Sadly, no one in power seems interested in this larger issue.

The State Government celebrated Independence Day with a bright, film-star studded show on the banks of the Dal lake in Srinagar. Ironically closed to the public, the celebration was organised by Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan's son, Rahul Mahajan. Like the two chess-players who are the central characters in Satyajit Ray's masterpiece, *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, the Union and State governments seem supremely unconcerned about the violent events that surround them. ■

An exercise in illogic

The report of the inquiry by the Wadhwa Commission into the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines in Orissa shows little inclination to unravel the processes that drive social violence.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

AMONG the crowd that assembled at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, presumably few people carried documents establishing their credentials. To be present and to participate in the demolition of a place of worship was in itself sufficient testimonial.

Likewise, the mob that assembled at Manoharpur village in Keonjhar district, Orissa, on the night of January 22, to visit a grisly death by fire on Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his two young sons, wore no badges of allegiance to any cause. Their political affiliations, though, were clear from the background to the macabre incident, the manner in which it was conducted, and the slogans raised as the perpetrators melted away into the night.

Justice D.P. Wadhwa, a serving judge of the Supreme Court, was on January 29 appointed a one-man Commission of Inquiry into the Staines murder. In requisitioning his services, the government seemed anxious to send the appropriate signals of concern and sensitivity, especially in a context of adverse global reactions. The Wadhwa Commission subsequently went to work amid a few irritants over the failure of the government to provide sufficient staff and amenities. By a notification in March, the original two-month term of the Commission was extended by three months. The final report of the Commission was submitted to the Union Home Ministry on June 21. It was subsequently transmitted to the Parliament library, with a memorandum of action taken by the Union Government, on August 5.

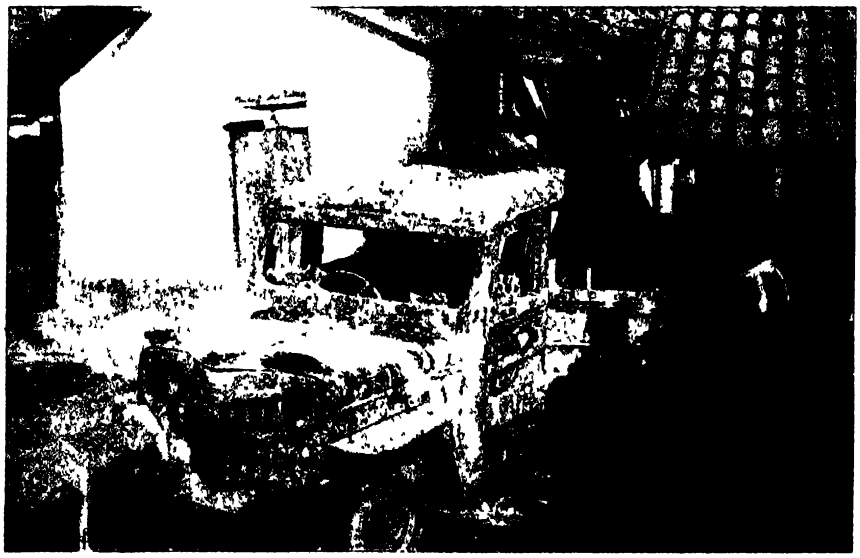
The relative alacrity with which the report was placed in the public domain after official scrutiny, is a departure from established custom. This would be commendable were it not for the very obvious deficiencies of the report itself. In fact, it is absolutely evident that the only reason it was made public without great delay is its failure to tackle even remotely the social pathologies that were brutally manifested in the Staines murder.

Justice Wadhwa's discourse is a singularly unenlightened one, seemingly oblivious to contemporary realities. Chapter 13 of his report, for instance, deals with the inherent ironies of the slogans raised by the mob that killed Staines and his two young sons. "Bajrang Bali", says Justice Wadhwa, "is a great Hindu god revered and worshipped all over the country." He was, continues the Judge, "a great warrior, a great scholar, a sincere friend, minister, ambassador, as one who was wedded to truth and righteousness, a servant and outstanding devotee of Lord Rama." Indeed, Justice Wadhwa concludes that it would be extremely difficult to characterise the multi-faceted virtues of this mythological hero, "as described in the epic Ramayana and expounded before me by the learned counsel in their scholarly way." From all this, the Commission concluded that the mob which shouted slogans in praise of Bajrang Bali after accomplishing their heinous deed, committed a "sacrilegious act".

It does little good for public confidence in the rules of procedure framed by the Commission to know that counsel appearing before it were often engaged in commentaries on the virtues of a mythological character. Neither, indeed, does it speak very highly of the Commission's grasp of prevalent facts. Even a cursory familiarity with media reports on communal incidents over the last decade would show that slogans invoking the most hallowed figures of Hindu myth have been the staple of riotous mobs in all parts of the country.

Evidence available to the Wadhwa Commission has seemingly established, with little room for ambiguity, that Rabindra Kumar Pal from Etawah district in Uttar Pradesh – better known now by the assumed name of Dara Singh – was the principal instigator of the crime. Other material that was produced before the Commission, which includes the first information reports implicating Dara Singh in numerous petty crimes prior to the Staines murder, pointed virtually unanimously to his association with the Bajrang Dal – a militant organisation of rootless youth who won their dubious spurs in the Ayodhya agitation. A few of the FIRs also point to a link between Dara Singh and the Bharatiya Janata Party.

None of the police reports has conclusively established this point, merely



The jeep in which Staines and his sons were burnt alive.

because of procedural infirmities in criminal investigations. But cow protection and the prevention of religious conversions were principal among the causes that Dara Singh espoused as he set to work in the tribal districts of Orissa – and both these have strong resonances with the political project of the Bajrang Dal.

There are seven police investigations under way in Keonjhar district and four in Mayurbhanj, all implicating Dara Singh in various ways. In all the cases registered in Keonjhar, Dara Singh is quite explicitly identified, either by the admission of accomplices who have been arrested or by accounts available from eyewitnesses, as an activist of the Bajrang Dal.



Justice D.P. Wadhwa (right) in Bhubaneswar during the inquiry into the Staines murder.

Wadhwa also had a number of investigation reports from other agencies to draw upon, all of which pointed towards a definite political affiliation for the suspects in the Staines murder case. The Revenue Divisional Commissioner, Sambalpur, for instance, concluded that Dara Singh was quite clearly a "strong activist" of the BJP and that his associates were "most likely the supporters/activists of BJP/Bajrang Dal". Prakash Mishra, Deputy Inspector-General of Police in the Crime Branch, inferred similarly that a "Hindu fundamentalist group" under the leadership of Dara Singh was in all probability responsible for the murder. D.R. Karthikeyan, Director-General of the National Human Rights Commission, pointed to various "indications" that Dara Singh was a "sympathiser" of the Bajrang Dal. And finally, the National Commission for Minorities pointed to what seemed an indubitable fact: that Dara Singh's campaign for cow protection was linked in its inspiration to Bajrang Dal activities in various other parts.

Wadhwa passes over all these findings with little comment or elaboration, although he reserves a rather extraordinary rebuke for the Minorities Commission: "Although the recommendations made by the Minorities Commission appear to be well-founded, the findings arrived at by them do not seem accurate. In fact, subsequent inquiries and the evidence before this Commission lead one to the conclusion that the findings were not accurate and ought not to have been recorded without greater circumspection."

It is unusual for a Commission of Inquiry to censure a statutory body in this manner without caring to assign reasons. The conclusions of the Minorities Commission clearly do not depart significantly from those arrived at by various other investigations. For Wadhwa to single out this body for reproach betrays a certain negative predisposition, an element of bias that clearly has no place in the working of a judicial commission.

Interestingly, an investigation team appointed by the Wadhwa Commission had concluded that Dara Singh was "an activist/supporter of the Bajrang Dal", although there was admittedly no "documentary evidence to prove that he (was) a member or office-bearer". Later, in a supplementary report, the investigation team recorded that by his own avowal and the avowals of his associates, Dara Singh seemed clearly to be involved with the Bajrang Dal. But in a curious retraction at the conclusion, the team concluded that the available evidence did not "reveal the role of any organisation in the commission of the crime".

Substantively, Wadhwa relies upon this finding, as also the evidence rendered by two acknowledged leaders of the Bajrang Dal, in dismissing the notion that any organisation was involved in the murder. A State-level leader of the Bajrang Dal, for instance, was categorical in denying that Dara Singh ever had anything to do with his organisation. A local functionary of the Dal in Keonjhar admitted that he had met Dara Singh the day after the murder, when he was told enigmatically about a certain "job" having been accomplished. Specific details, however, were not revealed, nor asked for.

From these rather skimpy testimonies, Wadhwa concludes quite authoritatively that the "act of murdering Staines and his two children was inspired by Dara Singh and his clout and no authority, organisation or any other person played any role in or in connection with the killings."

Wadhwa's formulations occasionally confront the reader with befuddling problems of logical interpretation. An illustration would be the following characterisation of the motive behind the crime: "From the records, it appears that the motive for the crime was that there were conversions of illiterate and poor Hindu tribals to Christianity on certain premises but these conversions were not necessarily inspired by Staines."

The intent behind this rather complex formulation is to identify conversions as the underlying cause of social tensions leading to the murder of Staines, but to exonerate him individually of responsibility for them. Elsewhere in his report, Wadhwa betrays a certain aversion to the notion of religious conversions itself. The constitutional guarantee of the freedom to "propagate" one's religion does not extend to conversions, he asserts. Rather, it only means that an individual is at liberty to expound the basic tenets of his religion. The practice in Orissa, he noted with obvious disapproval, was for tribal people to change religious affiliation on vague and irrational expectations – improvements in health or material circumstances being the typical kinds of allurements. This, concludes Wadhwa, is repugnant to the freedom of conscience as guaranteed under the Constitution.

Yet the figures the Commission relies upon show that the phenomenon was at best marginal. Those who switched religion in the hope of material improvement were often found to return to the original fold on their expectations being belied. The picture that Wadhwa himself constructs on the basis of his inquiries is of a very insubstantial demographic impact from all these activities.

Further, there is a certain inattention to context apparent in the Commission's report. The Staines murder came as part of a cycle of violence against the Christian community which began almost immediately after the BJP-led government came to power at the Centre, an upsurge that involved regions as far-flung as Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. In focussing on the Staines murder, Wadhwa does consider some proximate instances of inter-community strife, only to dismiss them as random manifes-

tations of personal animosities. In the process his attention is diverted from some very pertinent factors such as the growing collective hysteria over religious conversions that was being orchestrated by the ideological fraternity of the BJP and the deliberate targeting of Christian places of worship for vandalism and destruction. He also fails to consider the evasive response of the Union Government, the Prime Minister's suggestion that a "national debate" be conducted on religious conversions being a virtual abdication of responsibility.

Overlooking all this, Wadhwa turns his attention to the media, gratuitously advising restraint: "Reporting of communal strife should not be done without proper verification or an ordinary crime given a communal twist." The media have reason to be wary about this piece of advice since the notion of restraint that the Commission operates upon seems to verge on self-delusion. It is public knowledge that the Bajrang Dal is open for membership to any individual who shares its broad convictions, provided he is between 15 and 45 years of age. He would be liable to pay a token membership fee of Rs.5 a year, for which he would be issued a receipt. He would not, however, be given a membership card that will establish his credentials as a member of the Hindutva fraternity.

The Wadhwa Commission approaches this rather ambiguous reality with an excess of misplaced conviction. It takes at face value the disavowals of the Bajrang Dal activists, who have an obvious interest in concealing evidence of their culpability. It even refuses to go into the question of the Bajrang Dal's constitution, character and methods of operation. It is content to quote the affidavit filed by Pratap Chandra Sarangi, coordinator of the Bajrang Dal for Orissa: "Sarangi stated that Bajrang Dal is an independent forum associated with Vishwa Hindu Parishad. He described the objectives and activities of the Bajrang Dal. It is not necessary to go into that (sic) as Bajrang Dal is not an unlawful organisation."

The admission could not be more transparent in its cavalier disregard for the factual record. The Wadhwa Commission arrives at its rather infirm conclusions by suspending its critical faculties. An inquiry that was expected to answer troubling questions about a heinous crime has ended up being an exercise in illogic which shows little inclination to penetrate superficial appearances and unravel the processes that drive social violence. ■

Focus on domestic violence

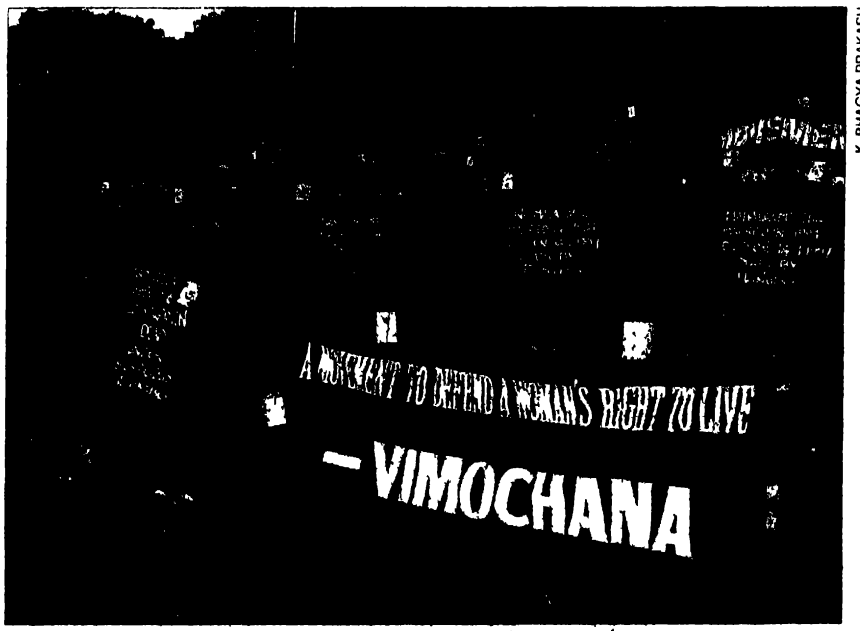
A Truth Commission debates the findings about the high incidence of unnatural deaths of women in dowry-related incidents in Bangalore, and in this context the broader issue of domestic violence, and makes recommendations for tightening investigative and prosecution procedures.

PARVATHI MENON
in Bangalore

A THREE-DAY public hearing in Bangalore before a Truth Commission comprising a distinguished jury of political and social activists, lawyers and former judges revisited the issue of domestic violence against women, which was first raised by the women's movement in India 20 years ago. It was pressure from the women's movement in the early 1980s that resulted in the amendment of penal statutes to protect women against all forms of marital violence by broadening the definition of cruelty, providing for heavier penalties, and relaxing evidentiary requirements. Twenty years on, the problem of domestic violence, particularly dowry-related domestic violence, has escalated and assumed shocking proportions, both in its incidence and social spread, as a limited but thorough study-cum-campaign in Bangalore by the women's group Vimochana has shown (*Frontline*, August 27).

Organised by Vimochana in collaboration with the National Law School University of India, the Truth Commission, which sat for three days from August 15, was confronted with the contemporary face of domestic violence, its patterns and causes, and the limitations of investigative and justice-giving procedures that are in place to deal with it.

While it was the hope of speedy justice that brought the fifty-plus families before the Commission to depose, for Vimochana



Outside the venue of the Truth Commission's public hearing in Bangalore, Vimochana activists draw attention to a serious social issue.



T.L. PRABHAKAR

Relatives of a woman who died following dowry-related domestic violence depose before the Truth Commission.

the hearings marked a new phase in its ongoing campaign against dowry-related domestic violence. "The Truth Commission provided us the opportunity to take the issue of domestic violence to a more public and political level," Donna Fernandes of Vimochana told *Frontline*. "It marks for us the beginning of a new stage We intend to organise these commissions in the districts and also network with other organisations. The report has underscored the need for tighter monitoring of the investigative and prosecution processes. We have to push for acceptance of these findings at the political level."

The members of the commission sat in two juries and heard depositions. The terms of reference were: 1. to identify the shortcomings in police investigations, inquest, dying declarations, forensic science and prosecution; 2. to suggest improvements for better medical treatment for women who are victims of domestic violence; 3. to recommend measures and suggest appropriate institutional arrangements to provide adequate protection to women victims of violence; and 4. to help put in place a system that is accessible, transparent and accountable. One of the jury panels was headed by Justice H. Suresh, former Judge of the Bombay High Court, and included Justice Leila Seth, former Judge of the Delhi High Court and of the Himachal Pradesh High Court and now a member of the Law Commission of India; Brinda Karat, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association; Padma Seth, former member of the National Commission for Women; and Flavia Agnes, lawyer and women's rights activist in Mumbai. The other jury was headed by N. Madhava Menon, former Director of the National Law School of India University and Law Commission member, and included Justice Sadashivaiah, former Judge of the Karnataka High Court; R. Venkatramani, senior advocate of the Supreme Court; Madhu Kishwar, editor of the women's journal *Manushi*; and Corinne Kumar, founder-member of Vimochana.

The jury panel led by Justice Suresh gave a set of specific suggestions on how each of the cases that came up before them at the public hearing could be followed up. It also gave a set of broader recommendations on how the investigative and prosecution procedures could be tightened. Of the 24 cases it heard, it found that in 12 cases reinvestigation and reframing of charges was called for owing to the failure of the police to assess the nature of the case. In addition, there were at least five more cases of police negligence. Thus, in 17 of the 24 cases, according to this jury, there was clear evidence of police culpability. In five of the cases, the post-mortem did not give the relevant details, and of these in three there were charges of corruption against the doctors concerned. The inquest proceedings in at least one-third of the cases were faulty. Of the 24 cases, the jury panel found that in eight cases there was evidence of lapses and bias in judicial procedure. Of these, three cases concerned the question of bail for the accused, two concerned irrational adjournment and delay of hearings, and three reflected judicial bias in the judgment, in the jury's opinion. It noted that families of victims did not in some cases have information on the status of the case. In 12 cases, the complainants had not been given copies of the First Information Report (FIR) and/or the post-mortem report and had no information on the progress of their cases. The jury also recommended, in four cases, the filing of appeals for child custody/maintenance/visiting rights. In all the cases, the natal families of the victims knew of the harassment of the woman prior to her death, and in many cases had sent the woman back to her husband's family with the advice that she should "adjust".

In this summation of cases lies a picture of shoddy investigation, lack of transparency and information, the utter lack of accountability of the various arms of the investigative machinery, and the ignorance of the complainant who is sent from pillar to post with little or no idea of the law or where the case stands. The large number of acquittals in such cases is not surprising given the flaws in the initial investigation process.

All the members of the Truth Commission made special mention of the lack of support that harassed, and often battered, daughters received from their natal families. "By asking her to return to her husband's family, parents have unwittingly signed their daughter's death warrant," noted Brinda Karat.

This jury also gave specific recommendations with respect to some of the crucial elements of the investigative process. It stressed the importance of the correct filing of the FIR, upon which is based all subsequent investigation. It noted that many police doctors and Special Executive Magistrates do not follow the basic rules in the recording of the dying declaration and the inquest proceedings. The jury also recommended that as far as possible the inquest should be conducted in the presence of the victim's family.

Vimochana's study shows that 70 per cent of cases of suspicious deaths of women were closed and the deaths recorded in the Unnatural Death Register (UDR). On this important issue, the jury said that all cases of deaths of married women within seven years of marriage should, as the law provides, be actively investigated. "The police practice of adding a dowry section to every death seems to have boomeranged and has resulted in many acquittals," the jury noted. "Violence against women should be viewed within a wider perspective rather than the narrow scope of 'dowry death'. We need changes in sections which deal with violence against women

so that their scope is not narrowed down merely to violence due to dowry. Another automatic presumption of the police in cases of hanging, in particular, or of cases of death due to poison is that of suicide. All investigations are conducted within this framework. This often converts what in reality is a murder case under Section 302 to suicide and abetment to suicide. In our findings in 24 cases, there are as many as 11 cases where the wrong sections have been applied by the police due to these false premises."

The jury made some important recommendations on the role of the Public Prosecutor, a crucial agency responsible in bringing about convictions. It noted that most cases failed because of the "corruption, apathy and indifference of this agency". Although the panel did not have the opportunity to examine many judgments in dowry cases, the few it did contained judicial biases, according to the panel.

On the last day of the public hearing, each member of the jury offered his/her general comments and personal recommendations on the issue of marital violence and unnatural deaths of women. Madhava Menon was of the opinion that a jury of 12 citizens, of which half are women, should try such cases (as is the model in many countries of the West). This idea was opposed by Justice Suresh. Indeed, it is a viewpoint that women's groups and others disagree with. Juries can be influenced by social and ideological pressures that would prevent the unbiased application of law.

Brinda Karat noted several points of concern. The first was that one should not look at these cases as individual aberrations or in the framework of a man-woman relationship, but as reflecting a social trend that has enveloped all sections and communities. The social context of violence is closely related to the social processes spawned by the culture of economic liberalisation, she said. "The violation of the Line of Control and our territorial integrity brought forth national outrage, as it should have. But every day the LoC that preserves basic humanitarian concerns in interaction between human beings is violated, and we are silent." Her point that a society that perceives marriage as central to a woman's role and identity thereby circumscribes her choices was shared by other jury members, including Flavia Agnes and Padma Seth. Madhu Kishwar said that the lives of many women could have been saved if the natal families had extended them the support that they needed. ■

■ THE STATES

A militant upsurge

Secessionist militants in the northeastern States step up violence on the eve of Independence Day, targeting mainly the security forces and transport and communication systems.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

INDEPENDENCE Day once again witnessed secessionist rebels of north-eastern India step up violence and trigger attacks on security forces in order to remind New Delhi that their "liberation struggle" would continue.

Several underground organisations gave a joint call for a boycott of Independence Day functions and a 24-hour general strike from the midnight of August 14-15. Describing August 15 as "Black Day", they charged the Union Government with suppressing the aspirations of the people of the States of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura.

Army intelligence sources said that representatives of major rebel groups of the region, including the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), met in July at a place in Myanmar close to the Manipur border to discuss a revival of the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF). The meeting drew up a plan to step up armed action against the security forces in the entire northeastern region and to target the transport and communication infrastructure, particularly the Railways, in the period leading up to August 15. The IBRF was inactive over the past few years owing to differences among the rebel groups. Arabindo Rajkowa, the ULFA chairman, and Ranjit Deb Burman, Tripura People's Democratic Front (TPDF) president, issued a statement on behalf of the rebel groups on August 6, calling the 24-hour strike. The groups stepped up violence, especially attacks on trains and road convoys of security forces, immediately after this.

In order to thwart the insurgents on August 15, Army helicopters were requisitioned and security personnel put on high alert in Assam, while a security blanket was thrown in the entire Kohima district of Nagaland. Roads and rail tracks were brought under surveillance and helicopters were pressed into service to patrol oil installations and pipelines, bridges and so on. Patrolling was intensified on the national highways, railway tracks and vital oil installations in Assam. Security measures were stepped up in Tripura too.

Celebrations in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur were confined to governmental functions. The official functions were seen through, with Chief Ministers hoisting the national flag in the State capitals and the ministers in the district headquarters amidst tight security. It was in this background that the Chief Ministers of Assam and Tripura, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Manik Sarkar respectively, once again appealed to the militants to come forward for peace talks.

The underground organisations that came out with a specific programme of organised attacks on security forces include the ULFA, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), both the Isaac-Muivah and Khaplang factions of the NSCN, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Revolutionary Party of Kengleipak (PREPAK), the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), and Kengleipak Communist Party (KCP) of Manipur, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), the Tripura People's Democratic Front (TPDF), and the political wing of the underground All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). The NLFT threatened "death penalty" for those who "dare" to hoist the tricolour in Tripura's hill areas on August 15. The Kuki National Front (KNF), operating along the Nagaland-Manipur border, also called for a boycott of Independence Day celebrations.

The Bodo-dominated Lower Assam region remained strike-bound on August 15. In the evening of August 15, three Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed when armed militants ambushed two vehicles of the 82

CRPF battalion at Khbirakpam in Manipur's Bishnupur district. Thirty-one others, including 17 CRPF personnel, were seriously injured. Earlier, on July 14, a junior commissioned officer was killed and seven jawans were injured when militants ambushed an Army convoy at Pungdongbam village in Imphal East district of Manipur. Army officials said that the assailants belonged to the PLA.

An attempt by ULFA to carry out subversive activities, including the blowing up of oil installations, was foiled on August 5 with the killing of a rebel in Guwahati. A huge quantity of RDX was seized.

Activists of the NDFB blew up an Army vehicle on August 12 in Sonitpur district of Assam. Three Army personnel were killed in the blast, which took place at Rajgarh on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. On the same day, a CRPF convoy had a miraculous escape when ULFA militants triggered a high-power remote-controlled blast at Bilpara in Lower Assam's Nalbari district. The improvised explosive device planted underground, went off a few seconds after the convoy crossed the spot.

A possible case of "mistaken identity" saved the Guwahati-bound Rajdhani Express on August 10 as a goods train, 15 km ahead of it, took the impact of an explosion triggered by Bodo militants under a railway bridge in Lower Assam's Kokrajhar district. Militants also targeted the Arunachal Express but it escaped narrowly as the explosives, planted in a coach next to the engine, were detected and defused minutes before the trains arrived at Bongaigaon. Two Power Grid Corporation pylons collapsed in a blast on August 7 in Barpeta district, plunging the area into darkness.

An attempt by ULFA to carry out subversive activities, including the blowing up of oil installations, was foiled on August 5 with the killing of a rebel in Guwahati. A huge quantity of RDX (Research Department Explosive) was seized. The rebel was identified as Bablu Ingti, ULFA action group commander for Guwahati and Kamrup districts. "With his killing, we have busted ULFA's 'volcano unit', which was engaged in carrying out explosions," said State Inspector-General of Police (Operations) G.M. Srivastava.

Bodo militants blew up a portion of the broad gauge railway track between Barpeta Road and Sarupeta stations on August 4, and this caused the derailment of 10 wagons of a goods train and the disruption of rail communication to and from Assam.

A series of blasts in 10 days since August 1 prompted the railway authorities to suspend train services after sunset in Assam from August 11 to 15. Assam's Director-General of Police, P. V. Sumant said: "The Bodo militants simply want to make their might felt by repeatedly blowing up railway tracks. They know they can derive maximum mileage and grab headlines in the newspapers by destroying public property."

In Tripura, militants of the banned NLFT gunned down six non-tribal villages on August 12. As the rebel group entered Shibbari village in Dhalai district from the nearby Longtarai hill ranges, the residents tried to escape; however, they were sprayed with bullets from AK-47 rifles. In another incident on August 11, a police official was killed by NLFT militants. NLFT activists abducted Kshetra Mohan Debnath, father of Ranjit Debnath, senior Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and former Transport Minister, from his Bangalipara residence in South Tripura. Militants belonging to the NSCN (Khaplang) gunned down five policemen on August 3 in an ambush in Karbi Anglong district of central Assam, bordering Nagaland.

The police arrested two "officers" of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and two top Harkat-ul-Mujahideen militants from Guwahati on August 8. In a follow-up operation, the police nabbed 27 other members of various pro-Pakistan outfits. Chief Minister Mahanta said that documents found in the possession of the arrested persons proved their ISI links. Describing it as a "major breakthrough", Mahanta said that the two ISI officers and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen activists had been deputed to carry out "specific anti-India operations". The task assigned to them was "to make use of ULFA and other local rebel outfits to create in Assam large-scale disturbances, including bomb blasts in public places, railway stations, railway tracks, market places and oil installations," Mahanta said.

The Chief Minister told *Frontline* that the arrested ISI officers had confessed that carrying out "high-intensity bomb explosions" was "one of their assignments". The blowing up of oil installations in Assam and the snapping of the Leh-Manali highway were top on their list of priorities. The Chief Minister quoted Mohammed Fasih Ullah Hussani, one of the arrested ISI officers, as saying that he and his colleague were "on a very important mission, the Assam Mission". They also disclosed that over 300 militants from Assam had received training in Pakistan over the past few years.

Srivastava said that the ISI officers had disclosed that they arrived in Dhaka from Karachi by Pakistan International Airlines flights on different dates in the third week of July. They stayed at two hotels in the Bangladesh capital, Timestar and Lucky Seven. "They met ISI agents based in Dhaka and asked them to arrange for the despatch of a consignment of explosives to Assam. Then they crossed the border by a boat somewhere near Karimganj. Finally they reached Guwahati and got in touch with their local contacts in ULFA and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen," Srivastava said.

The Assam Police suspects that the militants expected the consignment of explosives from Dhaka but it got diverted to unknown destinations following the arrest of the ISI officers in Guwahati. Mahanta, in his Independence Day address, said that a combined police team of West Bengal and Assam had recently recovered 30 kg of RDX from suppliers in Rajsahi in Bangladesh during a raid inside Bangladesh territory on the basis of information from the ISI officers. West Bengal Home (Police) Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, however, denied any such raid in Bangladesh territory.

Informed sources said that the West Bengal Police believed that the explosives – 14.65 kg of ammonium nitrate mixed with fuel oil (AMFO), which was recovered from Platform No. 8 of Calcutta's Sealdah railway station on August 16 - was part of the main consignment from Bangladesh. The 6 kg of RDX, seized on August 16 in Phulbari in Jalpaiguri district of north Bengal, was also part of the consignment.

On Independence Day, over 200 ULFA and Bodo militants surrendered before the Army in different parts of Assam. They handed over arms which included AK-47 rifles, grenades and revolvers. ■

Smokers under siege

Smokers in Kerala come under pressure as a High Court judgment banning smoking in public places is enforced across the State.

ANAND PARTHASARATHY

THE second class chair car of the inter-city express train bound for Thiruvananthapuram witnessed an unusual sight recently. Soon after the train left Ernakulam, a passenger lighted a cigarette – not an unusual sight in Indian Railways. What was unusual was the reaction of his co-passengers. A woman in the adjacent seat requested him firmly to put out his cigarette. When he did not comply, four other travellers got up and surrounded the smoker. "This is Kerala," they said, 'Don't you read the newspapers? You can't smoke in public here. Either you put out your cigarette or we hand you over to the Railway Police."

Faced with this determined assault, the man threw away his cigarette, bemused at the reaction of his co-passengers. "Nobody minds in the North, it's not a big deal there," he grumbled. As many others like him have found out, smoking in public in Kerala these days can be a painful exercise. If you flourish a cigarette or a beedi in public places – bus stations, streets or railway platforms – the chances are that a policeman will nab you and issue a summons to appear before the local magistrate. If you resist or refuse to give a credible name and address, he could arrest you. The fine one has to pay for the pleasure of lighting up in public is anything between Rs.200 and Rs.500. If one refuses to pay or cannot afford to, it is one month behind bars.

What amazes visitors nowadays is that one cannot easily smoke in Kerala even if there are no policemen around. The members of the public will prevent you. This is one law the people have welcomed. Snap polls conducted by the media and some commercial organisations found that nearly 80 per cent of those interviewed were in favour of the ban.

The ban was imposed by Di[illegible]rict Collectors within days of a l[illegible]dmark judgment delivered by a Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on July 12. The judgment followed a petition filed earlier this year by two Keralites: Monamma Kokkad, mother of three children and a teacher of English Literature at BCM College, Kottayam, and K. Ramakrishnan, an advertising designer from Kozhikode who has since moved to Dubai. Monamma Kokkad used to commute by train between Kottayam and Ernakulam, and it was the hassle of having to put up with smokers on the journey that motivated her to move the courts.



A policeman forbidding a smoker from lighting up in Thiruvananthapuram, outside the State Secretariat.

When the case came up before a Division Bench consisting of Acting Chief Justice A.R. Lakshmanan and Justice K. Narayana Kurup, the judges took an unusual course of action. They enlarged the list of respondents from an original nine to 52, including every possible agency of government, the civil administration and the police. This ensured that any action that flowed from the judgment was swiftly executed.



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Acting Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court Justice A.R. Lakshmanan and (right) Justice K. Narayana Kurup, who issued the landmark order.

The 48-page judgment – possibly the most detailed legal document on the subject of smoking hazards – drew on dozens of sources both Indian and international (articles and news items from *The Hindu* were cited). Around one million people die every year in India from tobacco-related diseases, according to the Indian Medical Association. Cigarette smokers have been proven to have a 70 per cent higher chance of dying earlier than non-smokers; in fact, half of these smokers will be dead before they

Smoke signals

ANAND PARTHASARATHY

THROUGH most of the 1990s, proceedings in tobacco-related cases in United States' courts followed a set pattern: the plaintiff, usually an individual or a social service organisation, took on the might of the tobacco industry, citing what often seemed damning medical evidence of harm done to smokers or to those forced to work in a smoke-laden environment.

After weeks of arguments and a procession of experts presented by both sides, the jury went into a brief huddle, only to come out to announce a verdict that favoured the defendant. The tobacco industry's attorney stepped outside the court, smirking in front of a battery of cameras. "We have a justice system that works," one of them said, "Our juries are intelligent. They are not conned by frivolous publicity-seeking plaintiffs. They have sent a clear message."

The first-ever such lawsuit against a tobacco company was filed in 1954 by a lung cancer victim in the U.S. It dragged on for 13 years before it was dropped. In 1964, the Surgeon General released a report that, for the first time, linked smoking with lung cancer. A year later, health warnings became mandatory on cigarette packets sold in the country – a requirement that was later imposed in dozens of other countries including India.

By 1971, airlines began segregating smokers in separate sections of the aircraft and the U.S. took the lead in banning broadcast advertisements for tobacco products. In the 1980s, the tobacco companies won dozens of lawsuits filed by smokers dying of lung diseases. In a bizarre case in 1983, a smoker, Rose Cipollone, dying of lung cancer, was ordered by a court to pay $40,000 in damages – a verdict that was later overturned. Rose died soon after and her son withdrew the case because he could no longer afford to keep it going.

This was a scene that was played out time and again. The tobacco companies had enormous financial clout which enabled them to drive its opponents to penury. In July 1997, U.S. based tobacco companies came to an agreement with the Attorneys General of 40 States, whereby they promised to pay over $200 billion over the next quarter century into a fund to cover medical costs, help people to quit smoking and pay damages to affected smokers. They also agreed to remove cigarette advertisements from hoardings, sporting events and supermarkets and shut down cigarette vending machines. The agreement shielded the companies from cases, but did not restrict individuals from suing them.

And that is what they faced in early 1999, when hearings began in a Miami court. Five of the largest companies were taken to court by the first-ever class action suit filed on behalf of 500,000 sick smokers in Florida suffering from lung cancer, emphysema and other diseases. On July 7, a jury found the five companies guilty of making a defective product and found them "engaged in extreme and outrageous conduct... with the intent to inflict severe emotional distress".

The jury agreed with the smokers on every count: that the industry deceived them about the dangers of smoking; suppressed research that would have produced safer cigarettes and targeted children with their advertisements. The final figure in punitive damages could well exceed the $200 billion settlement that the tobacco companies reached with the States – that is, if the jury verdict is not overturned in appeal. But the finding is still being seen as a startling reversal of a historical unchanging pattern. It was the first major defeat for tobacco companies.

Readers of John Grisham's thrillers might have felt a sense of *deja vu* while reading about the Miami court proceedings. His *The Runaway Jury* evoked a strikingly prescient scenario: a jury which for the first time returns a finding in favour of a dead smoker.

Meanwhile, a special federal court has been set up in the U.S. to hear cases filed by countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Thailand against American cigarette manufacturers. And in mid-August, six smokers with lung cancer filed a class action suit in the Australian Federal Court on behalf of 40,000 fellow-smokers against the 'Big Three' cigarette manufacturers – Philip Morris, Wills and Rothmans.

Groups of sufferers from environmental smoke hazards – such as airline flight attendants forced to serve in the smoking areas of aircraft – have in the past sued cigarette manufacturers, with mixed success. But in the roster of legal moves in support of the innocent non-smoker, the recent Kerala court judgment has its own special place. It was the first instance when the judiciary has acted in favour of all passive smokers of a State without receiving a specific complaint against a tobacco manufacturer or trader. ■

turn 40, according to the judgment.

It devotes much space to documenting the hazards of passive smoking – what the medical profession now calls "environmental tobacco smoking (ETS)". This is a syndrome that is as yet not fully studied in India, but the statistics in the United States are striking. According to a 1998 report of the American Health Association, quoted by the judges, there are nearly 40,000 deaths caused by the effects of passive smoking in the U.S. every year. Even infants are in danger of contracting asthma and other lung diseases if their parents are heavy smokers.

In India, the Bench found, an indication of the dimensions of the hazard can be seen in the statistics of paediatric admissions in hospitals: one in four is the child of a smoker. After direct smoking and alcohol, concluded the judges, passive smoking is one of the biggest worldwide killers.

It is the interests of this section of the public which is subject to serious health risks for no fault of theirs that invite the court's concern. And, in an analysis which is a throwback to the judgment delivered by V.R. Krishna Iyer in the Ratlam Municipality case in 1980, the court found that "existing laws... are quite sufficient to safeguard the interests of the public against the wisp of environmental tobacco smoke."

This, said the court, is because smoking is a public nuisance as covered under Section 268 of the Indian Penal Code – it "causes any common injury, danger or annoyance to the public". Further, the court invokes another Section which concerns "making the atmosphere noxious to health" and says: "There can be no doubt that smoking in a public place will vitiate the atmosphere so as to make it noxious to the health of persons who happen to be there. Therefore smoking is an offence punishable under Section 278 of the IPC."

The judgment concluded: "Public smoking of tobacco in any form whether in the form of cigarettes, cigars, beedies or

otherwise, is illegal, unconstitutional and violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India (which assures every citizen the right to life and liberty). We direct the District Collectors of all districts of the State of Kerala... to promulgate an order under Section 133 (a) CrPC, prohibiting public smoking within one month from today and direct the Director General of Police to issue instructions... to prosecute all persons found smoking in public places... by filing a complaint before the competent magistrate.. "

The judgment clarifies that "smoking in public places falls within the mischief of the penal provisions relating to public nuisance as contained in the Indian Penal Code and also the definition of air pollution contained in the statutes dealing with protection and preservation of the environment..." A footnote clarified what the judges considered a public place " all educational institutions, hospitals, shops, restaurants, commercial establishments, bars, factories, cinema theatres, parks, walkways, places of amusement, bus stops, bus stations, railway stations, railway compartments, and other public transport vehicles, highways, or other places where people congregate." This turned out to be the crucial and operative part of the court's orders: you cannot smoke on a road or within a restaurant – indeed any place where another member of the public has access.

EVERY District Collector acted within days of the judgment and well before the 30-day deadline. Smoking in public is a cognizable offence, that is, the police can make an arrest even without receiving a formal complaint. The Government now plans to send publicity vans equipped with loudspeakers to all towns and villages to broadcast details of the ban.

In the days following the judgment, the police picked up hundreds of smokers who attempted to smoke at bus stations, on railway platforms or in shopping centres. A pocket cartoon in *Mathrubhoomi*, the Malayalam daily, showed a policeman telling another: "No room in the lock-up for all the smokers, sir. Shall we let out the petty thieves and pickpockets?"

Old habits die hard, but faced with the hassle of having to appear in court and pay a fine of Rs.200 or more, many smokers have called it quits, at least in public. The foyers of cinema theatres which used to be normally enveloped in a cigarette-induced haze during the interval, were suddenly clear of smoke.

And 'no smoking signs' have sprung up in unlikely places, around places of worship, in local reading rooms and gymnasia. A day after the judgment was published, a heartfelt response was posted on the gates of a church in Champakkara near Kochi: "No smoking on these grounds." In smaller letters was a footnote in Malayalam: "High kodathi vidhikku nanni" (thanks for the High Court judgment).

Fifteen days after the court's order, cigarette majors reported a 30 per cent to 50 per cent drop in the offtake of tobacco products by the around two lakh retailers in the State. Officially the Government has accepted the judgment and will not appeal against it. But Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar, a former smoker, has assured smokers that they will not be unduly harassed by the police who would, however, strictly enforce the court orders.

Such compliance will cost the exchequer dear. Tobacco products used to provide Rs.200 crores every year by way of taxes. Kerala Dinesh Beedi, the largest cooperative tobacco venture in the State and an umbrella organisation for 22 primary societies and over 300 plants, will soon move an appeal in the High Court, citing the threat to the livelihood of 25,000 people who depend on the manufacture and sale of beedis.

Legal experts do not see much hope for such appeals. Says P.B. Sahasranamam, an advocate at the High Court who specialises in environmental pollution law: "No review lies in the Kerala High Court unless it can be established that the judgment contains an error apparent on the face of the record." This is unlikely.

The only legal recourse open to those who may want to seek to reverse the judgment is to move the Supreme Court. And that would be a dicey option for the tobacco industry: if it loses its appeal in the apex court, it risks seeing the Kerala ban extended all over the country.

The media are already questioning why States such as Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were tardy in enforcing laws banning public smoking. And within the last few weeks, anti-smoking activists are reported to have moved both the Madras and Karnataka High Courts, seeking a ban similar to that imposed in Kerala.

The hotel and restaurant industry which operates thousands of bars in Kerala has not yet reacted to the ban; but it is likely to feel the impact in the weeks ahead. Observers suggest that the industry may be forced to invest in a facility that is common in countries whose smoking laws are strictly enforced – lobbies for smokers.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, is hearing a public interest case filed by Mumbai Congress leader Murli Deora against cigarette manufacturers, seeking Rs.500 crores on behalf of non-smokers and better control over the marketing, advertising and consumption of tobacco products.

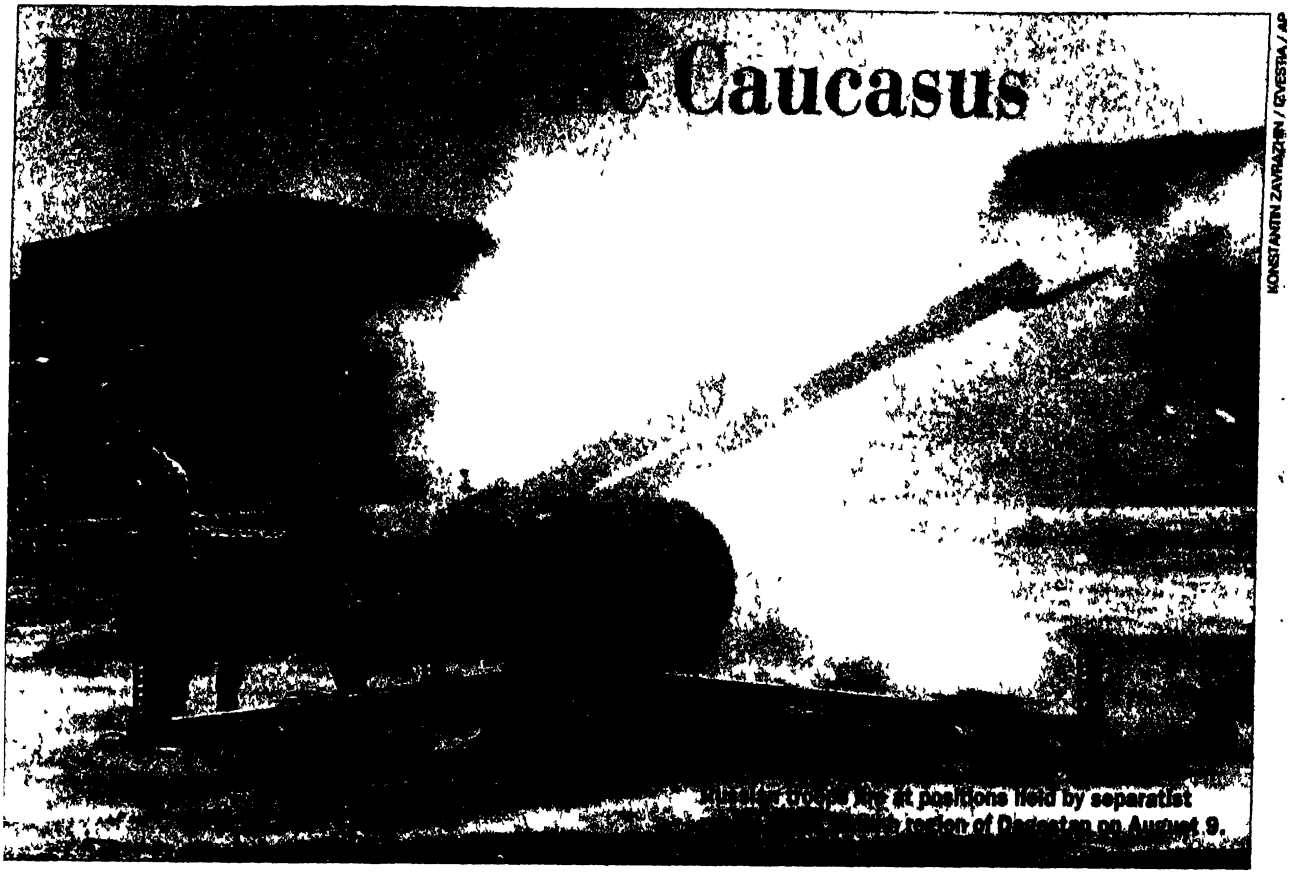
It may well happen that the Kerala move triggered by a couple of public spirited citizens and articulated by an alert and sensitive judiciary, will create a nationwide focus on the dangers of tobacco to both active consumers and passive members of the public. That will bring India in line with dozens of other nations where the cigarette industry is under unprecedented pressure to mend the way it does business. As lighters go off all over Kerala it may yet be that smokers nationwide have taken their last nicotine-stained gasps – at least in public. ■

Designer beedis

FACED with tough competition from cigarette manufacturers, beedi-makers are seeking new pastures. Indian beedis in 'designer' flavours such as strawberry, grape and vanilla are all the rage in parts of the United States today.

As cigarettes become costlier, many young Americans have taken to the cheaper option of beedis from India. Beedis made their first appearance this year in Massachusetts and at least some school children who took to smoking flavoured beedis thought they were some kind of herbal cigarette sans tobacco.

Beedis available in some States such as California carry no health warnings. They are easily available and can even be ordered on the Internet. Health departments are now waking up to the hazards posed by these handrolled unfiltered tobacco products. Recently ABC TV reported that the Massachusetts Department of Health checked a batch of beedis and found that the amount of tar that they contained and carbon monoxide that they emitted was two to three times higher than in the case of cigarettes. And the nicotine per gram was seven times higher than that of regular cigarettes. ■



KONSTANTIN ZAVRAZHIN / IZVESTIA / AP

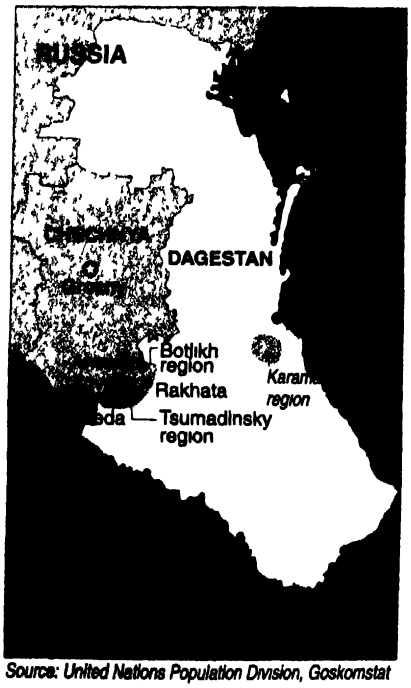
Separatists in Dagestan republic, near Chechnya, declare an independent republic, but President Boris Yeltsin's response – a military campaign and the appointment of a new Prime Minister – reflects an insensitivity to the problems of Caucasian republics.

ANURADHA M. CHENOY

IN early August, separatist rebels in the mountainous republic of Dagestan in the Northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation seized several areas of the region and declared an independent Islamic republic of Dagestan. The separatists crossed over from the neighbouring republic of Chechnya and were led by Chechen rebel Shamil Basayev and others who have long fought Russian control, raising the banner of Islam. Chechnya had in 1994-95 witnessed a similar conflict that ultimately led to a war with Russia, followed by an agreement that gave Chechnya greater autonomy. The separatist fire that was ignited in Chechnya has now spread to Dagestan. If Moscow does not handle the matter with care, the entire Caucasus may flare up.

Moscow has reacted to this rebellion by sending in Russian forces to bomb the rebels in the mountains of Dagestan and in areas of Chechnya that are believed to be hideouts for the separatists. This has led to hundreds of casualties and set off streams of refugees from the trouble-torn villages in Dagestan and Chechnya. Rebels have long controlled the border between Dagestan and Chechnya. Given the nature of the territory, the rebels' determination, the ethnic and communal divide, the seriousness of economic problems, the breakdown of law and order and the possibility of support from Islamic mercenaries, a large-scale war is a distinct possibility.

Meanwhile, with Russian parliamentary and presidential elections approaching, President Boris Yeltsin once again shuffled his pack of executives. Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin and his entire Cabinet, appointed only in May, were dismissed on August 9 and former National Security Adviser Vladimir Putin was appointed Prime Minister. Although Yeltsin gave no reason for this



Source: United Nations Population Division, Goskomstat



Rebel commander and Chechen fighter Shamil Basayev. (Right) A Dagestan rebel fires from a rocket launcher during an air strike by the Russian Army in the Botlikh region on August 15.

round of dismissals, Russian media analysts link it to the Dagestan conflict. The Communist Party and the Duma see little difference between the new Prime Minister and his sacked predecessor and are concerned primarily with how events will shape up in the Caucasus. Russia continues to face further instability.

The European Community and the United States have expressed concern over the escalation in the levels of violence, the ethnic conflicts and the violations of human rights in the Caucasus. The U.S. had in 1997 declared the Caucasus an "area of interest". This coincides with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's new doctrine of intervention in key geostrategic areas citing alleged human rights violations. Given the region's geostrategic importance, the oil resources in Chechnya, the oil pipeline routes, and the influence of local warlords and the mafia, the region makes for a heady mix of instability and international intrigue. This can once again threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.

Russia's concern for territorial integrity is valid; however, its use of Su24 bombers on the Dagestan rebels can lead to significant civilian casualties. Some rebels have appealed for intervention by the United Nations; a large-scale war can invite international repercussions. The he[illegible] of the National Assembly of Dagestan, Mukhu Aliyev, has expressed allegiance to Moscow and has distanced himself from the rebels. Dagestan, unlike Chechnya, signed the Federal Treaty that made it part of the Russian Federation in 1992. In earlier presidential and parliamentary elections, the people of Dagestan have voted against Yeltsin and his supporters and have backed the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. These factors may make it easier for Moscow to rein in the rebels, because unlike in Chechnya, where the ruling regime led the insurgency, in Dagestan the elected regime is politically linked to Moscow.



An injured boy from a village affected by the fighting.

The Northern Caucasus is one of the most troubled regions in the Russian Federation. The problem of Dagestan and the Northern Caucasus dates back to the early 19th century when Russia invaded the Caucasus and handled the local clans with a heavy hand. The Caucasus region was home to four republics which were part of the former Soviet Union, seven autonomous republics and four autonomous regions. About 60 nationalities belonging to various linguistic groups and different denominations of Christianity and Islam live here. Dagestan has a mix of multiple nationalities, but the population is predominantly Muslim. Some ethnic groups in the Caucasus live in contiguous areas in two or more republics; these groups want borders to be redrawn in order to protect their ethnic unity. The political and administrative boundaries of these units were often changed, especially during the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. Many of the ethnic groups, including the Chechens and Dagestanis, were deported during the Stalin period and rehabilitated much later. Many of the demands made by the people of this

region seeking the reorganisation of administrative units reflect this past.

Dagestan's problems are not confined to ethnic and Islamic separatism. Like many of its neighbouring republics in the Caucasus, it is among the poorest regions in the Russian Federation. Not only does the region generate the lowest income in the Federation but it has the highest unemployment rate. The percentage of pensioners in the population is considerably more than in the rest of the country. All these republics have a corrupt power elite that has made personal gains through the privatisation of state industries and utilities. Moscow has supported this elite since it remains loyal to the centre. Further, Dagestan and the republics of Chechnya, Irkutsk and Tatarstan receive more from the common treasury than they contribute to it. Moscow has thus used its economic resources as levers to control this area. Dagestan's economic dependence on Moscow is another reason that will compel it to remain in the Federation. But Russia's economic crisis and Dagestan's low status have accentuated the problems in the region.

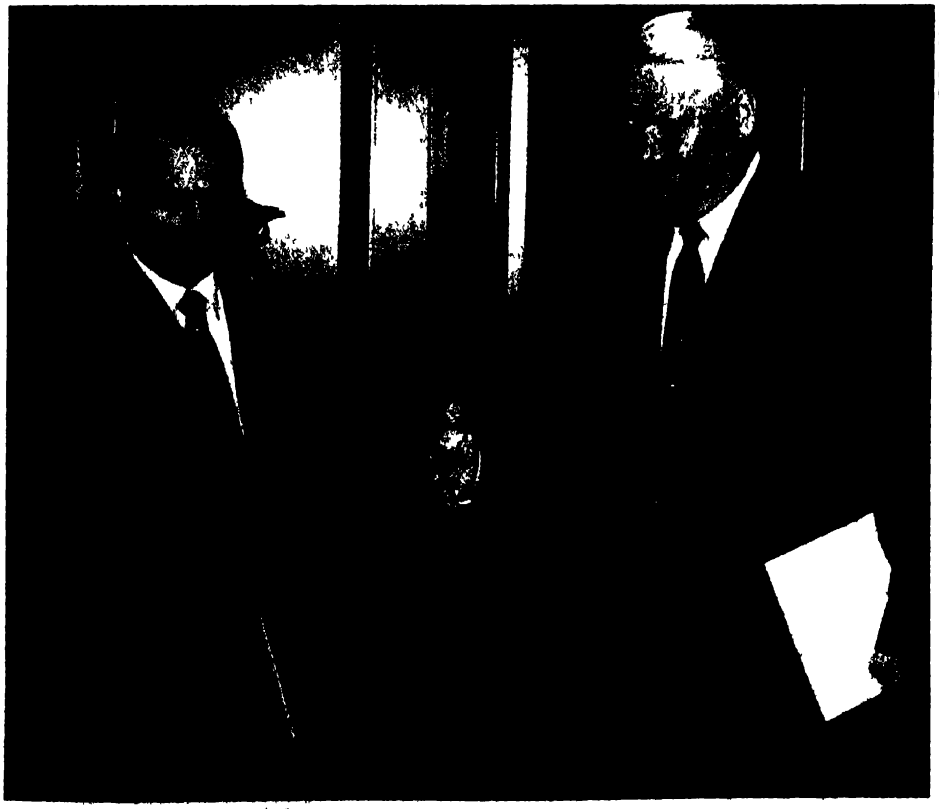
Separatism and ethnic and regional conflicts in the Russian Federation remain major problems. Ethnic mobilisation and separatism are not confined to Dagestan and Chechnya: among the other republics where the dominant nationalities have used this threat are North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chuvashia, Tuva and Kabardino-Balkaria. Further, regions such as Kaliningrad and the Maritime Territories, Southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles, which are influenced by contiguous states, are susceptible to separatist tendencies. The economically more powerful republics such as Tatarstan, Bashkira and Yakutia have at various times used the bogey of ethnic separatism to threaten Moscow and to mobilise popular opinion in their own territories.

THE Dagestan problem is complex because it brings back the issue of Chechnya, where the rebels' ideology is based on Islam and an ultra-chauvinist militant nationalism used to construct a Chechen nationalism with a vision of a greater Chechen nation. The December 1995 agreement between Russia and the Chechen Government gave special status to Chechnya within the Federation. It provided for a treaty to delineate authority and powers between the two and to resolve conflicts through peaceful negotiations. Chechnya and a few other republics in the Caucasus have adopted laws that go against the grain of the Russian Constitution. Not only have the rights of Russian minorities in the Chechen Republic suffered, the republic has adopted the Shariat laws an established Shariat courts. Executions hav been carried out under this law, an women's rights remain curtailed.

Moscow has appealed to Chechn President Aslan Maskhadov to crac down on the rebels based in Chechny but the regime has little hold on rebe leaders and warlords. Russian troops fac further problems owing to poor coordi nation and distrust between the Interio Ministry and the Defence Ministry an are a demoralised force. Even if Moscow puts down the rebellion in Dagestan wit force, the victory will be a limited one The problem in the Caucasus needs long term structural solutions. The neglecte region is a cauldron of ethnic and cultur al contradictions. It needs patient han dling and economic development tha will ensure sustainable development.

The Caucasus has been a 'free-marke economy' where a corrupt local elite ha made gains at the expense of the people In addition, there has been mobilisatio on ethnic and religious lines, turning com munities against one another. Given th total breakdown of law and order and th lack of civil society, the vacuum has been filled by local warlords and gun-runner who use inter-clan rivalry to build thei support base. Moscow is seen as a soft tar get and most of the problems are conve niently blamed on it. Moscow' response – seeking to control th region through the corrupt elite, o in the event of a civil war through military intervention – further alienates the people of the region.

Russia has to rethink its strate gies if it wants to hold on to its dis tant regions and trouble-spots such as Dagestan and the rest of th Caucasus. For this, however, Russi needs a capable and far-sighte leadership. The Russian parliamen tary elections are due on Decembe 19 and the presidential elections i early 2000. Under th Constitution, Yeltsin, who ha served two terms as President, is no eligible for a third term. While h claims to be looking for a successor he might use the latest crisis t impose changes to extend his term or that of his coterie. It is evident that whatever the outcome of th Dagestan conflict, the crisis o Russia is far from over. ■



ITAR TASS/AP

Preeident Boris Yeltsin with newly appointed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on August 17.

Anuradha M Chenoy teaches at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Re-enter Primakov

CELESTINE BOHLEN

THREE months after President Boris Yeltsin fired Yevgeny Primakov as Prime Minister, Primakov made a dramatic re-entry into Russian politics, this time as head of a new electoral alliance poised to assume a commanding lead in the parliamentary elections in December. The decision by Primakov has recast the shape of Russian public life as this vast country prepares for the post-Yeltsin era.

Shown in various opinion polls to be Russia's most trusted and respected politician, Primakov, 69, a former Foreign Minister, spymaster and wily survivor from the Soviet era, has been courted alternately by his former allies in the Communist Party and by a new centre-left coalition put together by Moscow's ambitious Mayor, Yuri Luzhkov.

On August 17, Primakov announced that he had agreed to head the Luzhkov team's list of candidates. With Primakov now firmly on board, the Fatherland-All Russia coalition could become an unstoppable force. But Primakov left unanswered the critical question of which of the two strong-willed, battle-hardened politicians who head the coalition – himself and Luzhkov – will emerge next year as Russia's leading presidential candidate. "We will agree," said Primakov with typical ambiguity, adding that his mind was not made up about a presidential bid in 2000.

Primakov's alliance with Luzhkov may only be temporary, designed to last long enough to push their joint coalition into a dominant position in the next Parliament. The two could pair up for the presidential elections, with Primakov, the more senior figure with more national experience, running for President, and Luzhkov waiting his turn to become either Prime Minister or to fill a newly proposed post of Vice-President – although such an arrangement strikes some experts as improbable.

With his stolid appearance and his experience as an expert on West Asia and as Cold War-era adviser to Soviet leaders, Primakov comes across as an elder statesman, an image that has broad appeal in Russia today, after a decade of political turbulence and discord. His guarded manner, and flashes of sly wit, contrast with Yeltsin's belligerent and bombastic populism, which has left people bitter and exhausted.

Primakov, who became Prime Minister in September 1998 in the wake of a devastating financial crisis, was credited with restoring political calm, largely by appeasing Yeltsin's Communist Opposition, and with arresting the economy's downward spiral. Critics argue that Primakov's Government did little more than mark time. Supporters say that the country needed the breathing spell he provided. Even after he left office and dropped from public sight, Primakov's popularity held steady. His popularity rating is not high, but against the backdrop of Russia's often sordid political scene, they are higher than anyone else's.

Sergei Stepashin, the man who succeeded Primakov as Prime Minister, is holding talks with leaders of Russia's cluster of centre-right parties, which include the once-mighty Our Home is Russia, headed by another former Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and parties headed by the economic reformers once favoured by Yeltsin and widely disliked by the public.

But most political experts agree that even if they unite, they will not be able to run ahead of Fatherland-All Russia, although they will probably get the 5 per cent of the popular vote required to qualify as a parliamentary faction.

In his prepared statement, Primakov stressed that he was not joining any party or movement, but had agreed to head the list of candidates put forward by the Fatherland-All Russia for elections to the 450-seat Duma. Describing the coalition as an "association of healthy centrist forces, open to all who wish Russia good", Primakov said his goal was to turn politics away from a debilitating cycle of intrigue, blackmail and back-biting, towards a more constructive debate. "We must move toward consensus in society," he said. "It is only through consensus that we can achieve stability and rescue our country from its troubles, its people from the poverty they do not deserve."

Walking with a cane that he has used since he underwent back surgery in Switzerland last year, Primakov appeared together with his new political allies who, besides Luzhkov, include Vladimir Yakovlev, Governor of St. Petersburg; Mintimer Shaimiyev, Governor of oil-rich Tatarstan; and Mikhail I. Lapshin, a leader of the Agrarian Party, which has traditionally been aligned with the Communists.

This group represents the backbone of the coalition whose emergence came as a direct challenge to Yeltsin, who has tried hard in recent months to disrupt and derail Luzhkov's political ambitions.

Primakov outlined specific goals for his new alliance, which would include making changes to the Russian Constitution and the structure of presidential system. He proposed reinstituting the position of Vice-President – a post abolished in 1993 after Yeltsin's first Vice-President tried to lead a mutiny against him – and a special law guaranteeing "full security and a worthy life" to Presidents after they leave office. This last pledge was an obvious olive branch to Yeltsin and his presidential administration, whose increasingly desperate battle to influence the choice of a presidential successor is widely thought to be driven by concern for their own future. The Kremlin in recent months has fought hard to keep a series of corruption investigations from focussing on members of the "family", as Yeltsin's inner circle is known.

"I will do everything possible to make sure that this bloc is not 'against' but 'for'," Primakov said. "Enough of strife, attacks on each other, threats to ban parties which are against somebody's liking, enough of mud-slinging."



ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO/AP

Former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov (left) and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzkhov.

	STUDENT NAME	PLACE	RANK
1	AMIT NEGI	DEHRADUN	2
2	ANIL KUMAR YADAV	SALACHAT	5
3	KUNAL KUMAR	ROORKEE	6
4	SRIKAR M S	BANGALORE	7
5	VANDANA R	BANGALORE	11
6	PUNEET YADAV	AGRA	15
7	SHESHADRI V	BANGALORE	16
8	PUSHPENDRA RAJPUT	SUNOR	19
9	RAHUL SHRIVASTAVA	ROURKELA	24
10	SYED ALI MURTAZA RIZVI	LUCKNOW	25
11	PAWAN KUMAR SHARMA	DELHI	30
12	LOPAMUDRA MOHANTY	CUTTACK	41
13	BIDHU SHEKHAR	DELHI	49
14	VEENA RAJ	KOLLAM	50
15	TIJU T	ALWAYE	59
16	ASHIMA NEB	NOIDA	67
17	MEERA SRIVASTAVA	LUCKNOW	71
18	SIBASH KABIRAJ	RANCHI	84
19	SUDHIR KUMAR	GHAZIABAD	89
20	SATYAPRIYA RAMAKRISHNA	HYDERABAD	98
21	SHOBHIT JAIN	INDORE	100
22	ROHIT GARG	LUCKNOW	114
23	KUMAR SUPRAVIN	CHENNAI	117
24	NAZLI JAFRI	ALIGARH	135
25	SYED MOHD ANDALEEB RAZI	RAEBARELI	150
26	ANURADHA SINGH	GURGAON	152
27	DHRUBAJYOTI SENGUPTA	HOWRAH	163
28	MONICA SINGH	PATNA	175
29	AMARPREET DUGGAL	AMBALA	179
30	JUSTIN MOHAN J	TRICHY	183
31	FREDERICK ROY KHARKONGOR	SHILLONG	186
32	NEELAKANTA REDDY C	SECUNDERABAD	208
33	SHEENA SANDHU	DELHI	211
34	VIKRAM S KULKARNI	BELGAUM	219
35	NITIN KUMAR YADAV	HYDERABAD	220
36	VENKATESH T N	CHENNAI	227
37	VINAY HANDE	BANGALORE	233
38	YASHASVI YADAV	LUCKNOW	237
39	WABANG JAMIR	DIMAPUR	250
40	ANURAG CHATRATH	DELHI	261
41	VINOD BHATIA	LUDHIANA	262
42	RAJENDRA PRATAP SINGH	GHAZIABAD	271
43	ASHUTOSH AGNIHOTRI	KANPUR	277
44	MADHUP VYAS	DELHI	280
45	MOLLY BOSE	JABALPUR	282
46	MANISHA BANSAL	BATHINDA	283
47	NIDHI MANI TRIPATHI	GORAKHPUR	287
48	PRACHI MISRA	DELHI	302
49	SONALI RAMESH PANKSHE	PUNE	304
50	PANKAJ K UKE	AHMEDABAD	359
51	DEEPAK M DAMOR	VADODARA	361
52	TANMAYA BEHERA	BHUBANESHWAR	363
53	VIJI M R	TRIVANDRUM	366
54	NIPUNA A CHAUHAN	AHMEDABAD	376
55	JAYASHREE S BHOJ	DELHI	385
56	BASANT SWARUP	KANPUR	401
57	TEMJENWAPANG AO	DELHI	452
58	POLAN JOHN	DELHI	466

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Of buildings and blocks

The inauguration of a new European Parliament occasions some reflections on its directions and prospects.

GLYN FORD

SEEMINGLY after ages, the new European Parliament elected on June 13 met on July 20. More than half its members were new and almost all were lost, politically or geographically. The Christian Democrats (and the European Democrats, British Tories) offered a deal the Liberals could not refuse: vote for Nichole Fontaine, our French candidate for President now, and in two and a half years' time our block vote will fall behind your favourite son. Some Liberals were sceptical on political grounds, but were soon slapped down by those who had been waiting for a generation for some crumbs to fall from the political table and who were damned if political principles were going to stand in their way now. So the deed was done.

It was done in the infamous Parliament building in Strasbourg, which opened for this inaugural session. Round buildings are in themselves inherently confusing; throw in no exits to the ground floor, black and glass walls, a ten-metre 'firebreak' between buildings spanned by random bridges and lifts with a will of their own, and the result is chaos. The newly elected French President showed her confidence in French technology when she chose, immediately after her election, to climb nine floors to her office rather than venture into the lifts.

Yet much of the media criticism is nonsensical. The building's cost was a comparatively modest £250 million, for over 1,100 offices and meeting rooms plus a spectacular hemicycle that can hold 800 people. It compares very favourably with an identical cost for a mere 200 offices for MPs at Westminster, whose crowning glory is a £81,000 reception desk – which amount is equal to the price of two and a half terraced houses in most of Britain's northern cities.

Equally, you cannot complain about the cost and lack of facilities at the same time. If the members' offices are too small – and they are – making them larger would have increased the already "exorbitant" cost even further. Yet some journalists have trained themselves in intellectual acrobatics so as to hold both thoughts in their heads simultaneously without feeling confused.

THE stupidities of the geo-morphology of the European Union's institutions, scattered as they are across Belgium, Luxembourg and northeastern France, are not the fault of the buildings themselves, but rather of the politicians. It is another proof of Nietzsche's dictum that "madness is rare in individuals but common in parties, groups and organisations."

Not even a group of ten-year olds of average intelligence would want to perpetrate a system whereby 600 people meet three times a month in Brussels and once a month in Strasbourg, with filing cabinets, boxes and the rest being transported back and forth – I am surprised we are not sponsored by the Road Haulage Association – and with much of the secretariat located in Luxembourg. At one time, the European Parliament Library was in Luxembourg and books could not be taken out by post. Yet at the Edinburgh Summit in 1992, British Prime Minister John Major turned stupidity into farce by brokering an agreement. This agreement ensured that what had been a temporary arrangement until a single working place was agreed upon would become a permanent monument to collective madness.

The architects claim that the new building was designed to reflect European democracy at work: open, transparent and modern. It looks suspiciously enough like Breughel's Tower of Babel, which led some people to believe that an element of heavy irony was involved. But its design specifications by a group of Strasbourg-sceptic Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) some years ago may yet have an impact. The offices, that make rabbit hutches look spacious, may trigger a revolt when the MEPs start to seize back control of the issue of when and where they will meet, from the footnotes of Edinburgh and John Major.

After all, there is already the first flicker of revolt in Strasbourg amongst the new parliamentarians. The system is to "divvy up" the positions of responsibility within Parliament by party and country: a mechanism that does not lead to inspired leadership as successful candidates demonstrate their complete ignorance of their responsibilities and subjects. One member once thought Bangkok was the capital of the Philippines. Ignorance is every excuse. But when the Christian Democrats (and European Democrats) indicated that their candidate for the vice-president of the Citizens' Rights Committee was to be a Berlusconi man who was under investigation for mafia links, the limit of tolerance was passed. The members from the left, centre and even some from the right said no! So from that moment there is a Christian Democrat (and European Democrat) vacancy.

AS for the rest, it was business as usual. The European Parliament had no opinion on the Cologne Summit. The Centre-Right wanted to flex its political muscle by taking an independent critical line. They learnt again the lesson of the last Parliament: negative majorities are easier to obtain than positive ones. They lost by a score of votes and the other group's resolutions met the same fate. The only way for Parliament to speak with a voice anyone hears, let alone listens to, is when the vast majority of members are shouting the same message.

Finally, Parliament wound up with a Commission Statement on why the fine of £650 it imposed on the French football authorities for selling 600,000 tickets to French residents against European competition policy rules – which stipulate that you cannot discriminate among European Community nationals – would frighten future organising committees and prevent them from trying similar profit-maximising strategies.

Neil Kinnock made a stout defence of a bad case. But it would have proved easier to persuade the Saudi religious authorities of the medicinal benefits of pork in red wine than the MEPs of the Commission's astute handling of a question they tried so hard to avoid. ■

Glyn Ford is a Member of the European Parliament from the United Kingdom.

The long road to peace

The Colombian Government and the leftist guerilla groups would like to give peace a chance but the far-right paramilitary groups are trying to scuttle the peace process.

JOHN CHERIAN

THE election of Andres Pastrana as Colombia's President last year generated great expectations among the people. He had pledged to the electorate that he would bring to an end a long-running civil war. In the first few months of his Presidency he devoted most of his time to bring the two major guerilla groupings, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), to the negotiating table. However, he has been successful only to a limited extent.

Both guerilla groups have begun talks with the Government but there is still a long way to peace. Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez said earlier in the year that the peace initiative taken by the new President and the goodwill shown by both the FARC and the ELN were positive signals. "What is important for now is not peace but to be making it," said the Nobel laureate.

The Government and the leftist guerilla groups would like to give peace a chance but the far-right paramilitary groups, initially financed and nurtured by the Army and landlords, are trying to scuttle the peace efforts. The recent assassination of the country's favourite television comedian is a case in point. There are some renegade elements among the guerillas too, as the recent hijacking of a Venezuelan plane by an ELN faction illustrated. The plane and its passengers were subsequently released unharmed.

The new President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, is trying to persuade the the FARC and the ELN to arrive at a negotiated settlement. Chavez met the ELN leader, known by the *nom de guerre* Gabino, several times in Caracas. There is a danger of the civil war spilling over to Venezuela, which shares a long border with Colombia.

Chavez' progressive image has made him acceptable to the guerilla groups in Colombia, but influential sections of the Colombian establishment are suspicious of him. Some prominent right-wing Colombian politicians allege that Chavez has close links with the the FARC leadership. Another factor that complicates matters is the role played by the United States military in Colombia. Ostensibly, the U.S. military is engaged in a fight against drug production and the mafia cartels that control drug trafficking. Colombia is one of the biggest producers of narcotics and the U.S. the biggest consumer; most of the narcotics smuggled into the U.S. come from Colombia.

However, the dividing line between the anti-narcotics campaign and the anti-guerilla campaign is becoming increasingly indistinguishable. Only last month, a U.S. surveillance plane was shot down in the jungles of Colombia by left-wing rebels, killing five U.S. servicemen. Under the guise of anti-narcotics operations, the U.S. is providing logistical help to the Colombian Army in a big way. In the second week of August, Thomas Pickering, the U.S. Under Secretary of State, visited Bogota, the Colombian capital, to discuss the civil war and the drug trafficking. He was the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit the country in more than a decade. The media have gone to town with stories of an imminent U.S. military intervention to stop the guerillas from making any more territorial gains. There has also been talk about the U.S. organising a multinational Latin American intervention force for Colombia.

In 1998, the U.S. Congress passed a law that tripled the counter-narcotics assistance for Colombia to $289 million a year. In the last week of July this year, the Colombian Government asked for an additional $500 million for the next two years. The Clinton administration's top anti-narcotics official, Gen. Barry MacCaffrey, who visited Bogota in July, recommended that $1 billion be made available to Colombia and other U.S. allies in Latin America and the Caribbean as "emergency drug assistance". Colombia is now the largest recipient of U.S. assistance after Israel and Egypt. After the rebels made some military gains recently, President Bill Clinton said that the U.S.' vital interests were at stake in Colombia.

Colombia's neighbours have reacted with alarm at the prospect of a U.S. military intervention in the region. Soon after the intense rebel offensive in early July, the top brass of the Colombian Army rushed to Washington for consultations. In a series of raids, the FARC had attacked more than 20 towns, including one



President Andres Pastrana with U.S. Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering in Bogota on August 10. There is some concern in Colombia over a possible U.S. intervention in the country's affairs.



Refugees return to their homes southwest of Bogota, on August 11 after the Army promised them safety from paramilitary groups. More than a million Colombians have been displaced by violence since 1980.

just 40 km from Bogota. The Government imposed a curfew on one-third of the country, and the military was put on a state of high alert.

The guerilla groups rely on a "tax" levied on coca producers to fund their operations. It is estimated that they thus earn more than $500 million annually. Almost all segments of Colombian society have been affected by the production and trafficking of cocaine and heroin. Drug trafficking has led to the existence of a parallel economy, which is equivalent to 35 per cent of the country's legal exports. The cocaine cartels have been acting hand in glove with politicians and the Army since the narcotics boom started in the mid-1980s. Pastrana's predecessor in office, Ernesto Samper, was not allowed to visit the U.S. on the grounds that his campaign for the presidency was funded by the Cali cartel. The town of Cali is the centre of operations of this drug cartel.

The civil war in Colombia has been going on for more than four decades. The FARC's origins can be traced to the struggle for land waged during the 1940s and 1950s. The FARC, the biggest and oldest of the guerilla organisations, was linked to Colombia's Communist Party in the 1960s but broke away in the 1980s to form its own political party, called the Patriotic Union. It did well in the 1986 elections but soon the right-wing paramilitaries started targeting its leaders, who had emerged from the underground. The group returned to guerilla activities. The FARC now appears to have become more flexible about ideology. The Cold War had ended. In the changed world situation, Cuba had stopped supporting left-wing insurgencies in Latin America.

THE FARC has an estimated 15,000 fighters, who have a strong presence in more than half of Colombia's municipalities. The FARC is particularly strong in the rural areas. In May, in an effort to kickstart the peace process, the Government agreed to the FARC's demand to withdraw the Army from a large area in southern Colombia and turn it into a "demilitarised zone". The ELN also demanded a similar concession, and when this was not forthcoming it embarked on a kidnapping spree. The most foolhardy of such acts involved the capture of 143 worshippers in a Catholic church in Cali in early June. Later, two senior ELN leaders reportedly went in person to the Vatican to apologise for the incident.

The ELN was founded in the early 1960s by radical students having strong links with the adherents of the liberation theology of the Catholic Church. The ELN has 3,000 to 4,000 fighters concentrated in the country's oil-rich north-east. The FARC and the ELN have over the past few years inflicted a series of defeats on the Colombian armed forces. On the other side of the spectrum are the right-wing paramilitary groups which have a membership of around 5,000. They have their own political agenda and have been demanding a part in the peace talks. They are backed by big farmers and businessmen and are known to have strong links with the drug-trafficking operations.

Most political killings in Colombia are carried out by the paramilitary groups. Approximately 10 Colombians are killed in politically-related violence every day. More than a million Colombians have been displaced by violence since 1980. One reason why the FARC is not willing to sit down for protracted negotiations is the Government's inability to control the paramilitary forces. Efforts to usher in peace are continuing but the momentum that was evident when Pastrana took over last year seems to have been lost. Today, the Government is in control of only half the country's territory. ■

The costs of sanctions

A survey of child and maternal mortality in Iraq shows up the human costs of the inhuman sanctions regime imposed on the country, and points to other disturbing aspects of the war of attrition.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

EARLY this year, United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked by a leading television network about the human costs of the sanctions policy against Iraq. The interviewer focussed in particular on the rising toll on children's health, of rampant malnutrition, infant mortality, of a generation of Iraqis being deprived of the basic rights of growing children. "Was it worth it?" he asked. Albright paused for a moment before responding. "Yes," she said, "I think it is worth it."

As Iraq was isolated after it invaded Kuwait in 1990, the U.S. (in the loyal company of the United Kingdom) today finds itself isolated in its insistence that a change of regime in Iraq must be effected before the crippling economic sanctions imposed nine years ago are removed. Now an authoritative survey of child and maternal mortality in Iraq – the first conducted since 1991 – shows what exactly the human costs of this inhuman policy are.

According to the survey conducted under the joint auspices of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Iraqi Government, in the southern and central parts of the country children under five are dying at more than twice the rate they were ten years ago. These parts of the country, where over 85 per cent of the total population live, are still under the central authority of the Saddam Hussein regime.

The survey reveals that in southern and central Iraq the under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) more than doubled from 56 deaths per 1,000 live births between 1984 and 1989 to 131 per 1,000 live births between 1994 and 1999. The rate of infant mortality, that is, of children dying before they complete a year, increased from 47 per 1,000 live births to 108 per 1,000 live births within the same period.

Girls, the survey found, have a marginally higher rate of survival than boys. And the scourge of child mortality is more prevalent in rural areas as compared to the urban centres.

The survey also covered the northern region of Iraq, which was detached from the central authority of the Saddam Hussein Government by U.S. and U.K. forces immediately after the Gulf war concluded in 1991. In this region – inhabited predominantly by Iraqi Kurds – U5MR rose from 80 per 1,000 live births between 1984 and 1989, to 90 per 1,000 live births between 1989 and 1994. It then fell to 72 per 1,000 live births between 1994 and 1999. Infant mortality rates, it is learnt, also followed a broadly similar trend.

UNICEF has estimated that if Iraq had managed to sustain the rapid strides in child welfare it had achieved during the 1980s, then 500,000 fewer children under the age of five would have died between 1991 and 1999. That finally is the cost of the sanctions against Iraq – half a million dead babies.

RELEASING the results of the survey, UNICEF executive director Carol Bellamy noted that the situation in Iraq was a "humanitarian emergency". Although as a member of the U.N. family, UNICEF was obliged to accept the legitimacy of sanctions imposed ostensibly under the auspices of the Security Council, Bellamy was insistent that the international community should substantially and immediately increase its humanitarian funding for Iraq.

The Western media, which have to a great extent been complicit in the campaign against Iraq, seemed to have little use for these nuances. *The New York Times* blazoned the Iraqi regime's culpability in its headline: "UNICEF Survey Blames Saddam for Increased Child Mortality in Iraq". The basis for this rather extravagant interpretation was simple: areas administered by the Iraqi Government witnessed a rapid increase in child mortality, while the Kurdish areas where Western humanitarianism was in full play, saw an improvement in this indicator.

The cues for this interpretation were obviously received from officials of the U.S. administration. James Rubin, State Department spokesman, said that the government was "very concerned" about the death of children in Iraq. He added, however, in self-exculpation that the "bottom-line" of the situation was that Iraq was blocking aid available through the oil-for-food programme.

The "blame Saddam" game has obviously not exhausted its potential as far as the U.S. is concerned. But in this most



NOEL QUIDU/GAMMA

A mother and child in a hospital in Baghdad. Malnutrition as a consequence of the sanctions has so far claimed the lives of half a million babies in Iraq.

recent version, the alibis offered are very thin. It is, for instance, an acknowledged fact that international aid for the northern regions of Iraq began trickling in immediately after the Gulf war ended in 1991. The rest of Iraq had to wait for a satisfactory formula to be worked out under the "oil for food" programme before obtaining any kind of sustenance. And although the Iraqi regime has been blamed for whimsically delaying the initiation of the humanitarian programme until 1995, the reality is that the U.S. was insistent on hedging the programme around with a host of conditions which no sovereign government could have acceded to.

Since then, 35 per cent of the meagre revenues that Iraq has been able to pump out of its crippled petroleum industry has been reserved by the U.N. for war damages and the costs of administering its disarmament programme. Of what is left, 20 per cent goes towards humanitarian purchases for the northern region – a clearly disproportionate share for 15 per cent of the population. And since the administration in this region is under the direct control of the U.N., it faces none of the bureaucratic hurdles that the Iraqi Government encounters in purchasing basic humanitarian supplies.

The pattern of deliberate obstruction by U.S. and British officials in the U.N. sanctions committee is clear from the record. As Iraqi Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak pointed out, "Out of $1.029 billion worth of contracts to buy medical requirements over the first five phases of the oil-for-food deal, only $600 million worth have reached the country."

Few in the global community today remain willing to go along with the "blame Saddam" game, especially now that the human consequences of the sanctions have been brought home to them with devastating clarity. Within the Security Council, policy towards Iraq is rapidly becoming one of the most divisive and contentious issues. Russia, China and France are united in their demand for an immediate end to the sanctions, with Iraq's remaining disarmament obligations being conducted under an agreed regime of inspections and oversight. The U.S. and the U.K. are equally insistent that the elimination of all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has to be certified by a duly authorised body before sanctions can be removed.



AP/INA

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Some of the underlying tensions boiled over recently in the form of an intemperate attack on U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan by Richard Butler, the discredited former chief of the U.N. Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM).

Since his term as executive chairman of UNSCOM ended in June, Butler has taken up a position at the Council on Foreign Relations, a New York-based policy advocacy group. His stock in the U.N., though, has been low since he lent his authority to a particularly brazen attempt by the U.S. and the U.K. to hold Iraq in breach of Security Council resolutions on WMD elimination. The report he submitted in December 1998 constituted the basis for a ferocious four-day-long aerial assault on Iraq by the Anglo-American axis.

On the strength of high-level information *The Washington Post* then reported that officials from the U.S. Government "played a direct role in shaping Butler's text during multiple conversations with him at secure facilities in the U.S. mission to the U.N." Following accepted norms of responsible journalism, the *Post* invited comments from both UNSCOM and the U.S. Government on these findings. Both declined to confirm or deny the substance of the report.

Evidence of Butler's sordid role in Iraq has mounted since then. In September 1998, Butler alleged that traces of the deadly nerve agent VX had been found on missile fragments recovered from Iraq. The discovery was "utterly unambiguous", he said, and pointed conclusively to Iraq's relentless pursuit of a programme of nerve warfare. Iraq then alleged that the U.S. laboratory's findings were doctored by bias. Later tests at Swiss and French laboratories returned negative results, casting grave doubts on Butler's integrity.

In June this year, the Iraqi Government lodged a complaint with the U.N. about samples of deadly chemical agents such as Sarin and VX found in the Baghdad premises that UNSCOM had abandoned just prior to last year's air strikes. Russian ambassador Sergei Lavrov, in a letter to the Security Council, requested an "urgent consultative meeting" to discuss the complaint. Late in July, the Russian Government accused UNSCOM of concealing seven vials of VX nerve gas in the Baghdad laboratory and asked the Security Council to authorise an independent investigation.

The impression was gaining ground that UNSCOM had in the guise of disarmament been engaged in a sordid game of planting evidence in Iraq. But Butler's patrons in Washington and London soon bailed him out. Other members of the Security Council abandoned this line of inquiry in the face of a veto threat.



JASSIM MOHAMMED/AP



PETER MORGAN/REUTERS

Prakash Shah, former special envoy to Iraq of U.N Secretary-General Kofi Annan. (Right) Richard Butler, former chief of the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq.

PRAKASH SHAH, the Indian diplomat who has functioned since March 1998 as Kofi Annan's special envoy to Iraq, was an immediate casualty of this episode. The U.S. demanded his recall for alleged bias in handling the dismantling of the UNSCOM facility in Baghdad. U.S. and British scientists, it alleged, had deliberately been kept out of the decommissioning exercise on Shah's Instructions. The

Indian diplomat, who served for long as the country's permanent representative in the U.N., took leave of his posting with the ironic comment that he represented the U.N. rather than the U.S. – the difference between the two lying in the small matter of 22 million non-combatant civilians who were suffering the worst of the economic sanctions against Iraq.

Butler now accuses Kofi Annan of seeking to "destroy UNSCOM". Butler's recent fulminations reflect the desperation of a man who would, devoid of the patronage of the global policeman, have little moral standing in the diplomatic community. His claims have expectedly been dismissed as "arrant nonsense" by spokesmen for the Secretary-General. In floating outrageous theories of complicity between Kofi Annan and Saddam Hussein, he evidently sees the opportunity to divert attention away from the manner in which he persistently allowed a multilateral mandate for disarming Iraq to be abused and corrupted.

Early in June, Annan said that there was some evidence that UNSCOM inspectors in Iraq were involved in espionage on behalf of the U.S. Government: "I think there was a measure of justification in those allegations and Washington never denied it." It was, he said a "worrisome" development, "because it not only undermined UNSCOM but it could undermine future disarmament regimes".

CLEARLY, Butler was no mere disarmament expert. In his functioning he showed all the proclivities of a ruthless hatchet-man, tasked with facilitating the long-term American agenda for the region – the elimination of the Saddam Hussein regime or the partition of Iraq. On the pretext of weapons inspection, UNSCOM was charged with collecting all details of Saddam's innermost security ring, in the long-term interests of hatching an assassination plot. That plan now presumably abandoned, the U.S. seems to have switched its focus to the alternative – the partition of Iraq.

U.S. and British warplanes have of late considerably stepped up their undeclared war of attrition against targets in northern and southern Iraq. The parallel objective, of mobilising Shia rebels in the south and Kurds in the north into offensive military formations and inducing them to stake out a territorial and political claim, remains. When, or if, it comes into play, the repercussions are unlikely to remain confined to Iraq. ■

An eventful period

The capture of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan and the results of the April general elections that followed that event mark a phase of transition in Turkey.

JOHN CHERIAN
recently in Istanbul

TURKEY has been in the limelight for various reasons over the past few months. The most important development, perhaps marking a defining moment for the nation, was the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (*Frontline*, July 30). The national euphoria that followed the arrest resulted in the pro-establishment parties, currently favoured by the country's all-powerful military, emerging victorious in the general elections held in April. The main Opposition party, the pro-Islamist Virtue Party (F.P.), saw its strength decimated in Parliament. (The Virtue Party is the successor of the Welfare Party. The Welfare Party, which was banned at the instigation of the military, and its leader Necmettin Erbakan have been barred from public life for five years.)

The True Path Party, the biggest secular party until recently, saw its support base shrink drastically. Most commentators have blamed its poor performance on the corruption by party members when it was in power under the leadership of Tansu Ciller. An electoral alliance with Erbakan added to its misfortune.

Today, the military and the civilian government under Prime Minister Bulen Ecevit share a cosy relationship. In fact, Turkey is sometimes described as a "military democracy". To the surprise of many people, Ecevit's left-of-centre Democratic Left Party emerged as the biggest gainer in Parliament, winning 22.19 per cent of the votes polled. The fact that Ecevit headed the country when Ocalan was captured, no doubt helped him at the hustings.

However, Ecevit presides over a coalition comprising two other right-wing parties. Ecevit, a Sanskrit scholar, did not have much of a choice. The avowedly secular Ecevit has been a supporter of the military's hardline stance against the



Abdullah Ocalan sits behind bullet-proof and bomb-proof glass during his trial in the prison island of Imrail on May 31.

Islamists. All the same it was a surprise to find Ecevit, a vociferous crusader for democracy and human rights, share power with the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The other party in the coalition is the Motherland Party (ANAP).

Many of the DSP's members had voiced their disapproval of the political arrangement with the MHP and the ANAP. The differences over the issue reached an emotional pitch. According to reports appearing in the media, one of Ecevit's closest associates, Hikmet Ulugbay, the State Treasury Minister, even attempted suicide. Ulugbay is known for his integrity; the ANAP, under Prime Minister Mehmut Yilmaz, had during its stint in government scaled new heights of corruption.

Despite the fact that the Motherland Party's vote share came down by six percentage points, it managed to corner some major portfolios in the new government. The MHP, on the other hand, is known for its extreme nationalist views. It is backed by the "Gray Wolves", an armed vigilante group, which has the support of certain state organs. It has been in the forefront of the fight against Kurdish and left-wing groups in Turkey and northern Cyprus.

Together the present alliance has 350 seats in Parliament, enough to pass any bill. At the moment, the Opposition is weak, disunited and dispirited. The Virtue Party and the True Path Party are facing serious internal problems. The True Path Party is all set to throw out Tansu Ciller, while the Virtue Party, which lost its vote base by seven percentage points, is witnessing a battle between the old guard and younger elements. Erbakan, who has been in politics for four decades, is still trying to call the shots from outside.

The Virtue Party, like its predecessor, the Welfare Party, may also be served with a ban order by the government. The Constitutional Court is hearing a case relating to the issue. The Army's goal is to remove the Islamists from the country's politics. The military's argument is that the Constitution prohibits the creation of a party that was banned earlier. In late 1997, the military issued a warning that "giving freedom of movement to religious extremism and to the outlawed (PKK) in the context of democracy would be tantamount to the state committing suicide. There cannot be any such concept of democracy."



BURHAN OZBILICI/AP

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit (foreground), and Navy commander Salim Dervisoglu (behind), with Army generals during a ceremony at the mausoleum of modern Turkey's founder Kemal Ataturk on August 2. Currently, the military and the civilian government share a cosy relationship.

The absence of an articulate Opposition in the present Parliament has created a vacuum in Turkish politics. This vacuum is currently filled by the trade unions. In the last week of July, protests were organised all over Turkey against the International Monetary Fund/World Bank-dictated economic policies that are being implemented by the new Government. The labour movement is angry about the Government's plans to pass a reform bill which would raise the retirement age of women employees to 58 and of men to 60. At present, the retirement age for women is 48 and for men 51.

The proposal to raise the retirement age would not have caused such an adverse reaction in most other countries. Unlike in most western European countries, Turkey's social security system does not provide an adequate safety net for the unemployed. There is no unemployment insurance. Besides, there is a ceiling of $200 a month on pension. The cost of living in Turkey is very high, given the current rate of inflation. Early retirement has given Turks an opportunity to explore new avenues of employment. This option will cease to exist if the retirement age is raised, for landing new jobs at 58 or 60 would be virtually impossible. The Government has also refused to compromise on its economic package.

The trade unions are threatening a nationwide strike. Ironically, at one time, Ecevit was a vociferous supporter of the trade union movement; many trade unions supported his party in the previous elections.

HOWEVER, it is the Kurd issue which is occupying centre-stage in Turkey. Ocalan's capture and subsequent trial left the nation spell-bound. Ocalan's call for reconciliation, made during his trial, seems to have struck a chord. Since early August, Ocalan has been issuing statements about the PKK's readiness to lay down arms if the government offers a general amnesty. In the first week of August, he asked his guerillas to give up the insurgency and withdraw from Turkish territory. In a statement issued in the second week of August, Ocalan said that the PKK was determined to abandon the armed struggle for Kurdish self-rule.

Fifteen million Kurds live in Turkey, accounting for 25 per cent of the population. In the unitary state founded by Kemal Ataturk after First World War, minorities were forcibly assimilated into the mainstream and everybody became a "Turk". Although the Kurds have revolted regularly against the central government, the Kurdish uprising assumed

serious proportions only after the PKK took control in 1982. It was only after the Gulf war that the Government gained the upper hand over the PKK.

Many people expected the PKK to fade away after the arrest of its supreme leader. However, the PKK has not given up the fight for greater cultural and political rights. Almost every day the Turkish media carry reports about clashes in the southeast between the security forces and the guerillas. A counter-insurgency programme launched by the Turkish military in the early 1990s razed some 3,000 villages and displaced about three million villagers. Because of incidents such as these, there is widespread sympathy at the grassroots level for the PKK in the region. Interestingly, public opinion in Turkey seems to be undergoing a change - the demand to carry out Ocalan's death sentence is getting fainter by the day. This can be attributed to Ocalan's performance during his trial. Ocalan came across as a leader intent on finding a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem. His other main priority was saving his own life – he has been more than willing to reveal the names of those who backed him and the countries that provided him aid and refuge.

Many prominent Turks are urging the Government to start talks with the pro-Kurdish party, Hadep, which controls most of the municipalities in the southeast. The United States, which played an important role in the capture of Ocalan, is now urging the Turkish government to give "more freedom of expression to the southeast". A U.S. State Department official, who visited Turkey recently, said that the "United States has long maintained that there can be no military solution to Kurdish issues." But the Turkish Army has so far been dismissive of Ocalan's offer; it still favours a military solution.

In the last week of July, Iran alleged that Turkish planes attacked a border post of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards killing five people and wounding 10. Iran also claimed that Turkish troops crossed into its territory. For its part, Turkey accused Iran of providing sanctuary to PKK guerillas. However, the Iranians have no love lost for the PKK and Kurd separatists. They have been waging a war of their own against various Iranian Kurd factions which want to secede. Iran is deeply suspicious of Turkey after Turkey worked out close relationship with Israel. Iran and many Arab countries are also wary of the military alliance between Washington, Tel Aviv and Ankara. ■

A night of destruction and death in Turkey

A powerful earthquake kills more than 2,000 people, leaves many more injured and renders many homeless.

EDMUND L. ANDREWS

MORE than 2,000 people were killed by an earthquake that struck northwest Turkey on August 17, destroying thousands of buildings. The quake, which struck at 3-02 a.m. and ripped through cities and villages, was by far the strongest on record in the area. Thousands were shaken out of their sleep to find walls collapsing, windows shattering and roofs tumbling down on them. Government officials said that nearly 11,000 people were injured and that they expected the death roll to rise.

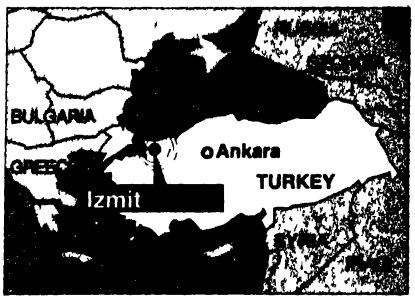
Countless bodies remained trapped under pulverised buildings in the early hours of August 18. The most passionate plea from Turkish Government officials to neighboring countries was for more digging equipment and trained dogs to help locate victims. "There are many people who are alive beneath collapsed buildings," Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said on television.

The epicentre of the quake was near the industrial city of Izmit, where as many as 1,000 people were killed, most of them trapped inside huge apartment buildings that crumbled within seconds. In Golcuk, the site of a naval base on the southern coast of the Izmit Gulf, more than 248 sailors and naval officers were trapped under collapsed buildings. Scores of people were unaccounted for. In Istanbul, hundreds of buildings collapsed into dusty piles of concrete. In a frantic, endless and exhausting race to reach possible survivors, rescue crews dug into piles of debris 20 feet high with bulldozers, tower cranes, front-end loaders and jackhammers.

Despite the extraordinary destruction, most of Istanbul's stunning mosques and minarets survived and appeared to remain in fairly good condition. Even while the vast majority of apartment buildings were dark because of power failure, the mosques remained well-lit and eerily serene against the late summer sky. The treasured landmarks of the city, including the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace and the Hagia Sophia, were spared of any visible damage.

On the night of August 17, Istanbul was transformed into a city of tents and lean-to shelters as hundreds of thousands of people camped out along highways, in parks and in parking lots. More than 250 aftershocks were reported.

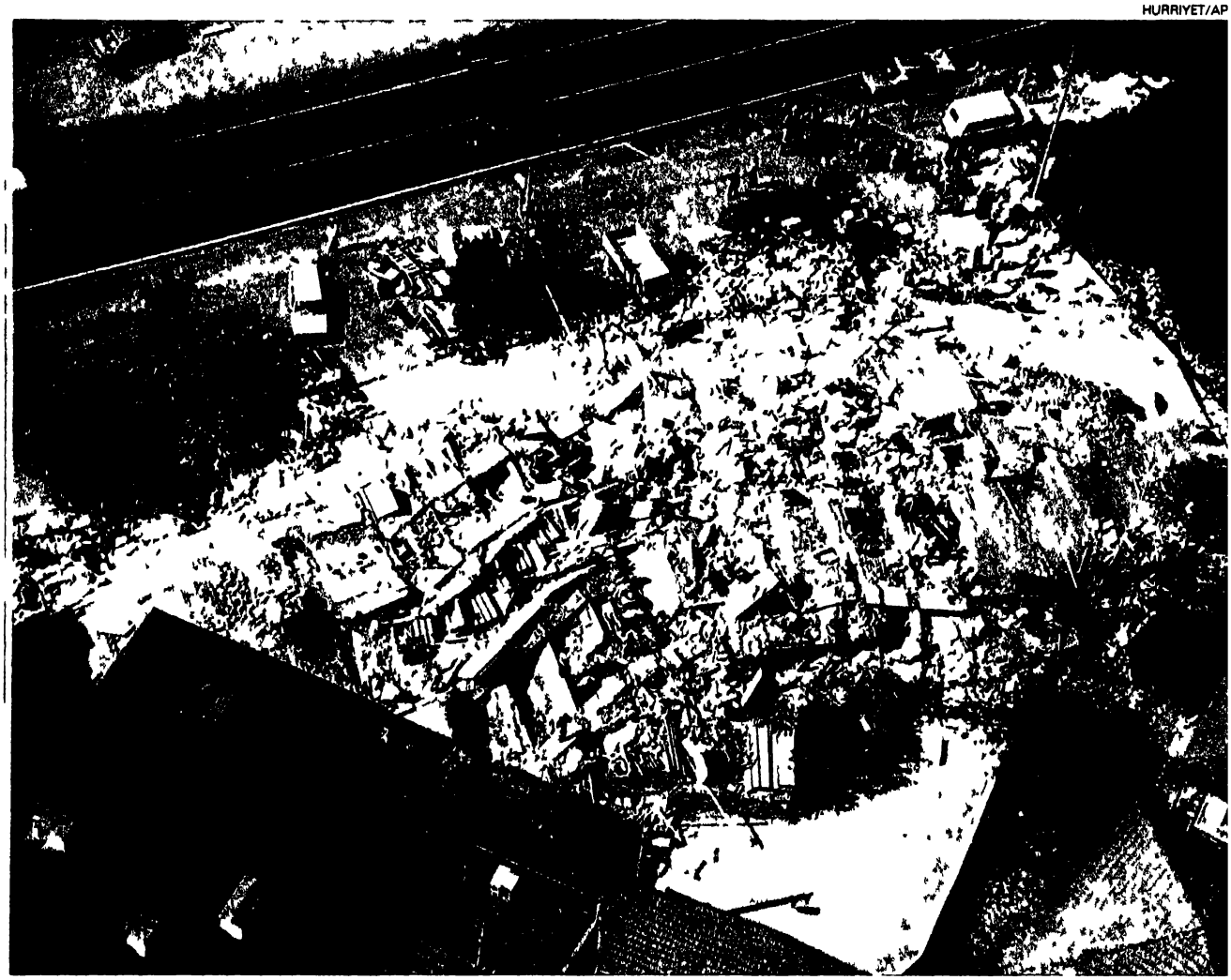
Jusuf Sever, a 54-year-old high-school teacher in Avcilar, watched in shell-shocked dismay as soldiers and about 100 construction workers tried to



dig through the mountain of concrete that had been his apartment building. "I was fast asleep along with my wife and my daughter, when we woke up and found that the whole building was swaying back and forth," he said, pointing to what remained of his bed on the fringe of the rubble. "Suddenly, the ceiling was gone and we were looking at the stars in the sky." Sever's apartment was on the fourth floor of a six-storeyed building. The top two floors were ripped off the building, and that allowed the family to escape without injury before the rest of the building collapsed.

Similar scenes were played out in many places as the earthquake wielded a fearsome power across a wide area, including highly populated areas like Istanbul, with 12 million people, and Izmit, with a population of nearly one million.

HURRIYET/AP



BURHAN OZBILICI/AP



A building that collapsed in Izmit, the epicentre of the earthquake. (Left) A Turkish doctor treats a man who was rescued from his home.

In Izmit, medical workers smashed pharmacy windows to obtain supplies for hospitals swamped with injured people Many reas were without electricity and water. A large oil refinery not far from Izmit exploded and burned uncontrollably for hours, pouring black smoke over the area

In badly hit areas, many buildings with little visible damage stood side-by-side with others that were totally destroyed Questions were being raised about whether slipshod construction contributed to making a bad situation worse Most of the buildings along the main road through Avcilar were still standing, interspersed every few blocks by apartment buildings that were heaps of rubble

One relatively new five-storeyed apartment building with balconies and satellite dishes looked as if it had been pulled out of the ground. Each floor – from the front balconies to the rear-windows – remained parallel to the one above it, but was leaning at a 45-degree angle towards the ground. Ozgur Oztopcu, a chemical engineer, stood watching the diagonally-shifted balconies of his friend's apartment His friend had a wife and two daughters, one of whom was still missing "I don't think she is alive," Oztopcu said

AS news of the earthquake reached other countries, offers of help started pouring in European countries, the U S , Israel and Iran pledged to send medical supplies, equipment, rescue workers and other aid Even Greece, which has squabbled with Turkey for decades, offered condolences and indicated that it would send an airplane to help out

But as dust-caked soldiers and medical workers heaved slabs of rubble under the glare of spotlights throughout the night, thousands of people kept a weary vigil in the hope of finding friends and family members "It is the biggest natural disaster I have ever witnessed," Ecevit told the Turkish people. "May God help our state and our people." ■

New York Times Service

Exploding myths

New history textbooks in Israeli schools are closer to the truth with regard to the Palestinians and the 1948 war.

ETHAN BRONNER

FEW ideas are as deeply ingrained in Israeli culture as the one summed up by the Hebrew phrase, me'atim mul rabim, or "the few against the many". Schoolchildren have long been taught that the Jewish people have always been surrounded by enemies and that their victory over five Arab states in the 1948 War of Independence was a near miracle of David-and-Goliath proportions.

But the start of this school year marks a quiet revolution in the teaching of Israeli history to most Israeli pupils. New, officially approved textbooks make plain that many of the most common Israeli beliefs are as much myth as fact.

The new books say, for example, that it was the Israelis who had the military edge in the War of Independence. They say that many Palestinians left their land not – as has traditionally been taught – because they smugly expected the Arab states to sweep back in victoriously but because they were afraid and, in some cases, expelled by Israeli soldiers.

The books freely use the term "Palestinian" to refer to a people and a nationalist movement, unheard of in the previous texts. They refer to the Arabic name for the 1948 war – the Naqba, or catastrophe – and they ask the pupils to put themselves in the Arabs' shoes and consider how they would have felt about Zionism.

Finally, the books no longer separate Jewish and Israeli history from events around the world but weave them into a single tapestry. "Only 10 years ago much of this was taboo," reflected Eyal Naveh, a history Professor at Tel Aviv University and the author of one of the new ninth-grade textbooks on the 20th century. "We were not mature enough to look at these controversial problems. Now we can deal with this the way Americans deal with the Indians and black enslavement. We are getting rid of certain myths."

The "new history" approach that Naveh and other new textbook authors are using in their descriptions of the Israeli-Arab conflict is 10 or 15 years old. It has gained a growing following among academic scholars and then with a somewhat larger public after the 1993 Oslo peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians.

But while the publication of such revisionism by scholars is one thing, the inclusion of their perspective in school books is clearly something else. In all states, but especially new ones, school is typically viewed as a place not only to learn but to be imbued with civic and patriotic spirit.

The fact that these new books are currently being assigned and bought without advance publicity about the changes says something about Israel's sense of its own maturity. But it seems nonetheless likely that when, in the coming months, the books' contents become known, controversy will ensue.

"Why not just translate the Palestinian books for our children and be done with it?" fumed Aharon Megged, a novelist and outspoken critic of the new history, when he was read a passage from a new textbook. "This is an act of moral suicide that deprives our children of everything that makes people proud of Israel."

The passage to which Megged was reacting was from Naveh's book, on the War of Independence: "On nearly every front and in nearly every battle, the Jewish side had the advantage over the Arabs in terms of planning, organisation, operation of equipment and also in the number of trained fighters who participated in the battle."

The approach of earlier textbooks is typified by the following from a 1984 Education Ministry book on the years 1939 to 1949: "The numerical standoff



A class in progress in a school in the ultra-orthodox Mea Sahrin neighbourhood of Jerusalem. State-approved schools will switch to new history text books from this school year.

between the two sides in the conflict was horrifyingly unbalanced. The Jewish community numbered 650,000. The Arab states together came to 40 million. The chances of success were doubtful and the Jewish community had to draft every possible fighter for the defence of the community."

This shift in perspective is common to the work of the new historians who are relying on newly opened state archives and the emotional distance of a young generation.

Instead of portraying the early Zionists as pure, peace-loving pioneers who fell victim to Arab hatred, the new historians focus on the early leaders' machinations to build an iron-walled Jewish state regardless of the consequences for non-Jews living in the country.

The controversy that this narrative has generated mirrors the wider dispute in Israel between those who favour more concessions to the Arabs and those who fear that such concessions place Israel's legitimacy and its very existence at risk.

But the arrival of the new textbooks also mirrors the growing acceptance of some new history by Israelis. Last year, when the country marked its 50th birthday, a television series known as Tkuma, or rebirth, offered a more complex and less varnished version of Israeli history than had been typically shown. And a new military history book of Israel by a group of mainstream military historians has just been published that explodes several key myths about Israeli military feats.

MICHAEL YARON, who is in charge of the history curriculum at the Ministry of Education, says that the issue is one of historical accuracy; he calls the changes salutary. He took up his post five years ago, during the liberal administration of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and quietly continued his work after Benjamin Netanyahu, a conservative, was elected in 1996, finishing approval of the new books just as Ehud Barak, who is in Rabin's mould, was sworn in in July.

"We are beginning a new era in history teaching where, for the first time in Israeli textbooks, the picture is not black and white," Yaron said. "That was an important goal of mine when I came, to make sure the Palestinian perspective was included. My second goal was to end the practice of separately teaching Jewish and Israel history on the one hand and world histor[illegible]on the other. It was absurd. We used to spend one year teaching the Holocaust and the next teaching the Second World War. Now we will teach Jewish history in the larger context of other events. This doesn't minimise Zionism. It puts it in context."

Yaron's department began integrating Jewish and world history for middle school in its sixth grade textbooks several years ago and is finishing this project with the new ninth grade books that have just been printed. Since ninth grade history class is devoted to the 20th century, when Israel was formed, this is the year when controversy may be expected.

Israel has a number of state-approved school systems and the new books will only be used in the mainstream secular system that serves about 60 per cent of the population. The religious state system and the strictly-observant systems that operate with state approval and funds will not use the new books, meaning that the divisions between the various sectors may now be aggravated further.

There are three new competing ninth-grade history books for the secular system, one from the Ministry's own publishing division and two produced privately with Ministry approval. All three take a much broader, more textured approach to Israeli history than textbooks have done in the past.

New books for the 10th,11th and 12th grades are due in the coming year and all take the new approach of integrating Jewish history with world history. One ninth-grade book is *Passage to the Past* by Kezia Tabibyan, which not only mentions the 1948 massacre carried out by radical Zionist forces in the village of Deir Yassin, something Kezia Tabibyan says had never been done in a ninth-grade text before, but also engages in a kind of historiography by asking students to reflect on the use of myths in nation-building.

"If I want to educate the citizens of Israel after 2000 they must know that there is another point of view about things like our War of Independence," Kezia Tabibyan said. "They must deal with Deir Yassin. They must know that there was another people that had their life here."

The Ministry book, edited by Danny Jacoby, is in some ways the most radical of the three. Its discussion of why the Palestinians became refugees includes the sentence, "There were also localities in which the Jewish fighting forces conducted expulsion actions." The book also frankly discusses how Jews from North Africa and the Arab world felt mistreated by European Jews when they came to Israel.

Clearly, part of what is driving the change in history texts is the ongoing West Asian peace effort. The accords between the Israelis and Palestinians call on each side to fight racism and provocation and instruct their populations in coexistence.

Yet one of the issues that has troubled Israeli commentators most is the fact that the Palestinians are still using old Jordanian and Egyptian texts which never mention Israel and often portray Jews as evil and bloodthirsty.•

An Israeli group called Palestinian Media Watch recently published the findings of its study of Palestinian textbooks. In one textbook on Arab history, the group noted, is the sentence, "The best examples of racism and discrimination in the world are Nazism and Zionism." Another book, for sixth graders, says, "One must be careful around Jews because they are lying traitors." Khalil Mahshi, director of international relations at the Palestinian Education Ministry, said he was troubled by the anti-Semitism that appeared in the books used by Palestinians but noted that new books were being written.

"We are not rewriting our school history books," he said. "We are writing them for the first time. It will take a few more years because we are just forming committees to set up the guidelines." Asked if the new books would include Israeli perspectives on the dispute, Mahshi begged for indulgence, saying that while the Palestinians want to be treated as equals, their historical development has not been equal to that of the Jews.

"We are attempting to be as objective as possible," he said. "We should be living a new reality, taking a more mature view, but to do that means overcoming pain. To see the Zionist movement as having an equal right to our land as we do is to embark on a personal journey to history which is more complicated than most people realise.

"It took me a long time and even then I am not there. Israelis are changing because they can afford it. They are now so rich and powerful that they can afford to be magnanimous and say, 'OK, there are people here we haven't treated well.' But when you are still dealing with daily difficulties and view them as the fault of the people next door, can you afford to be so magnanimous?" ■

New York Times Service

From ore to yellow cake

Uranium Corporation of India's mining and processing facilities in Bihar's Singhbhum district present a range of capabilities in the specialised field.

T S SUBRAMANIAN
SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
in Jaduguda
Pictures Sushanto Patronobish

NATURAL uranium converted into pellets is the vital fuel for eight nuclear reactors in the country, called Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs), two each at Rawatbhatta in Rajasthan Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu Narora in Uttar Pradesh and Kakrapar in Gujarat Heavy water is both the moderator and the coolant in these reactors

The mining and milling (that is, processing) of uranium ore the first steps leading to nuclear power generation are undertaken in India by the public sector Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL), which comes under the administrative control of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) UCIL itself was founded in 1967 with its headquarters at Jadugiida in east Singhbhum district of Bihar where the country s first underground uranium mine was established the same year UCIL manages the mining of uranium ore and its processing into uranium oxide concentrates, or yellow cake Yellow cake is sintered and made into fuel pellets at the Nuclear Fuel Complex, Hyderabad

Uranium is found in nature in the form of minerals There are more than 100 such minerals present in almost all rocks The German scientist Martin Heinrich Klaproth isolated uranium in 1789 in a sample of pitchblende (It was only in 1896 that A H Becquerel discovered that uranium underwent radioactive decay The discovery of nuclear fission by Otto Hahn and F Strassmann in 1939 brought uranium into the limelight)

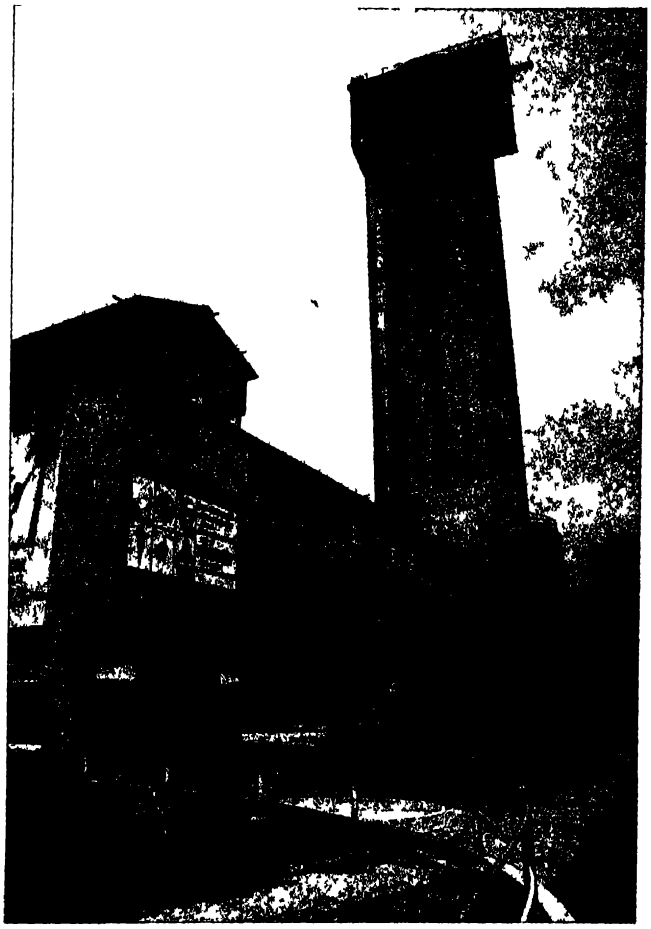
The Atomic Minerals Division of the DAE is responsible for uranium prospecting, UCIL mines and processes the ore Commercially exploitable levels of ore deposits were found at Jaduguda in 1950 and at nearby Bhatin and Narwapahar later in the 160-km-long and 2-km-wide Singhbhum thrust belt

Picturesque Jaduguda is 230 km from Calcutta and 24 km from Jamshedpur It is hemmed in by the Chhotanagpur hills The valley is awash with paddyfields The Subarnarekha flows nearby People belonging to the Santhal, Munda and Ho tribes live in the area

Although the ore is mined at all the three underground mines, all milling is carried out at Jaduguda Here the mine and the mill are next to each other

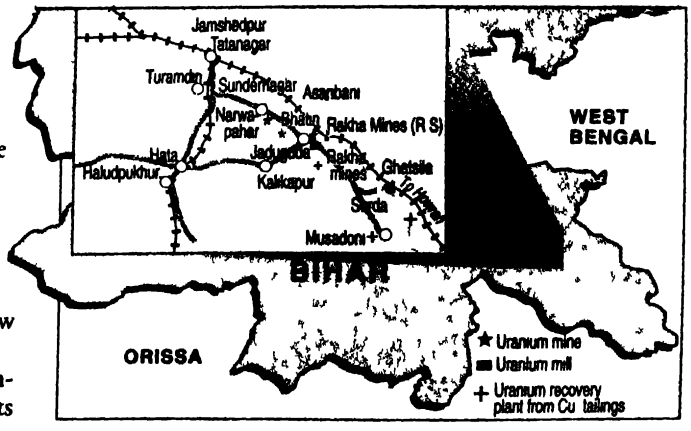
AS you step into the "cage' in the shaft and the switch is thrown, it is dark all around The lift speeds down In a couple of minutes, you step out – 605 metres below the surface of the earth, in an area that is well lit and ventilated Now you are in the heart of the Jaduguda mine

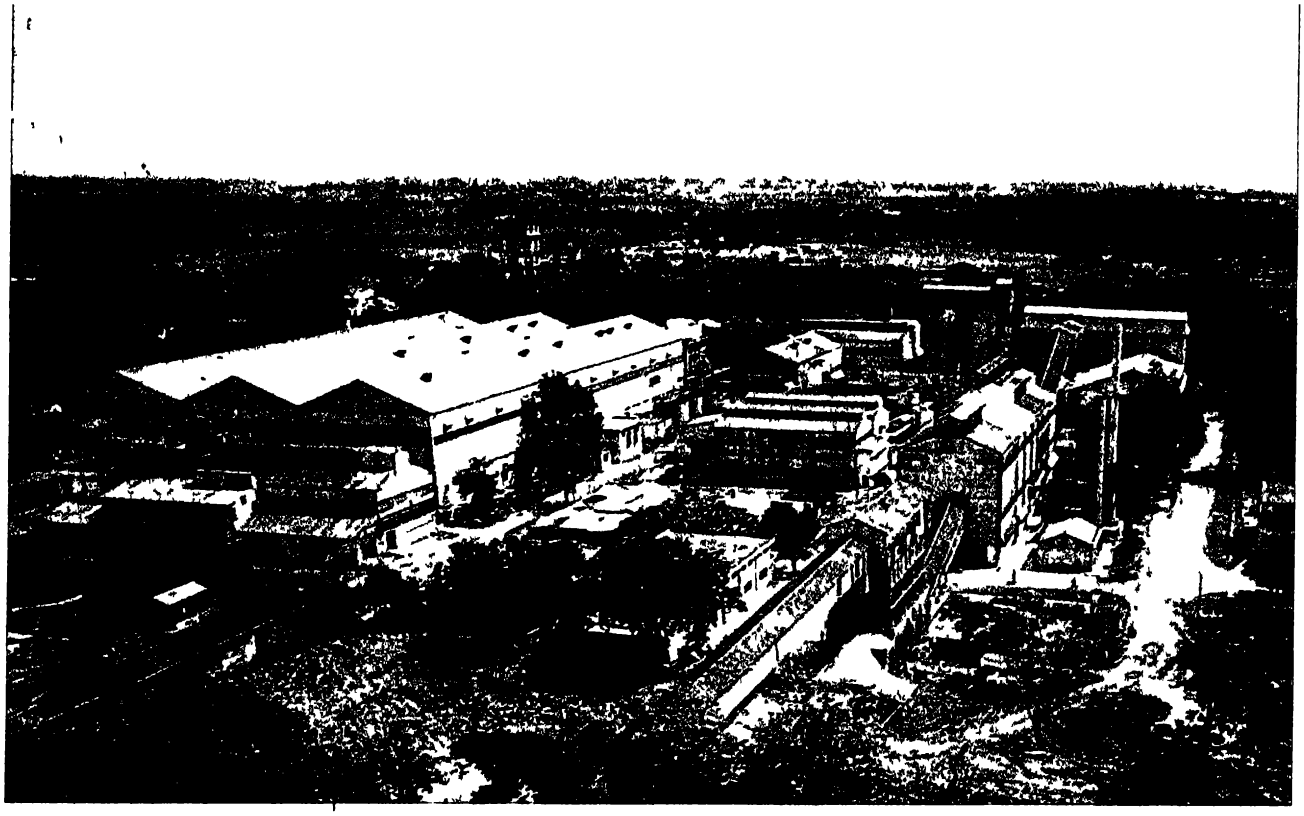
The tunnels go in different directions Occasionally, miners with their machinery appear. A conveyor belt transports



Rising over the underground mine shaft at Jaduguda, a 41-metre concrete tower housing equipment that enables the movement of men and materials through the shaft.

Mines and plants operated by UCIL





An overall view of the uranium processing mill and allied facilities in a verdant setting in the Chhotanagpur area. (Below) Uranium ore from the Jaduguda mine being transported by conveyor belt to the processing mill.



lumps of uranium ore into a measuring bin which, in turn, empties the ore into a skip The skip, a huge bucket, is hoisted and the ore is emptied on the surface

The circular, concrete-lined main mine shaft has a diameter of 5 metres and it is sunk to a depth of 640 m It was sunk in two stages – the first stage went to a depth of 315 m and the second stage from 315 m Later, an auxiliary third shaft to a further depth of 350 m was sunk The three shafts together go to a depth of 990 m

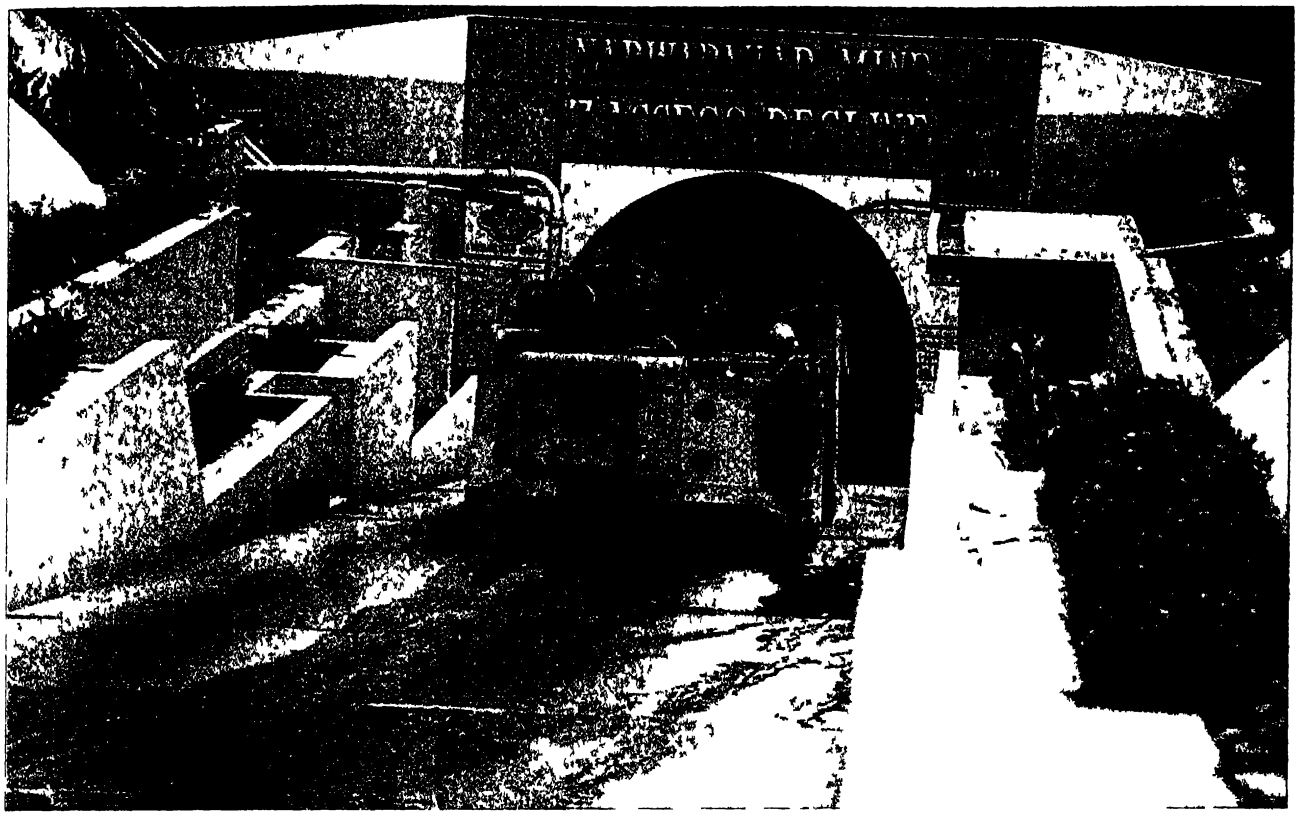
J L Bhasin who until his death on August 2 of a heart attack was the Chairman and Managing Director of UC II , was in charge of the design of the three shafts (Bhasin had briefed a group of visiting journalists on the activities of UCIL, just last month)

On top of the shaft and on the surface is a 41-m concrete tower that houses machinery Two multi-rope friction winders control the skip and the cage The skip can haul 5 tonnes of ore at a time from a loading station situated 605 m below the surface The cage has two decks to transport men and materials

As you go down the shaft, there is an operating level every 65 m, which is connected to the ore drives At every alternate level there is a pumping station

One sub-station with high tension lines of 6,600 volts could be spotted at a depth of 434 m Elsewhere, in a rock-cut "temple", is a control room with automatic panels.

S.C. Bhowmik, Mines Superintendent, explained how the uranium ore bodies are prised out. "Earlier, we used the hand-



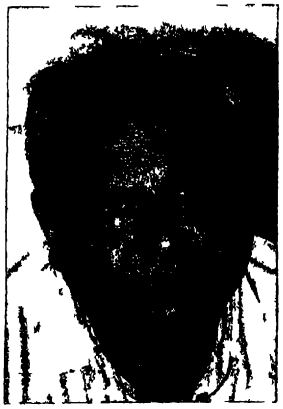
The Narwapahar mine, one of the most modern in the country, is the only underground mine in India where a ramp as well as a shaft is in use to go down the mine. A signalling system controls the traffic of trucks that go down hundreds of metres to transport mining personnel and the ore.

drill jack hammer Now we use electrically operated jumbo drills

The ore extracted from different levels is collected in a central crushing station, 580 m below the ground The crushing is done in the mine itself At a nearby washing station, the rocks are sprayed with water Then a big jaw crusher breaks the ore lumps to a size of about 200 mm The crushed ore is stored in ore pockets below the crushing station at a depth of 605 m Here a conveyor belt loads the crushed ore into a measuring bin which, in turn, loads the ore into the skip The ore is finally hoisted to the surface in the skip This ore is transported to the mill About 750 tonnes of ore a day is extracted at Jaduguda

Bhasin stressed the importance given to the safety of the workers He said "We lay great emphasis on providing adequate ventilation in all the three mines The most effective way of controlling radon and airborne radioactive dust from the mine air is proper ventilation" At Jaduguda, the main shaft is used to supply fresh air There are also two exhaust fans, located on the surface of the eastern and western ends of the mine, which get rid of impure air





J.L. Bhasin, who was Chairman and Managing Director of UCIL. (Right) R.P. Sengupta, General Manager of the Narwapahar mine.

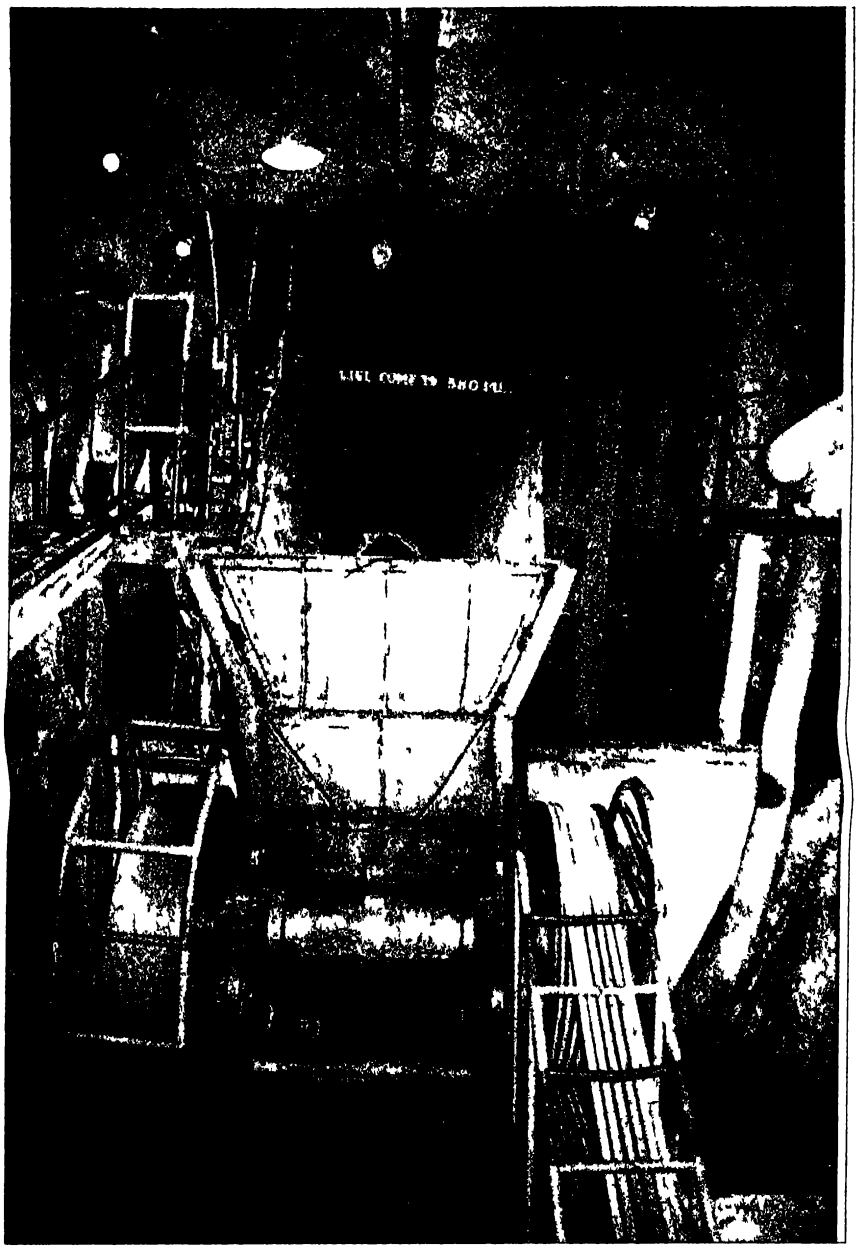
LOCATED 4 km west of Jaduguda is the much smaller Bhatin mine Entry into this mine, which goes to a depth of 135 m, is by means of an adit and two winzes Bhatin's uranium deposit is the western extension of the Jaduguda ore body This mine has been producing ore since 1986 87 and production now is around 150 tonnes a day This ore is transported to the Jaduguda mill

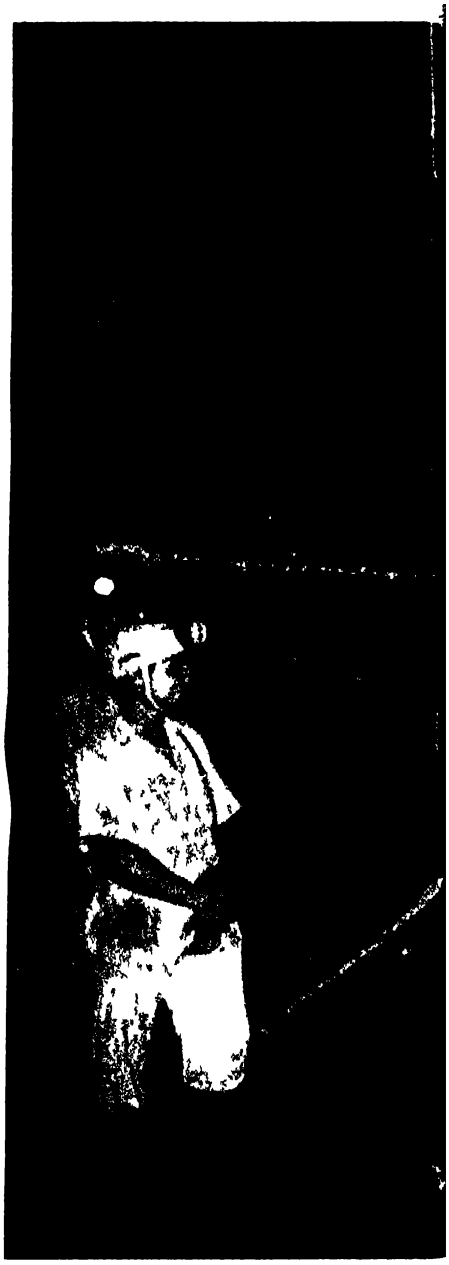
The Narwapahar mine is 12 km away from Jaduguda It is one of the most modern mines in the country Bhasin said state-of the art technology involving trackless mining with decline" and ramps in stopes was utilised here for ore extraction from depths of up to 140 m

The Narwapahar mine is also an underground one, but the preferred entry here is down a ramp rather than through the shaft This is the only underground mine in India where such dual type access is possible At a production point, a jumbo drill bores into the rock that contains uranium ore Trucks transport the ore outside

The Narwapahar mine was set up at a cost of Rs 216 crores The 5-m diameter shaft here is sunk to a depth of 355 m The working level is up to 275 m The mine now produces about 650 tonnes of ore a day, it is planned to increase production to about 1,000 tonnes

According to R P Sengupta, General Manager of the Narwapahar mine, trackless mining equipment such as jumbo





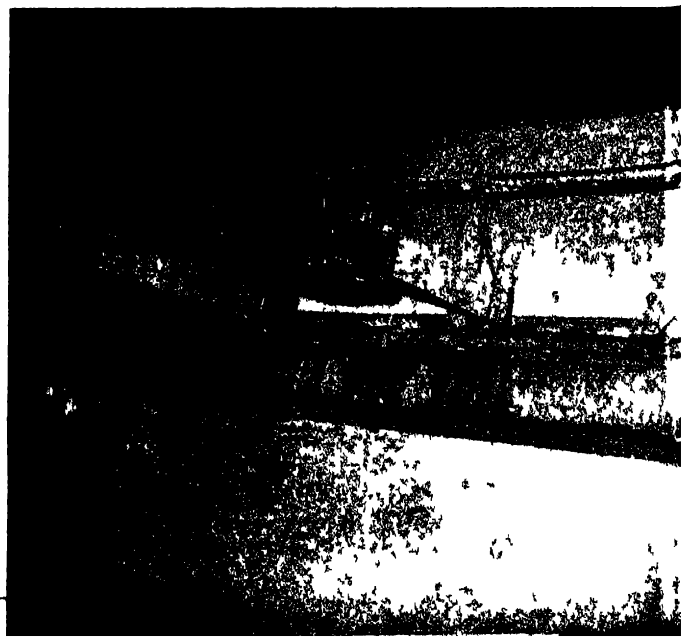
Uranium ore being collected in bins at a depth of 580 metres. (Below right) Yellow cake, or magnesium diuranate, the end product of uranium processing, is sent to the Nuclear Fuel Complex in Hyderabad where it is sintered and made into fuel pellets which power Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors.

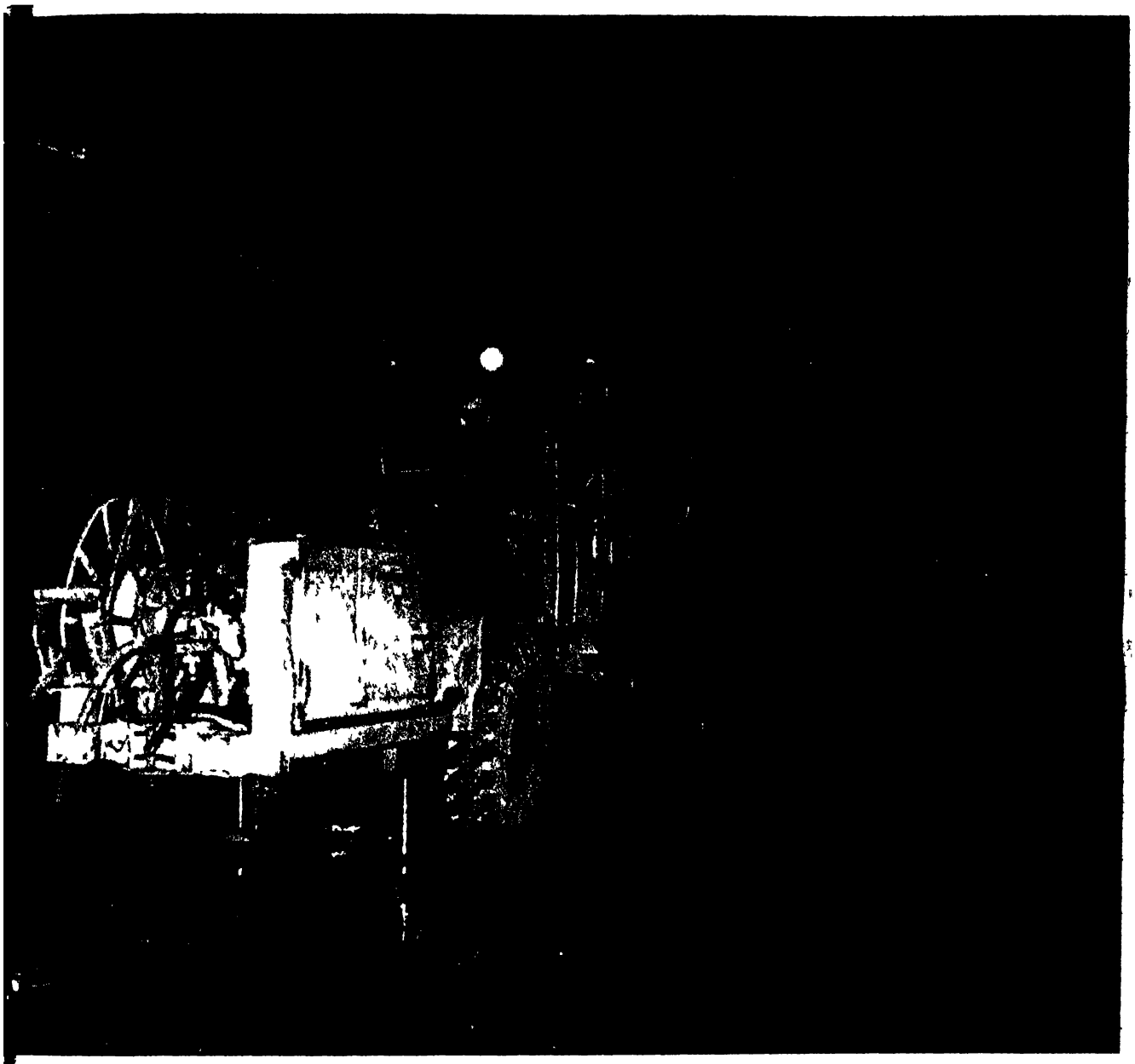
drill, low profile dump trucks and passenger carriers were introduced for the first time in the country here

D Acharya mine manager, said the jumbo drill used drill bits made of tungsten carbide As these drill bits cut into the rock, rock particles flew out

THE mill at Jaduguda is a modern complex with a massive chemical house It can process 1,000 tonnes of ore a day Here there is also a sulphuric acid manufacturing unit and a plant to recover byproducts

According to K K Beri, Director (Technical), UCIL, the processing is done in three stages crushing, grinding and leaching. The ore is crushed and ground and uranium leached into





A jumbo drill cuts the earth deep down the Narwapahar mine.



solution by sulphuric acid The solution is filtered, concentrated and purified, and uranium is precipitated in the form of magnesium diuranate, or yellow cake Crushing is done in stages in rollers with 4-inch-diameter iron rods and steel balls The rods and the steel balls impact on the ore, smashing it The smashed ore is sieved into 4-inch, 2.5-inch, and one-inch particles. The 4-inch and 2 5-inch particles are again crushed, to produce one-inch particles, which are mixed with water (to prevent dust formation) and ground.

The grinding produces a slurry which is 40 per cent solid; it is thickened into 60 per cent solid state This is filtered to 80 per cent solid state This ore pulp is dissolved in sulphuric acid in a process that lasts about 12 hours at a temperature of 40°to 50° C Thus, the uranium gets oxidised and dissolved The left-out solids are gangue minerals – waste products The uranium-bearing solution is filtered and purified by the ion exchange process of clarification Subsequently, the uranium is separated as magnesium diuranate after a reaction with magnesia slurry

A R Ray, General Manager (Electrical), UCIL, said that at a certain percentage of the hydrogen value, the uranium gets precipitated The yellow cake thus formed is sent to the NFC to be sintered into uranium bundles Once uranium is extracted, magnetite is recovered Magnetite has applications in the coal industry.

All the processes after leaching take place in the chemical house Double filtration is also done in the chemical house and its main purpose is to take out the uranium solution ■

Villages and woes

Tribal people living near the uranium mining and processing facilities say they are the victims of radiation. But UCIL attributes their afflictions to other factors.

SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

URANIUM Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) is today at the centre of a controversy which relates to allegations that tribal people living near the three tailings ponds outside Jaduguda have become victims of radiation. Tailings are radioactive waste that is left behind during uranium processing. Villages such as Dungridih, Chatitocha, Tilaitand, Mechua and Matigora, are situated between 250 metres to 3.5 km from the UCIL facilities.

Ghanshyam Biruli, president of Jharkhand Organisation Against Radiation (JOAR), which leads a struggle on behalf of the tribal people, says that a survey conducted by the organisation in 1997 revealed that a large number of residents of the villages suffer from cancer, skin diseases, physical deformities, blindness, brain damage, disruption of menstrual cycle or loss of fertility. Children are the most affected, according to him. Biruli belongs to Tilaitand village.

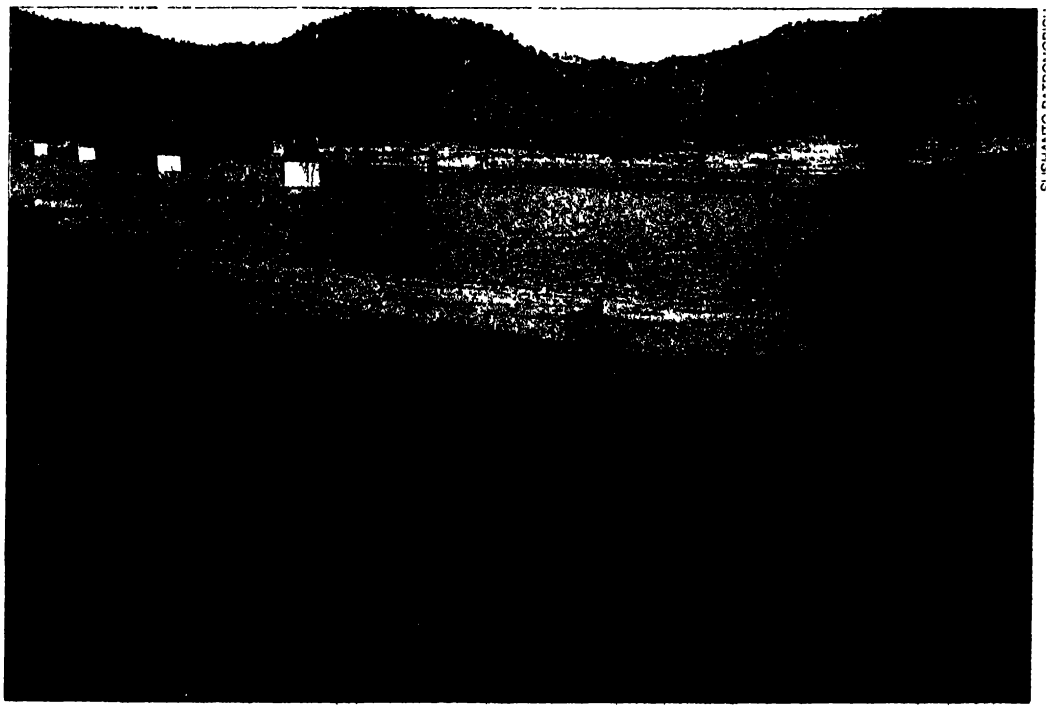
Top officials of UCIL and scientists of the Environmental Survey Laboratory (ESL), Jaduguda, which is under the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), refute the allegations and cite a BARC committee report in support of their stand. The report, which was submitted in December 1998, says: "The team was convinced and unanimously agreed that the diseases pattern cannot be ascribed to radiation exposure in these areas."

Since uranium forms only 0.5 per cent of the ore, almost the entire bulk of the material handled is rejected as waste. The waste, however, contains all the radionuclides other than uranium that occur in the ore. It also carries additive chemicals such as manganese, sulphates and chlorides. As Radon-222, a kind of radiation, is emitted from the tailings, the waste has to be disposed of carefully. The tailings are neutralised with lime and carried from Jaduguda through pipelines to the tailings ponds. Clean water from the ponds comes out of decantation wells and is taken through a closed channel to an effluent treatment plant for the removal of radium and manganese. The solid tailings are retained in the ponds.

The ponds, situated about 2 km from Jaduguda, are engineered structures with massive bunds made of rocks and earth. These bunds/embankments are 125 metres wide at the base and 25 metres high.

When the controversy erupted in 1991, it was of a different nature. It began as an agitation against UCIL displacing local people in order to construct the third tailings pond. The tribal people who were threatened with displacement formed the Jharkand Adivasi Bistapit Nirojgar Sangh under Biruli's leadership. He told *Frontline*: "When UCIL started mining in Jaduguda our families gave away their lands. They have not received compensation for them. Our demands are that those who lost their land in recent times in the process of expansion of the company's activities should be employed in UCIL, given compensation based on the price of land, and provided with alternative land to set up their homesteads."

After several meetings with the organisation's leaders, UCIL agreed to allot 12 decimal of land at Do Vani village to 30 displaced villagers and pay a compensation of Rs.65,000 to each family to build a house. J.L. Bhasin, UCIL's Chairman and Managing Director, said: "We were willing to give compensation and employment to the displaced villagers but Biruli tried

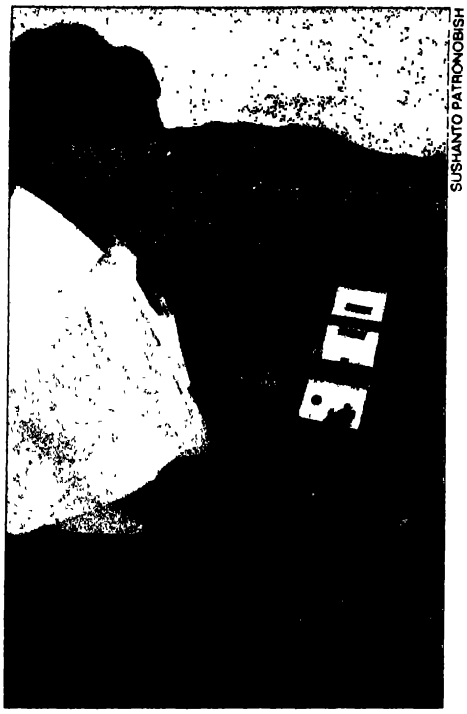


A wide embankment under construction for the third tailings pond.

to coerce us into employing people of his choice. We were not ready to accept that."

However, UCIL's problems on this count were far from over. The Jharkhand Adivasi Bistapit Nirojgar Sangh transformed itself into the Jharkhand Organisation Against Radiation as its members felt that radiation from the ponds affected the inhabitants of the area.

In a report in CSE-*Down to Earth* Feature Service, entitled "A deformed existence" and dated June 4, 1999, Manish Tiwari quoted Biruli as saying, "Many women in the area complain of disrupted menstrual cycles. This area also has a high rate of either miscarriages or still-born babies... Biruli claims that nearly 30,000 people living in 15 villages in the five-km radius of the tailings ponds are exposed to radiation. 'Earlier, children were still-born. Now they die within few days of their birth,' he says. He also claims that nearly one-third of the women living in these areas are suffering from loss of fertility. Even animals such as cows and buffaloes are suffering from rare diseases."



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

A.H. Khan, scientific officer of the Jaduguda mine, measuring the radiation readings with the help of a dosimeter.

The JOAR found a friend in Medha Patkar, the anti-Narmada Valley Project activist, who visited the villages. According to Biruli, "her visit was a source of strength and support to the people."

Pano Majhi, a JOAR activist, told *Frontline* that "none of the doctors in the area could say for sure that radiation is the cause of the ailments, yet cases of tuberculosis, cancer and child mortality are high here." His father, an ex-UCIL employee, died of cancer at the age of 42. Dopan Majhi (65), pradhan of Tilaitand, said: "When UCIL started its operations, a lot of my contemporaries were employed there. They are all dead now."

According to Jyotsna Tirkey, a member of the Adivasi Mahila Manch, which works in close association with JOAR, it has been found that since 1990, more and more women are becoming barren in the villages situated near Jaduguda. Many of those who conceived gave birth to still-born or deformed babies. She said: "This has shattered the sociological pattern in the villages. More and more marriages are breaking up and the practice of bigamy is growing."



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

Ghanshyam Biruli, president of the Jharkand Organisation Against Radiation.

THE Bihar Government set up a committee of the Legislative Council (Rajya Vidhan Parishad Paryavaran Samiti) under the chairmanship of Gautam Sagar Rana to investigate the matter. The committee, in its report submitted in December 1998, said: "The waste material, which contains traces of radioactive materials, should be taken to the effluent treatment plants by pipes. It was noticed by the team that water from the dumping ground is returned by open drains. This may allow some of the radioactive materials to be absorbed by the soil, which may result in long-term radiation problems." The report said that there were traces of radiation, up to 0.2 millirem (mr) an hour, in the "flowing water exposed to the public".

The committee expressed concern about the safety aspect with regard to the tailings ponds. It said: "The people and cattle have free and unchecked access to the area around the mines. The dumping ponds are unfenced and there are no proper warning signs to restrict entry."

Bhasin said that the committee members "bulldozed the people" and did not have a medical practitioner on the panel. Biruli would just collect five people and declare that they suffered from the effects of radiation, he alleged. He added that Biruli did not associate himself with any committee. Bhasin said that the Legislative Council Committee report contained contradictions. The report noted that "none of them (affected tribal people) mentioned any problem relating to radiation hazard..." and that "the radiation was well within tolerance limits."

Bhasin said: "The report is ambiguous. It is in no way conclusive." On the one hand it says that the symptoms could be attributed to radiation while on the other hand it says that there is no proof that the local people had really been affected by radiation, he added.

The BARC committee came to Jaduguda in November 1998 at the request of the State Government. Its report, entitled "Medical Survey of Inhabitants Residing Within Two-Km Radius of the UCIL's Tailings Storage Pond", says: "In order to make a factual assessment regarding health impacts, if any, on account of radiation emission from the UCIL's tailings storage pond, a detailed medical survey was carried out by a team of doctors and scientists from BARC." The 11-member team consisted of Dr. S.S. Ali, medical officer-in-charge. Trombay Dispensary, and overall-in-charge, zonal dispensaries; Dr. L. Kasturi, head of the paediatric unit, BARC Hospital; Dr. M. Seshadri, Bio-Medical Group, and Dr. D.K. Ghosh. Besides, there were two doctors each from the Bihar Government and UCIL, two doctors, including a nuclear medicine specialist from the Tata Main Hospital, Jamshedpur, and a scientist from the ESL.

The BARC report says that the short-listed (doubtful) cases were examined in the hospital and the others at the villages. As most of the cases were of children, Dr. Kasturi "examined them in detail, reviewed the investigations, discussed with other team members... and concluded the opinion." Seshadri and Ghosh reviewed the monitoring levels provided by the ESL and personally verified them by doing the re-monitoring themselves.

The committee concluded: "The consensus of all the doctors was that the cases examined had congenital anomalies, diseases due to genetic abnormalities like thalassaemia major and retinitis pigmentosa, moderate to gross

splenomegaly due to chronic malarial infection (as this is hyperendemic area), malnutrition, post encephalitis, post head injury sequelae and certain habits (alcohol) and have no relation to radiation." Its report adds: "The team was convinced and unanimously agreed that the diseases' pattern cannot be ascribed to radiation exposure in any of these cases."

In addition to a process of case-by-case medical examination, two BARC committee members and a Bihar Government doctor measured the radiation level from the tailings ponds and the nearby areas on November 30, 1998. They were assisted by three scientific/technical members of the ESL. The instrument used was a dosimeter. The measurements were conducted one metre from the ground. These readings were compared with the readings taken between 1993 and 1997. The conclusion was that "the operations undertaken by the UCIL in the Jaduguda environment have not resulted in any increase in the natural background radiation levels prescribed by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)."

Bhasin said that malnutrition is the main cause of the high incidence of tuberculosis and child mortality and the low level of health among the tribal people. The men are generally healthy until the age of 27. He said that after that they took to drinking. This coupled with their poor economic background resulted in the deterioration of their health, he said.



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY



ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

Gandhar Karmakar of Mechua village and (below) Mithun Patra of Bhatin village, both seven years old, carried by their fathers. A BARC report survey found that crippling diseases among people in the villages near the tailings pond could not be ascribed to radiation.

TOP UCIL officials accompanied a team of journalists to the tailings ponds. The ponds are surrounded on three sides by verdant hills. In the valley there are paddy fields and the villages.

The ponds cover an area of 82.28 acres (32.9 hectares), 35 acres (14 hectares) and 76 acres (30.4 hectares) respectively. The first two have solid embankments as prescribed by the AERB. The bund for the third is under construction at a cost of Rs.2 crores.

At the first pond, saturated with tailings, A.H. Khan, scientific officer and officer-in-charge, ESL, measured the radiation readings with the help of the dosimeter. Inside the pond the device registered a radiation count of 0.75 microGray an hour, which is three times the permissible limit of 0.25 microGray an hour. However, the level started dropping as the meter was moved away from the pond. It read 0.2 microGray an hour on the embankment, 0.17 outside the bund, then 0.15 and 0.11 outside – all below the permissible limit. In the third pond, the reading on the bund was 0.14 microGray. Khan said: "If the radiation count just outside the tailings pond falls below the permissible limit, then it is obvious that in the nearby villages it is much lower." (These limits are set by the International Commission on Radiological Protection). He said that radiation from the ponds did not go beyond a few metres.

According to Khan, the local background radiation in the area is 0.15 microGray an hour. For the common man, the threshold limit is 0.25 microGray an hour. The annual limit is 1,000 microGray. One would receive this limit (of 1,000 microGray) only if one were to stand in the pond for four hours every day, 365 days of a year.

Khan, who has been on the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) technical/advisory committees, said: "In the last 33 years, there has been no significant impact on radiation because of the UCIL's operations." He said that while the limit was 20 millisieverts for a mine worker, the average radiation doses received by him in the last five years at Jaduguda, Bhatin and Narwapahar were eight, five and seven millisieverts respectively.

K.K. Beri, Director (Technical), UCIL, said: "We give all the information to the IAEA." He said that environmental gamma radiation measurements were done in 22 places up to a distance of 25 km (at Jamshedpur) and they indicated that UCIL's operations had virtually no impact on the environment. The places included the Jaduguda, Bhatin and Narwapahar mines, Dungridih north and south, Chatitocha, Tilaitand, Matigora and Jamshedpur. The natural background exposure level in this region varied from 782 to 1,586 microGray a year with an average of 1,106 microGray a year. In fact, the allowable gamma radiation level for exposure to the public from the nuclear industry was 1,000 microGray a year above the natural regional background level, Beri said.

Bhasin said that each UCIL worker was sent for medical examination every five years. They undergo breath examination regularly. While the worker kept the medical examination record, UCIL kept the radiation records. "Not a single worker has asked for the records, nor have I denied him these when asked," the CMD said. Between 1967 and 1994, 22 employees had been stricken with cancer, he said.

Bhasin said that UCIL wanted 15 families living near the first and third ponds to vacate. "That is not because there is a hazard of radiation but we want some elbow room." UCIL offered these families alternative sites in three places, levelled the land and offered to instalhandpumps.

The district administration is unable to shift them. Bhasin asked: "Why do they not shift?" Thus the stalemate continues. ■

INSIGHT

M.T. VASUDEVAN NAIR

A Malayalam story by the Jnanpith Award winner, translated by V. ABDULLA.

IT was wrong to have assumed that the news would not have reached here.

It was a habit with her to come on solitary visits to her home in the village once in a way. As such, no one wondered why she had come.

She had a bath, breakfasted and came and sat on the verandah. Her Amma (mother) came near her and started off without any preliminaries: "Sudha Kutty, is what we hear true?"

"What did you hear?" She looked straight at her mother, deliberating on how to build a wall of words around herself.

Amma closed her eyes and said in a low voice: "That you and Prabhakaran are separating..." Amma had this habit of closing her eyes when she had something embarrassing to say. Sudha decided to take an aggressive stance instead of giving a direct reply. "Who sends such telegraphic news over to you."

Amma sat down a little distance away and stretched her legs on the stone steps. "Sreedevi had come to Narayanan Kutty's place two days ago. Her Devoo's husband is in Madras, isn't he?"

Her younger sister's mother-in-law had the habit of broadcasting gossip to relatives.

"It was in Vishalam's letter also."

Once she got the news from her elder sister, Chandrie, the younger one, would also write and tell her mother.

Sudha stepped out into the open front yard. Although it was only ten o'clock in the morning, it was unpleasantly warm. She walked close to the shade of the wall. As she walked a little fast, her rubber slippers made a noise by tapping on her heels.

She came to this old house, where her mother stayed by herself for solace and quiet. There was no telephone to disturb her. She did not have to dress up and entertain guests. She did not have to keep awake until midnight with an artificial smile on her face, pretending to enjoy the jokes of Prabhakaran's executive colleagues. But then, to come down here, she would get permission only once in a while. That too, only for three or four days.

The first question Amma always asked was: "When do you have to go back?" She did not ask it this time. When she walked back and reached the verandah, Amma said: "People are saying all sorts of things. What did really happen?"

She did not reply.

"As far as I could make out..."

"It is true, Amma. It's better for us to separate."

Amma sat down, staring at the steps.

When the girl help in the kitchen came and asked for something, Amma got up and went inside.

Sudha had come on 15 days' leave from the Bank. Some people at the Bank had an inkling about what was happening. She spoke frankly only to the Cashier, Nirmala Srinivasan. It was Nirmala who fixed up a room for her at the YWCA.

Amma liked to live by herself. She never encouraged visits from relatives or friends. She had no complaints when the children did not visit her. Once a month she would write inland letters to her three childen, whether or not they replied. She would always have the help of some girl from the neighbouring house. On the last occasion Sudha came, Amma told her about the impending wedding of the girl who had been helping her until then. Amma presented the girl with a gold chain weighing one sovereign.

"All the three of you must try and help her out. You can send money orders in Kuttiraman's name. Or else you can send them in my name."

Vishaledathi and Chandrie were to give three hundred rupees each. Sudha was asked to give four hundred rupees. Two of them worked, and they had no children. In the case of Sudha, she had to pay a hundred rupees more.

When that girl went away on getting married, her younger sister came to help in the kitchen.

Vishaledathi was concerned that Amma lived alone. In Thiruvananthapuram she had a large house with a retinue of servants. And it was an occasion when all of them had gathered there. "There is not even a doctor nearby to see Amma when she falls ill," Vishaledathi complained.

"I will not fall ill," was Amma's reply.

A black fowl with her chicks came through a gap in the wall near the banana grove and hesitantly looked around the yard to peck for food.

"It is a wild fowl. It always comes at this time. God knows where it's from," Sudha heard Amma saying.

She looked at them with amused interest. The mother hen was frightened at seeing people around.

Hiding herself under the shadows, Sudha hesitantly moved forward to take a closer look. The mother hen clucked in fright and ran away, followed by the chicks.

Amma said nothing while they ate lunch.

IN the evening Sreedharettan, brother of her younger sister's husband, came. He was the headmaster of the local High School and one of the leaders of the community.

Sudha enquired about his family and bemoaned the absence of any breeze in that warm weather. She readied herself for a cross-examination by him on the basis of local gossip.

"How many days' leave do you have, Sudha Kutty?"

"One week."

Amma intervened: "I don't have milk to serve you tea."

Sreedharan said he did not want tea.

Sudha was at a loss when small talk gave out. But Sreedharan began talking of the oppressive heat in Madras, about the wealth reportedly amassed by Jayalalitha, about Karunanidhi's rule and so on while Sudha sat listening with nothing to add on her own. As the conversation petered out into nothing, he got up to leave.

She had heard that this man's name had also come up when marriage proposals for her were under discussion.

A SWARM of dragon flies started buzzing around as sunset approached. She had heard in her childhood that when dragon flies hovered low, it was the sign of approaching rain. She

wished it would rain. The heat of the Meenam summer here was no less than the Vaikashi summer in Madras. Because of a family dispute over who should spend the money for house repairs, there were no fans in the house.

"Sleep in the south room. There will be some breeze there," Amma said as she served dinner.

"I don't mind sleeping anywhere."

In Mother's room there was a rusty old table fan, which Father had bought years ago.

Sudha had not brought anything to read. Nor had she picked up anything on the way. Father's old books lay in a heap on the round table in Amma's room as she was in the habit of reading something for a while at night. But there were no new books there. Sudha took a look at the book Amma had kept on top of "World History". It was "Hima Giri Vihara" (Discourses from the Snowcapped Mountains).

A bed had been made in the south room. Sudha changed into a nightie. She looked at the time: Eight forty-five. In the city it would be time for Prabhakaran to have his two beers before getting home.

Amma walked in. She said: "If you want, bring that table fan here. It is noisy but it still works."

"No, there's no need."

To make Mother go away soon, she sat on the bed as if she was about to lie down.

"Even then –" Amma wanted to talk.

"You can speak out."

"If you want to separate after having lived together for five years...."

She kept silent

"What will people think when they hear of it?"

Sudha turned a little so that she could avoid seeing Mother's face.

With the relief of having got a topic, she suddenly asked: "How does one phone from here if there is a need?"

"Now there's a booth adjacent to the pharmacy. You can call anywhere you want."

Again words dried up.

"What have you decided to do?"

"I'm thinking it over."

"Should I come?" Amma said. "Should I speak to Prabhakaran?"

Sudha said hastily: "No, no."

Amma looked at her plaintively.

Suppressing her anger, Sudha said: "There's no need to bring about a compromise, Mother."

Amma went out.

Sudha knew Amma would never talk about this again. Silent acquiescence was second nature with her. Father had died after a paralytic stroke had confined him to bed for a year and a half. Amma never uttered to anyone a word of her suffering or the cruel blow of fate that she had been subjected to. Even when people murmured about the entire savings of the man having been grabbed by a step-sister, she was not known to have uttered a word of protest.

Next morning Amma told Sudha: "Your Valiamma from Cholayil sent word she would like to see you."

She hesitated a while.

"The old lady heard it from Janu, who gets milk for us from the neighbouring house."

"Hm... I'll visit her."

"Last time also you said you'd go but didn't."

"All right."

"She's eighty-four now. One doesn't know how long she'll last. She can't see a thing. Her eyes are gone. Otherwise she's quite fit."

Valiamma at Cholayil was Sudha's grandmother's elder sister. All the children called her Valiamma because Amma called her so. Valiamma used to come home to visit her younger sister. She was fond of doing Vishaledathi's hair in different ways. She would make the three children sit before her at sundown and teach *sandya vandanam*, to recite evening prayers correctly.

Grandmother would give the bed to Valiamma and sleep on the floor. Valiamma liked to tell stories to the children. She would get hold of Sudha Kutty for the purpose. Vishaledathi would dodge her and Chandrie's eyes would be heavy with sleep.

There was the fascinating story of how Palat Koman, the warrior in Vadakkan Pattu, was kept concealed behind the long, flowing tresses of Unniyamma while she bathed in a pond.

Silent acquiescence was second nature with her... Amma never uttered to anyone a word of her suffering or the cruel blow of fate that she had been subjected to. Even when people murmured about the entire savings of the man having been grabbed by a step-sister, she was not known to have uttered a word of protest.

Then there was the story of Kovalan and Kannagi. Later, when she first visited Madurai, she recalled the story Valiamma had narrated: In sheer anger, Kannagi plucked her breast and threw it into the city, which was soon engulfed in flames. Valiamma would describe it as if she was an eye-witness to the holocaust.

Back home, Sudha had decided to buy some gift for Valiamma. When she was about to go shopping, she picked a minor quarrel with Prabhakaran and lay down in her bed as a protest, refusing to go out. She got up only when it was time to leave for the railway station.

Sudha last saw Valiamma the day before her wedding. More than five years had gone by. Even when Grandmother was alive, she somehow liked Valiamma more. Yes, she came home seven times after the wedding. On two occasions Prabhakaran was also with her. Every time Valiamma would enquire after her. Her house was hardly three furlongs away. And yet she could not visit her, for one reason or the other.

The wild fowl and its chicks came to the yard that day also. They appeared to be less frightened than the previous day. She went a little closer. They were mother-hen and chicks all right. She watched as sunlight hit their smooth feathers and dispersed as blobs of light.

"You have some guests coming,' came a loud voice, hearing which the fowl and the chicks scurried away into hiding.

When she looked, it was Sreedevi Amma and her younger sister.

Amma observed the traditional courtesies and asked them to take their seats. She asked Janu to make tea.

Amma looked at Sudha a little uncomfortably and disappeared inside. Her glance was significant. "Hear your bellyful" was what it meant.

"Sudha, sit down. You mustn't take offence if I am a little outspoken."

She did not sit down. She failed in her attempt to laugh.

"You may speak."

"Why beat about the bush? I have to speak out. If what I've heard is correct, things are bad indeed."

Sudha somehow pretended to laugh. She said nonchalantly: "It's bad but there's no way out."

Sreedevi Amma's face darkened as she looked at her younger sister who took the hint and said: "There's something in what Narayanan Kutty has written. It brings shame to the family."

Sudha stood there, a silent listener.

"To live together for five years and then put an end..."

Sreedevi Amma looked at her sister as if asking her to proceed. "Faults and failures there would be, but one has to accept them. Married life involves that. How much your Mother suffered!"

Sudha attempted to laugh. First she had wanted to say "Sreedevi Amma, the fault is not Prabhakaran's but mine," but then decided to say nothing.

They went on talking. From childhood she had developed a surprising ability to shut her ears to unwanted talk and commotion. She had learnt to be deaf to questions regarding names, characters in novels, the topography of places seen during childhood, the faces of some of her classmates in the elementary school and so on.

As they got up to leave, Sreedevi Amma said: "Do you think I have talked at length to no purpose?"

Sudha laughed and replied, "No, not at all."

"Don't you think there's something in what I said?"

"Yes."

She sighed in relief. "What have you decided?"

Sudha said laughing: "Let me think it over."

With a wide grin denoting satisfaction at her mission having succeeded, Sreedevi Amma left, followed by her sister.

Amma asked: "When are you going to Cholayil to see Valiamma?"

"I shall go."

Valiamma would also be getting ready to pour forth advice.

At noon Sumathi, with whom she had been at the High School, came along with her three-year-old daughter. She used to wait for her every morning near Asari Valappu. The tiny wart below her nose seemed to have grown. She got married before she completed her tenth standard.

She would not sit down although Sudha pressed her to do so.

"Well, Sumathi, how are you?"

"Oh, getting along."

She wore a shining sari, coloured blue, violet and red. It must have been brought by her husband who was working in the Gulf. He would come home on a two-month leave every alternate year. Heady fragrance enveloped Sumathi. Her neck and arms were loaded with gold ornaments.

"Will you be here for some time?"

From childhood she had developed a surprising ability to shut her ears to unwanted talk and commotion. She had learnt to be deaf to questions regarding names, characters in novels, the topography of places seen during childhood, the faces of some of her classmates...

"Yes, for a few days."

Sumathi had built a house, and the house-warming was the following Monday.

"Sudha Kutty, you must come."

"Yes, I shall, if I am here."

She ran her fingers through the hair of the child who was tracing the flowers printed on her mother's sari. Sudha asked: "What's her name? I've forgotten."

"Karthika."

She tried to hold Karthika by the hand but the child resisted and stayed with her mother.

Sumathi moved a little closer to her and asked confidentially: "I heard there's some family quarrel."

"Oh, you've also heard of it?"

"I heard it from the wife of Shankerattan who came for the mosaic work. I couldn't believe it."

Sudha just nodded.

"Is it true, Sudha Kutty?"

She laughed. "Yes, in a way."

Sumathi's eyes widened in anxiety as she bent down, almost touching Sudha's forehead and whispered: "Don't think I'm giving advice to people who are more educated and know the world better. It's far better to get reconciled and decide to live together."

Sudha held her by the hand.

"Let me think it over."

"It was a mistake to have decided not to have children. Whether it's a boy or girl, such evil thoughts would not have crept in."

Sudha looked at Sumathi with some surprise. She had got a colloquial word of which she made a mental note: "evil thoughts".

Sumathi left.

In the evening, when Janu brought the milk, she said that Cholayil Valiamma had again enquired after her.

"You had better go," Amma said.

"Yes, I'll go tomorrow."

"There's no need to give any money. All the same, give her something. When Visalam went she gave her fifty rupees, the old lady kept telling all and sundry about it for days on end."

Amma was laughing as she said this. For the first time during this visit Sudha saw the gloom on her face disappearing.

Sudha wondered whether she should say that she would not compete with Visaledathi.

She decided she would leave on Monday. She did not want to wait for her two weeks' leave to be over. She had heard more than enough during her three days' stay.

Should she call Hyderabad? She had noted the mobile number in the notebook in her handbag. And she knew his direct office number.

There was no one to be sent to reserve her ticket. She could get into the ladies' compartment. After all, it was only a night's journey.

She had been told to ring up even when she went home.

But he had added, "If possible."

The next day, after breakfast, she said: "I shall go and see Valiamma."

"Take Janu with you."

"There's no need."

FIRST she went to the new house that had come up at Asari Parambu. Filled with excitement and happiness, Sumathi did not know how to welcome her. The windows were being put in under the supervision of Narayanan, the carpenter.

Sudha went round the inside of the house.

"Both bedrooms have attached bathrooms," Sumathi said with obvious pride.

Sudha had difficulty in refusing the invitation to have something to drink.

"There was a letter saying he's coming in July."

"Ask him to take you to Dubai. You should also see the place."

"That's seems out of the question. It is allowed only for persons with high salaries."

All the same Sumathi was a very happy person.

"Sumathi, I'll take leave of you. I want to step in at Valiamma's place."

"You remember what I told you?"

"Yes, of course."

She turned round and laughed.

WHEN she passed the bamboo cluster she saw the now-dried-up *chola*. There used to be green bramble bushes on either side. The channel used to be full

of water round the year. During the rains, water would overflow the bund and into the channel below which would form a minor tributary of the river.

The house was built by Valiachan, the great grandfather. In the place of the "gate house," there was a bamboo stile now. When she went up the steps and entered the front yard, there was no one there. Pepper had been spread out to dry on a bamboo mat. As she stood there hesitantly, she saw Thankedathi stepping into the verandah.

"Look, who's come. – Achamma complained even this morning that you'd go away without seeing her."

Thankedathi insisted on her sitting in the chair drawn up near the built-in bench with a back rest. She started talking of family matters. Her two sons were studying and had gone to their hostel because of practical examinations. The youngest, a girl, was in the ninth standard.

When their mother died, her younger sisters took their share and settled down in new houses built by their husbands. "This crumbling house was given as my share. There was no one to speak up for me."

Her voice broke as a customary tribute to the premature death of her husband. She wiped her eyes which were dry.

"Where is Valiamma?"

"She's in the north room. She cannot see anything. She doesn't like us to lead her by the hand. One day she might stumble and fall."

"No one will have any trouble on account of me," Valiamma's voice was heard from the door.

With her hand on the door-frame, she stepped on to the verandah with meticulous accuracy. Sudha hurriedly got up and went near her. Even at eighty-four, Valiamma stood erect with not a trace of any stoop. Her blouse and the upper-cloth covering her were pure white. She wore a bordered *mundu* (dhoti) which glistened with starch. Sudha stole a glance at Valiamma's head with its profusion of grey hair. When she had heard the story of how Komappan was hidden in the pond behind the loosened hair of Unniyamma, she had visualised the woman as Valiamma herself.

When Thankedathi started pulling up a chair, Valiamma told her: "I'll sit here. Sudha Kutty, sit down."

Valiamma's hand came towards her arm more or less correctly. She sat down on the bench near Valiamma.

"Sudha Kutty, you've put on a little weight?"

Looking at her arm, she agreed.

"Weren't you panting when you took four steps towards me? Even without seeing, I can understand by your breathing." Valiamma laughed.

Her grey eyes looked lifeless. But there were no wrinkles on her face though age had made furrows on her neck.

"Thankam, make some tea. If you have any jackfruit, fry some."

Sudha said: "Oh, I don't want anything. Just half a glass of tea, maybe."

Valiamma was waiting for Thankedathi to go to the kitchen.

"Child, what have you decided?" Valiamma's question came all of a sudden, leaving Sudha jittery.

"Don't be frightened. I asked this not to berate you or find fault with you. Isn't it more than four years since we met?"

She felt relieved.

"People here squirm when I speak out. They wonder what I can see with both my eyes clouded over with cataract. Can they see what I see?"

She had raised her voice a bit, perhaps for Thankedathi to hear her from the kitchen.

Valiamma again lowered her voice: "What have you decided?"

She felt disturbed. She began to breathe faster.

"If you feel you had enough of one another, it is time you put an end to it. Marriage is a personal matter. There is no point in enacting marriage as a sort of charade to satisfy people around you."

Sudha sighed, pulled up her legs and squatted on the bench facing Valiamma.

Valiamma moved her head closer to hers. "My first husband... none of you would have seen him."

"My mother did. A singer, wasn't he?"

"He was a music teacher. A Bhagavathar. That was the problem. He conducted music classes at Sharon House. He ate at our place. He was a fine singer. He wore silver ear rings studded with a red stone each. He always had sandal paste smeared on his forehead. Take it that I felt attracted to him."

Sudha forgot her own troubles and problems. These were pushed to the back of her mind. She waited to hear Valiamma's words with the pleasurable anticipation of her childhood.

Valiamma ran her fingers through her hair and chuckled.

"He left before a year was over."

"Amma has mentioned that."

"He didn't go of his own accord. I told him to go," Valiamma murmured.

Valiamma fixed her sightless gaze on some spot in the distance and smiled.

"He had nothing material to give me even for my bare needs. I could have overlooked that. But he would talk and behave like a woman with a girlish lisp and shyness to boot. There was nothing masculine about his appearance. I told him to his face that it was better to end our relationship. There was no other way."

Sudha had heard of Valiamma's first marriage to the Bhagavathar but did not know any details.

Then Grandfather came into the picture. He was working in the Salt Department. They had three children. Grandfather died. The three children soon followed him. Only Valiamma survived.

"Haven't you seen your Valiachan? He was not good-looking or handsome, was he?"

"I've seen him when I was just a child. He was then ill and confined to bed."

"There was no other personality like him in the entire village. During festivals he would head the procession. If an elephant was in musth only Madhavan Nair could control it. If they wanted fireworks with eighteen bursts of colour, he alone could manage it."

Thankedathi brought tea.

As long as she stood there, Valiamma sat in silent dignity. The moment she went in, Valiamma laughed once more.

"On the outside he had the appearance of an angry cobra. He would lose his temper and shout at people. But at heart he was soft and kind as I alone knew. I had to say I had a cold, to see his anxiety and concern."

Valiamma's laughter became louder.

Sudha forgot her own troubles and problems. These were pushed to the back of her mind. She waited to hear Valiamma's words with the pleasurable anticipation of her childhood.

"I had never been a domesticated person but an upheaval took place. It happened after I gave birth to Kuttyaranan. An obsession for a man took hold of me. Take it that

I felt attracted no end. I had to take firm control of myself and curse my abysmal stupidity. My willpower took charge and nothing came of it. But even then...."

Without completing her words Valiamma opened her mouth wide and laughed. I noticed that she had lost very few teeth.

"Then I was your age," Valiamma added, sighing.

"Valiamma, is that man still alive?"

"Gone. All are gone. I alone am left behind. I have to wait till the call comes for me. One is not allowed to go of one's own accord."

Valiamma shook her head as if she wanted to rid herself of something, slid back a little and reclined, with her back resting on the wall.

"The other person, who is it Sudha Kutty?"

Sudha gave a start. "What?"

"You saw a man. You liked him. You decided to live with him. Isn't that what happened?"

"Who told you this?"

Valiamma drew up her knees.

"No one has to say these things. Who is it, child?"

She found it difficult to control her embarrassment.

"Is he someone you work with?"

"No."

She would find it difficult to explain the circumstances. She met him at a dinner got up to bid farewell to the outgoing manager. Janardhana Rao, who claimed to be a singer, was singing a ghazal. The chief guest, the organisers and the invited clients were steeped in alcohol and small talk. He was standing at the other end of the room, a glass of orange juice in his hand. As she looked at him, he slowly edged his way towards her. Her mind was in a flutter as she said to herself:

"Oh God, these hesitant steps are coming right into my heart."

She felt happy when he told her that he was in Madras for ten days every month. As the guests approached them, he said in a low voice: "I can get you over the phone at the Bank, I suppose."

She nodded in affirmation. She could not ask him why, for what purpose, he wanted to call her.

Valiamma asked: "Is he married?"

"No."

"Does Prabhakaran know?"

She paused before saying: "Somewhat."

"Then the two of you should separate. He will soon get some other woman. That's not a serious issue. You must get separated."

Valiamma did not look satisfied at all. "True, if there are children, their maintenance and upkeep should be provided for. But why should the Judge interfere with persons who do not want to live together?"

Sudha was amused.

"Separation is not that easy these days, Valiamma."

"If you don't want each other, there's the end of it. Isn't that so?"

Sudha retrieved the confidence to explain the position with clarity. "It's not like that. The couple have to submit a joint petition. Six months later, the two of them would be summoned before the Judge and asked whether they still persisted in their desire to separate. If they confirm their decision, they have to wait for another six months."

She could see anger slowly spreading over Valiamma's face.

"If the two of them have agreed, does it require the Judge's consent?"

"That's the law, Valiamma."

Valiamma did not look satisfied at all. "True, if there are children, their maintenance and upkeep should be provided for. But why should the Judge interfere with persons who do not want to live together?"

"The law's like that."

"Law indeed! Don't provoke me to speak out my mind."

As Thankedathi came to remove the empty glasses, Valiamma was muttering soundlessly. Thankedathi said: "Till last year Achamma could see things like a kind of shadow. Even that's not there now."

Sudha said: "An operation will restore your vision. Many get it done even at this age. If you like I can take you to Madras."

Valiamma's laugh had a tinge of bitterness.

"No, no, why should I get back my vision? Haven't I seen enough, my child?"

Sudha got up to go.

Thankedathi said: "You can go after having food here."

"Oh, no, Amma would have cooked my meal by now."

"Rice is on the boil. Sudha Kutty, you must look in here when you come next."

"I shall come."

Thankedathi went inside.

Just then the fourteen-year-old who had just come was removing the bamboo stile to enter. Valiamma's eyes turned to the entrance. The girl removed her chappals, looked at Sudha and smiled. She lowered her head and noiselessly went towards the door leading inside. As she reached the door, Valiamma asked: "Where had you gone?"

The girl was shaking like a leaf.

"To the Sharon. To get a book from Sharada."

"Did you have to get dolled up in silk to go to the Sharon?"

The girl went pale. In fright, she managed to scurry inside.

Valiamma turned her face towards Sudha.

"Did she have a book in her hand?"

"Er... No."

"The moment I heard the rustle of the dress, I knew it was silk."

"After all, she's a child, Valiamma."

"Hm. The girl's quite grown up for her age. I'm able to sense things."

"Let me go."

Valiamma also stood up. Remembering what Amma told her, Sudha quietly opened the purse in her hand.

Valiamma said: "You are about to give me some money. No, no. Why does Valiamma require money?"

Stunned, Sudha hastily shut her purse.

"I shall come ... When I come..."

There was a break in Valiamma's voice.

"If I am alive, you must come and see me. That's all I ask for."

She saw Valiamma's lustreless eyes fill up. Uncontrollably her own were also filled with tears. She bent down and touched Valiamma's feet in respect. She recalled that she had done this five years ago.

Valiamma placed her hand on her head in blessings and said: "May it turn out well, this time at least."

When she went through the bazaar she saw the board of the STD booth from a distance.

She intoned to herself both the telephone numbers. She must make sure of the mobile number from her notebook. After finishing the call, if she hurried home she would not miss the sight of the wild fowl and chicks entering the yard.

She quickened her pace. ■

A secular expose

A. G. NOORANI

The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism edited by K. N. Panikkar; Viking, pages 252, Rs.395.

THE show of moderation is deceptive and is intended to deceive. Atal Behari Vajpayee does not enjoy command over the Bharatiya Janata Party. It suits its mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to leave him alone till it is able to muster a solid majority in its own right. The allies will then be discarded – along with the mask of moderation. None should be surprised at the recent recruitments made to the BJP. Some joined it for the lure of power, others were closet Hindutva adherents anyway.

The situation lends added relevance to this collection of essays edited by an academic who combines scholarly pursuits with active espousal of causes he holds dear. Professor of Modern History at the Centre for Historical Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, K. N. Panikkar has written extensively on the cultural and intellectual history of modern India.

An anguished concern at the present situation is reflected all over his incisive introduction. A religious concept of nationhood led to India's Partition. The two-nation theory was propounded by V. D. Savarkar in his book *Hindutva* in 1924. M. A. Jinnah began to advocate it from 1939 onwards. But as Nehru wrote in his *Autobiography*, "many a Congressman was a communalist under his nationalist cloak." Rajeshwar Dayal's memoirs, *A Life of Our Times* (1998), record how, as Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, he found damning evidence of the RSS boss M. S. Golwalkar's complicity in a conspiracy to stage anti-Muslim pogroms but the man was protected by the Chief Minister, Govind Ballabh Pant, from arrest and prosecution. Pant foiled Nehru's and Patel's attempts to undo the forcible conversion of the Babri Mosque into a Hindu temple in the night on December 22/23, 1949.

Gandhi's assassination and Nehru's strong commitment kept the Hindutva forces at bay. The situation has "changed dramatically, particularly during the past two decades", Panikkar writes. Hindu communalism has spread its tentacles in civil society and also succeeded in gaining access to state power. In the process some of the vital principles and practices of a secular state and society have been either undermined or endangered. The essays collected in this volume seek "to join the public debate made imperative by the communal initiatives taken by the government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party" during its brief term and by the social and cultural interventions of the members of the Sangh Parivar, particularly the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the RSS and the Bajrang Dal.

The contributors are writers of repute, each distinguished in his/her own intellectual discipline. It is only appropriate that historians should lead the charge against obscurantism. "For, the Hinduised history is a deliberate construction, which seeks to valourise the Hindu in the chequered history of the nation. It traces the lineage of the nation to the ancient Hindu past, claims the Hindu scriptures as the source of all knowledge, the Indian civilisation as superior to every other civilisation, and ancient India's achievement in science, mathematics and other branches of knowledge as unsurpassed by other civilisations. The political history of India is interpreted as a record of the heroic Hindu resistance against foreigners and the last one thousand years as a period of continuous conflict between the Hindus and Muslims."

Panikkar recalls that a Maharashtrian intellectual in the mid-19th century, Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkadkar, distinguished the Muslim rulers from the British. The only instance of foreign rule in India, he held, was British colonial rule. Although they ruled for about 200 years the British distanced themselves from Indian society. Unlike earlier rulers such as Mughals and Turks, they drained wealth out of India.

"The politics of Hindutva, as the essays in this volume bring out, is primarily engaged in defining the nation as Hindu through a process of cultural homogenisation, social consolidation and political mobilisation of the majority community and at the same time, by stigmatising the minorities as aliens and enemies."



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ROMILA THAPAR, one of India's foremost historians, metes out deserved justice to the communal interpretation of India's history, a subject on which she has written extensively. British contribution to the writing of India's history was baleful in its periodisation of Indian history as that of the Hindu, Muslim and British periods. Muslim and Hindu communalists took over and constructed two monolithic communities, uniformly hostile, utterly free from diversities, immune to interaction and indifferent to a nationalism transcending the communal divide.

Romila Thapar writes: "The tragedy is that actually the study of the past sends us very different messages but we choose not to read them. Indian society has always been a multi-religious, multicultural society where identities have inevitably been multiple. Such a society

is not in itself secular but is conducive to the evolving of a secular society protecting the civil and human rights of all its citizens. Our history in India has been very different from that projected in the two-nation theory and the Hindutva ideology. If we can read our history with more sensitivity and insight, it would contribute to avoiding a fascist future."

What Nehru wrote of the Hindu Mahasabha applies to the RSS and its political front, the BJP. Their communalism "masquerades under a nationalist cloak," he wrote, and added insightfully: "The test comes when a national and democratic solution happens to injure upper-class Hindu interests." It is a test in which the Mahasabha "repeatedly failed". So have the RSS and the BJP, repeatedly.

As Jayati Ghosh writes in her incisive analysis of the economic underpinnings, "In the Hindutva world view, the only internal enemies are those determined by social and cultural differences. There is no recognition of classes or even of domestic economic antagonisms in this perspective, and therefore no understanding of the constraining role on development which can be played by certain classes such as large landed interests and big capital." She points out that while the Hindutva brigade's rhetoric is majoritarian, "in actuality it represents the interests of a very small minority – typically male upper-class and upper caste – and even of a relatively small sub-section within that group."

Tanika Sarkar's essay exposes "the gender predicament of the Hindu Right" with a wealth of documentation carefully sourced. She points out a curious feature of its behaviour which has been overlooked. The Sangh Parivar consciously projects women to the forefront. But "the women who are thus exalted do not come from women's organisations, nor do they have prominent bases among the women of their own political clusters. They also are quite indifferent to women's issues, problems and demands."

Sumit Sarkar's essay on conversions records how the fight against Christian missionary activity was an early plank of the Jan Sangh. Even as Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee sees nothing wrong in sponsoring officially (January 10, 1999) a debate on the right to practise and propagate one's religion. Rajeev Dhavan's analysis of the constitutional implications of the secular credo rises far above the level of arid legalism common to most lawyers. His interests are wide and his research is extensive.

Siddharth Varadarajan caps the contributions with one of the ablest analyses of the role of the media yet written. He is one of the rare breed who can effortlessly glide from academia to journalism and back. The thesis is made good convincingly. "Mass media's tendency to fragment news serves to depoliticise the body politic... When combined with fragmentation, the immediacy of news generates individual passivity and a public sphere that is generally inert except when the mass media itself is used by power politics to mobilise it. In the context of communalism in India, the layers of combustible myths which accumulate around most riots as time passes make this kind of memoryless media all the more manipulatory and dangerous."

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Nuances and complexity are shunned in "junk food journalism, which one author has labelled 'News McNuggets'." Varadarajan's essay, the longest in the volume, briefly surveys the history of Indian journalism to show how the communal slant became pronounced over the years. "Most Indian newspapers in the latter part of the nineteenth century had internalised the colonial political culture to such an extent that even when colonialism was challenged or excoriated, it was often from a 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' point of view. Even language became a bone of contention. The Urdu-Hindi divide began shortly after the advent of British rule and was reflected in some newspapers using Devanagari and others the Persian script."

Some grave errors of lasting consequence were made by the Congress, not least, by Gandhi. His "tendency in his capacity as a Congress leader, to use 'we' and 'us' when referring to Hindus has also been criticised for its alienating effect on Muslims. See R. Palme Dutt, *Inside India Today*, London, 1940; page 326," a footnote points out.

Coming to present times, Siddharth Varadarajan discusses the role of the media during moments of trial – the Punjab crisis and the anti-Sikh riots; the Shah Bano case, the Ayodhya movement and the communal riots of which there seems to be no end. The Shah Bano case, for instance, was essentially a gender issue. The BJP made it a communal one. Large sections of the media played the same tune.

"As a manager of news, the BJP has proved to be much more skilful than the Congress or any other political formation in the country. In the run-up to the Ayodhya agitation, the party pioneered the use of press releases, leaks and press conferences, which took place on more or less a daily basis, thereby ensuring that the BJP and its activities and views received continuous and prominent coverage in the newspapers. According to the media analysts Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma, the BJP's forte is the creation and management of the pseudo-event."

The print media is not the only culprit, Doordarshan and All India Radio played no mean role. Contrast Doordarshan's treatment of the film *Tipu Sultan* with its generosity towards *Ramayana* whose serialisation many now acknowledge was a mistake of great consequence.

It is a very thought-provoking contribution, altogether. "Communalism in the media is a problem but it is only an instantiation of the largely undemocratic nature of the mass media. What we need, therefore, is journalism which raises the level of discussion in society by addressing the concerns of the people. In modern market economies, two obstacles need to be overcome. The first is the market mechanism itself."

The other is the stranglehold of the state. It is able to influence media coverage and mould public opinion. In India, for example, the police and paramilitaries are considered to be the authority on questions of law and order; the Reserve Bank of India, the Union Finance Ministry and investment banks on the economy; and the Defence Ministry and quasi-government think-tanks like the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, the last word on issues of defence and national security. Journalists looking for an objective assessment turn mostly to officials from institutions."

In bringing such a fine group of thinkers around the table for an informed discussion, Panikkar has rendered no small service. ■

The real and the mythical

K.N.PANIKKAR

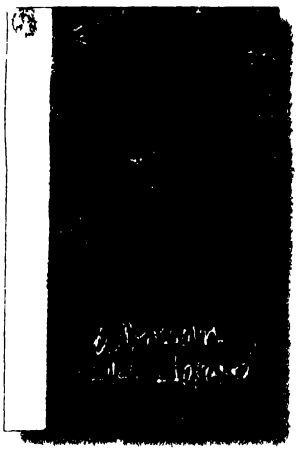
Kesavante Vilapangal by M. Mukundan, D.C. Books, Kottayam; pages 206, Rs. 75.

THE latest novel by M. Mukundan, one of the progenitors of modernity in Malayalam literature, is intensely political like all his earlier works. His novels and short stories have been sensitive to the people's struggle for liberation from colonial domination, the post-colonial disappointment and frustration, and the brutalisation that slowly set in in Indian society. Thematic novelty and innovative craft are the hallmarks of his earlier works, which have earned him much literary recognition and acclaim. His recent novel, *Kesavante Vilapangal* (The Lamentations of Kesavan), which breaks new ground in both conception and composition, is likely to create considerable interest and even controversy.

The formation and articulation of the Left political consciousness in Kerala form the central theme of the novel, whose focus is on E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who, arguably, exercised the most decisive influence on its course. Yet this is not a work on or about EMS, despite such an impression that the copper plate etching of EMS embossed on the cover will possibly create.

It is neither a biographical account of EMS nor a representation, faithful or otherwise, of his social and political activism. The novel therefore escapes being a caricature of EMS, as in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* or in some Malayalam literary resurrections after his death. At the same time, the presence of EMS in the novel is overarching, almost divine and mythical, which mediates at every stage, decisively influencing its course.

Kesavante Vilapangal has a multi-layered structure with a complex narrative strategy that brings out a relationship, almost symbiotic in nature, between its two main strands. There are, in fact, two intertwined and complementary plots in the novel. The first is about the tensions and travails as well as the popular recognition involved in the production of a literary work, drawing upon contemporary political issues and leaders. This is exemplified by the experience of the protagonist of the novel, Kesavan, a fairly successful writer, who undertakes to compose a novel on EMS. The second is the novel so written by Kesavan in which EMS looms large through a mythic presence in the life of a boy named Appukuttan. In the course of the narrative the distinction between the narrator and the narrated is so blurred that the former becomes a victim of the fallout of his own creative effort.



The subtle and suggestive manner in which the novel underlines the relationship between the real and the mythical makes it an extremely complex work.

The myth takes shape in the life of Appukuttan while he was still in the cradle. Its beginning is marked by the inexplicable influence on the boy exercised by a photograph of EMS fixed on the wall by Appukuttan's uncle. He grows up in its enchanting presence and is enamoured of the leader's childlike smile and the red colour that embellished the portrait's background. The child, it appeared, was in constant communication with the photograph, so much so that he protested when his view was obstructed by a change in the position of the cradle. In due course the myth assumes dynamic qualities, directing the mental and physical world of the child. In a crowded fair he could, even when he was only three years old, lead his father to the place where the photograph of EMS was on sale along with those of innumerable gods and goddesses. Or is it that the photograph was drawing him towards it? The influence thus exercised was so overpowering that the child in Appukuttan was marginalised; he did not enjoy the company of his friends nor indulge in what children are normally fond of. His world was confined to EMS and to the possibilities inherent in the ideas that he represented. His sole ambition was to pursue the path charted out by EMS and to end up as a martyr for that cause. As a result he sought to fashion himself in the image of EMS, meticulously tried to follow and internalise the details of his life and to devote himself to the pursuit of the ideals set by him. Yet, EMS remained enigmatic and mythical – distant but intimate, elusive but accessible, and awe-inspiring but gentle. He had no opportunity to know the 'real' EMS – Mukundan's engagement is not with the real – but the myth is so firmly embedded in his mind that he effortlessly translates it into real politics.

The translation of the myth into the reality of politics is facilitated by the mediation of his school teacher, Aman Master, who transforms Appukuttan from a dull and indifferent student to a front-runner in the class. Aman Master envisions in him a future leader and, reminiscent of the role school teachers have played in the dissemination of Left influence in Kerala, guides him in that direction. To the dismay of his father, a disillusioned naxalite who sought solace in religion, Appukuttan, though only 15 years, associates himself with the Communist Party. His ambition always was to become a martyr which he ultimately becomes by killing another former naxalite who had turned an alcoholic and committed the 'sacrilege' of urinating on a photograph of EMS. Appukuttan is arrested and taken to jail where he finds fulfilment in the strong arms of EMS who descends from a red star in the sky surrounded by a red halo. Thus Kesavan's political choice is clearly delineated.

KESAVAN'S attempt to construct the myth of EMS elicits a variety of

responses. A Left-leaning intellectual and literary critic warns him that writing on a theme that he is ignorant of is not short of serious danger.

That he buttresses his arguments with quotations from *Living in Truth* by Vaclav Havel and *Reality Effect* by Ronald Barthes is possibly intended as a comment on the intellectual practice in Kerala.

However, when the novel was completed, the same critic writes a laudatory review and also offers to use his political influence to get Kesavan important positions in government-controlled academies. He also receives a lucrative offer from a commercial publisher. All of these Kesavan rejects with disdain. To him, the moment of fulfilment was beyond all these, when the myth he created turns real and EMS appears in person before him, though for a fleeting moment, to bless him and thus give recognition to his creative ability.

The opposition to and disapproval of Kesavan's work were equally sharp. They presumably came from the Hindu fundamentalist groups which sent him anonymous letters threatening him for writing on the present-day Sankaran and not on Adi Sankara. This is reminiscent of the tactics of Hindu communalists who threaten and intimidate the secular intelligentsia who are critical of their cultural and political projects. Kesavan ignored the threat and publicly denounced it, which led to his murder. The novel thus ends by underlying the ominous possibilities inherent in Hindu fundamentalism.

The Left intellectual and political life in Kerala was largely dependent upon the theoretical erudition and political acumen of EMS. For a long time he strode like a colossus, guiding and influencing its direction. EMS was not only a leader engaged in everyday politics, but was an effective communicator who took great care to disseminate his ideas in society and thus to intervene in the existing social and political consciousness and eventually to transform them. The myth that the novel so cleverly creates is actually a reflection of this reality. But then the foregrounding of the myth is in itself an attempt to explore the meaning of the real. The subtle and suggestive manner in which the novel underlines the relationship between the real and the mythical makes it an extremely complex work, compelling a critical introspection on how political ideals make or unmake the popular consciousness. ■

■ **BOOKS**

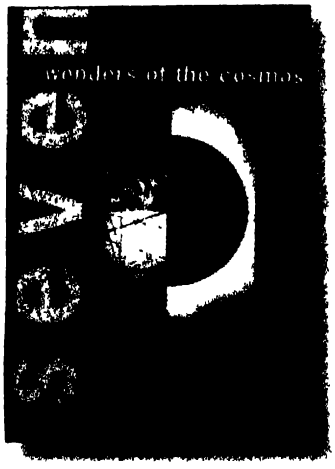
Understanding the cosmos

R. RAMACHANDRAN

Seven Wonders of the Cosmos by Jayant V. Narlikar; Cambridge University Press, U.K., 1999; pages 324, Rs.495.

THE British astrophysicist from Cambridge University, Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, described the challenges facing the physicist in his endeavour to understand the universe thus: "Man in search of knowledge of the universe is like a potato bug in a sack lying in the hold of a ship, trying to discover, from the ship's motion, the nature of the vast sea." That indeed captures what the human intellect is up against – for the earth is not even a speck in the vast expanse of the observable universe whose range is about 14 million million million times the radius of the earth (6,400 km). This in itself is mind-boggling. It will be even more so if you consider all the varieties of matter in the form of stars, galaxies, their clusters and other peculiar stellar objects, the all-pervading radiation and the eternal processes that have been going on for about 10 billion years, not to speak of how all this came into existence. Did all this begin with a bang or was there a beginning at all? Ten billion years into the past is just not the span of time that astronomers are able to see with their myriad telescopes and other devices.

A cosmos of such dimensions can only be expected to throw up phenomena that are seemingly inexplicable to the human mind with its limited comprehending capability and intellect. As J.B.S. Haldane, the British scientist, said: "The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, it is queerer than we can suppose." Perhaps the greatest wonder of all is, as Jayant Narlikar says in his preface to the book, the success achieved by the methods of science in coming to grips with cosmic mysteries. "Why should scientific laws discovered over three centuries on this tiny planet apply to a history of billions of years of a vast universe. The existing fact is that they do." Is that not remarkable? "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible," said Albert Einstein who produced the most powerful of all tools to enable a holistic comprehension of the universe, namely the General Theory of Relativity. (Actually, much of the comprehension of the universe that is possible today would have been impossible but for the genius of Einstein.)



Being a great populariser of science, Narlikar knows how to get across this thrill and excitement of a physicist to the public at large without invoking a maze of equations, symbols, numbers and technical jargon. Without resorting to them, he conveys the power of mathematics and logic inherent in a self-consistent theoretical premise such as cosmology. The book is pitched at the level of a high school student exposed to the basics of science and mathematics; it can also be enjoyed by those interested in the phenomena of the cosmos but lack exposure to science, if they put in a bit of effort and skip some details if that seem difficult. Narlikar may lack the skill to use flowery language or catchy phrases, but what he has to say is put across in a simple and lucid manner. The book should appeal to anyone interested in the mysteries of the universe; at the same time, it can serve as an excellent introduction for a student who wishes to make a career in astrophysics.

To take one through the cosmic journey, starting from the earth and the solar system to the farthest reaches of the universe from where instruments on the earth or near the earth (like the Hubble Space Teles-

cope or satellites) are able to receive electromagnetic signals, Narlikar has chosen the "queer" objects or phenomena, in the words of Haldane, at each level in the hierarchy of structures that make up the universe. Each level, in some sense, serves as a chapter in the book and through these seven wonders, and using them as the starting points, Narlikar is able to induce in the reader an interest in the fascinating discipline of astrophysics and related complex ideas that form the basis of cosmology today. This is something school- or college-level textbooks fail to do. One may ask why "seven wonders" and not more or fewer. That clearly is because on the earth one talks of only seven wonders. In that sense, the second chapter on "Giants and Dwarfs of the Stellar World" is not so much about any "wonder" or surprising phenomenon but an overview of stellar physics itself. It has gone into some remarkable concepts and ideas and is in that sense wondrous.

The book should appeal to anyone interested in the mysteries of the universe; at the same time, it can serve as an excellent introduction for a student who wishes to make a career in astrophysics.

One commendable thing about the book is how Narlikar is able to link physical and mathematical concepts discussed in one chapter with topics in another chapter by not failing to recall and recount the relevant elements in them. While this makes reading easy in the sense that one does not have to keep flipping back and forth, it also serves to reiterate how the same basic ideas of physics in the small scale work in the large scale as well.

Chapter 6 is titled "Illusions in Space", but this motif is a thread running through the entire book; that is, what one sees or observes with telescopes or other instruments is not actually how things are now or at any given instant. The assumption of "seeing is believing" is too naive and simplistic in the cosmic scale. For example, a picture of the great galaxy Andromeda, which is about two million light years away, means that it is a picture of the galaxy as it was two million years ago. Even that is not quite true, because Andromeda stretches about 100,000 light years across. So light from different parts of Andromeda arriving on the earth had left the galaxy at different times in the past. At one extreme is the observation of twin images of galaxie[illegible]g out of lensing effect by intervening stellar mass whose gravitational influence on light from stellar objects behind them bends it much like a lens and creates images. At the other, is the clear evidence of the existence of black holes and dark matter in the universe, which exert enormous gravitational influence on the motion of nearby stellar objects but are themselves not visible.

The chapters on gravitation, "Illusions in Space" (about gravitational lensing) and the expanding universe are extremely well written for the average reader, though, expectedly, Narlikar's preference for steady-state cosmology comes across in the last chapter and he emphasises the fact that unambiguous evidence in support of a big bang cosmology is still lacking. Narlikar devotes an entire chapter to pulsars, and rightly so, because these time-keepers of the universe, with their extremely precise pulsations, are really enigmatic objects that can result in the evolution of stars under certain conditions. Indeed, Narlikar closes this chapter with the question whether pulsars can replace caesium clocks on the earth for accurate time-keeping – a distinct possibility. The question will be which of the pulsars discovered so far would one choose to be the time standard. One of the intriguing aspects of some of the short-period pulsars discovered is evidence of planetary structures around them which defies human understanding because pulsars result from violent explosive events, as in the case of the supernova, and such structures should have got blown away. So what are these? No one knows as yet.

The epilogue to the book highlights some unsolved problems of astrophysics and cosmology, such as the solar neutrino puzzle, the red shift puzzle, the formation of stars and galaxies. In his closing remarks, Narlikar says: "The human prejudice that whatever is known in the current epoch should be sufficient to understand all the mysteries of the universe resists new ideas. Despite this resistance, they do break in, in an unexpected fashion...The wonders that are unexpected are more wonderful than the wonders that are expected." There could be many more wonders in store for physicists of the future. Indeed, it would be disappointing if there is none. ■

■ BOOKS

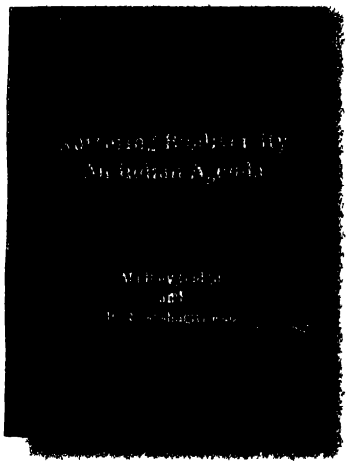
ASHA KRISHNAMKUMAR

Nurturing Biodiversity – An Indian Agenda by Madhav Gadgil and P.R. Seshagiri Rao; Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad; pages 163, Special price Rs.95 ($21).

THERE has been an alarmingly rapid depletion in the bio-wealth of India, one of the 12 mega-diverse countries in the world in terms of bio-wealth. Urgent policy responses are essential if this trend is to be arrested. *The book Nurturing Biodiversity – An Indian Agenda* establishes that India's existing model of biodiversity management is fundamentally flawed and identifies the systemic problems; more important, it provides an alternative approach that would reverse the process of depletion. The book is the last one in a series on environment and development brought out by the Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad.

India's unique geographical positioning has contributed to its richness in bio-wealth. It is the meeting point of three of the eight major global bio-geographic realms – Eurasia (Palaeartic), South-East Asia (Indomalayan) and Africa (Afrotropical). India is home to over 125,000 species of living organisms, 8,000 of the 1.5 million described animal species and 15,000 of the 240,000 plant species. According to experts, at least 400,000 species found in India are waiting to be described.

India is also one of the centres of crop and livestock diversity; it has contributed 167 economic plants such as rice, sugarcane, millets and lentils; vegetables including brinjal and cucumber; and a number of medicinal and ornamental plants.



The biodiversity challenge

All this diversity of living forms, created over billions of years, has been preserved and nurtured by the people primarily because of the country's religious and cultural pluralism, with each diverse group adopting its own conservation methods. Unfortunately, these people are not at the core of the present conservation efforts. As the authors of the book put it: "The prevalent model of biodiversity management makes conservation a government initiative and treats local communities as a problem rather than the solution." Invariably, according to the authors, bio-management plans are predicated on inadequate data and often designed to serve vested interests.

Ecological degradation, the book argues, has been happening because major groups control and benefit from the state-sponsored flow of resources. It terms them "the iron triangle" and identifies them as forest-based industries, the bureaucracy and politicians.

This, the authors say, is a colonial legacy. For, as the Industrial Revolution reached the Indian shores and began to spread across the land in the second half of the 18th century, the traditional respect for ecological diversity started to wane. There followed large-scale destruction of forests and slaughter of wildlife until the 1860s when some laws were enacted to stop this trend. However, soon enough, loopholes were found in these laws, and the destruction of natural resources resumed. This goes on even today though there are some 200 Central and State laws to protect the country's biodiversity.

The situation has worsened in the wake of the liberalisation of the economy, which is being vigorously pushed even by State governments. For instance, the Orissa Government is going ahead with the construction of a fishing jetty in Bittarkanika even though environmentalists have warned that it might sound the death-knell of the Olive Ridley turtles that breed in large numbers on the State's coast every year. The Gujarat Government has denotified the Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary – the only natural home of the chinkara – to facilitate limestone mining. Eight companies are to start cement factories in the region. A private sector oil refinery is threatening the fragile Gulf of Kutch Marine National Park and Sanctuary, which has mangroves and coral reefs that are teeming with life and is rich in fish. All political parties in Rajasthan are pushing for the grant of permission to marble and dolomite mining in the Sariska Tiger Reserve.

The annual extraction of 7,000 tonnes of bamboo by the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department from the Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary for trade in violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act has been going on for many years.

Such unabated exploitation since the 1960s has rendered 88 million hectares – or over two-thirds of the country's potentially productive land, which is not under cultivation or human settlement – into virtual wasteland. Some 10 per cent of India's wild flora and an even higher greater percentage of its wild fauna are on the endangered list. Many species are on the verge of extinction.

This ecological degradation, the book argues, has been happening because of the three major groups that control and benefit from the state-sponsored flow of resources. The book terms them "the iron triangle" and identifies them as forest-based industries, the bureaucracy which manages the resource flow and politicians. This system of control, which ignores the local people and their needs, is at the root of the inefficient management of natural resources and, hence, of their rapid depletion. Thus, in the last few decades India has lost 50 per cent of its forests, over 70 per cent of its waterbodies have become polluted, much of its grasslands has been built over or cultivated, and long stretches of its 1,000-km coastline degraded.

The book details a strategy to achieve value addition to biodiversity resources in the context of modern technological advances and new international regimes of intellectual property rights and each nation's sovereign rights over its biological resources.

IS there no hope? The book offers a detailed, integrated system to manage the country's natural resources. This model replaces the current fragmented (as in the case of the various government departments) and centralised bureaucratic regimes with a system that is decentralised and has the local communities in the vanguard. In this system, panchayati raj institutions have a central role. The authors emphasise all along the crucial role played by indigenous communities in preserving biodiversity and in the principle of equity in benefit-sharing.

The book outlines the approaches for biodiversity conservation – enhancing the information and education systems by maintaining and updating annually a biodiversity data bank and a 'People's Environment Register' in various localities; redefining the roles and powers of panchayats and government agencies; setting up a system of performance-linked rewards to local communities for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity resources; and harnessing practical ecological knowledge to meet the challenges posed by international trade agreements and global biodiversity conventions.

The book, which reproduces relevant portions of various international biodiversity conventions and agreements, details a strategy to achieve value addition to biodiversity resources in the context of modern technological advances and new international regimes of intellectual property rights and each nation's sovereign rights over its biological resources.

The alternative model of biodiversity management is India-specific and merits the consideration of policymakers. ■

A half-hearted critique of globalisation

VENKATESH ATHREYA

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT (HDR) 1999 is the tenth in the annual series being brought out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1990. Dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Mahbub-ul-Haq, the originator of the HDR, the theme of *HDR 1999* is globalisation.

The Report documents, in considerable detail, the inequalities of globalisation. It calls for 'globalisation with a human face'. Its dramatic expose of the highly iniquitous nature of the ongoing processes of globalisation – both among nations and among social classes in most nations – and its occasional flourish of radical rhetoric would almost lead one to believe that the Report opposes the phenomenon of hegemonic globalisation. That is, however, not the case. The Report is marked, instead, by a contradictory mixture of celebration of globalisation and bemoaning of its iniquitous consequences, and by a complete absence of any attempt to study holistically the political economy of globalisation.

The Report systematically documents the growing inequality among nations and peoples in respect of several aspects of economic and social life:

★ The income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest rose from 30 to 1 in 1960 to 60 to 1 in 1990, and further to 74 to 1 by 1997.

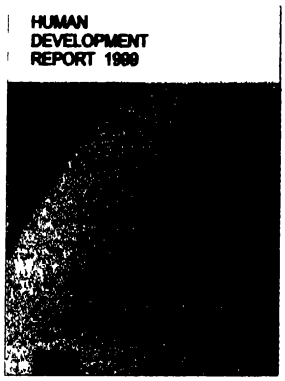
★ The richest fifth of the world's nations accounted for 86 per cent of world GDP while the bottom fifth accounted for just 1 per cent.

★ Corresponding figures for shares of export markets (82 per cent to 1 per cent), foreign direct investment (68 per cent to 1 per cent) and world's telephone lines (74 per cent to 1 per cent) confirm a scenario of staggering inequality.

★ The assets of the richest three individuals in the world exceeds the combined GDP of all least developed countries with a total population of 600 million people.

★ Globally, mass deprivation continues unabated with close to a billion adults either totally or functionally illiterate; a billion people cannot meet their basic consumption requirements; 340 million women are estimated to die before reaching the age of 40; more than 250 million children are working as labourers; and nearly 160 million children are malnourished.

The other side of this picture of stark inequality and deprivation is the enormous concentration of wealth, productive assets and economic power. This is especially striking in the leading industries of globalisation such as biotechnology, telecommunications and computers.



The Report is marked by a contradictory mixture of celebration of globalisation and bemoaning of its iniquitous consequences.

★ The shares of the global market of the top 10 corporations in 1998 in certain key industries were: pharmaceuticals – 35 per cent, computers – 70 per cent, telecommunications – 86 per cent.

★ Knowledge – a key productive asset – is very closely held. Industrial countries hold 97 per cent of all patents worldwide.

The Report highlights the role of two key technologies – information and communications technology (ICT) and biotechnology – as the 'drivers' of globalisation. It recognises that what it calls the 'new rules of globalisation' – namely, liberalisation, privatisation and tighter intellectual property rights (IPRs) – are 'creating new risks of marginalisation and vulnerability'. It lists the new negative features of these rules of the game:

★ '... for poor people, technological progress remains far out of reach.'

★ Tighter IPRs are blocking developing countries out of the dynamic knowledge sector.

★ New patent laws result in 'a silent theft of centuries of knowledge from developing to developed countries'.

★ All research and development are skewed to serve the well-to-do. The pharmaceutical industry is a case in point: 'Of annual health-related research and development worldwide, only 0.2 per cent goes for pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases and tuberculosis – yet these account for 18 per cent of the global disease burden'.

The Report documents instances of biopiracy and in a neat table (Table 6.71) demonstrates that it is mainly powerful transnational corporations which have 'real access to intellectual property claims'. It observes astutely and correctly that 'the attempt to create a global market in property rights imposes one conception of ownership and innovation on a culturally diverse reality, benefiting private industrial research but not public institutes or farming communities.' It even goes further to assert: 'The relentless march of intellectual property rights needs to be stopped and questioned'.

In an interesting discussion of the impact of globalisation on 'care and caring labour', *HDR 1999* recognises that the market does not reward activities pertaining to caring for fellow human beings and in fact penalises individuals who spend time in these activities, for they forgo income they could have earned in other activities that the market rewards.

Yet, at the end of its long and at times tellingly powerful critique of the key features of globalisation, the Report stops well short of questioning the basic tenets of hegemonic globalisation. Instead, it seeks to paint globalisation in rosy colours by referring to its alleged potential: 'Globalisation has swung open the door to opportunities in the world's markets.

The markets in today's global system are creating wonderful opportunities.' Its partial critique of globalisation is essentially from the standpoint of 'distribution' and 'inequality'. Consequently, it seeks to make globalisation work for human development by proposing well-meaning measures which, given the correlation of class forces nationally and globally, will at best remain a statement of good intentions.

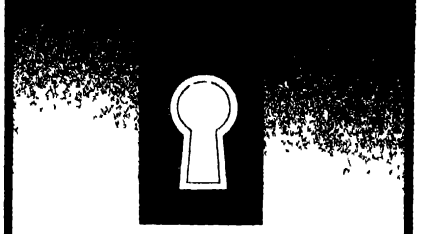
That the Report ends up making only pious recommendations after voicing trenchant criticism of aspects of globalisation is not surprising. For its basic standpoint is that 'competitive markets may be the best instrument of efficient production' even if this is qualified by the addition of the phrase 'but not of human development'. The Report's underlying philosophy is that a capitalist economy is basically efficient and that it can be made to serve the ends of human development by rewriting the rules of governance. The Report perceives the challenge to be one of promoting the expansion of global markets, and simultaneously to find rules and institutions for stronger governance. Its ideological bias comes out sharply when it speaks of countries of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as making a 'dramatic transition from centrally planned economic systems to market democracies' (page 29). Its presumption that globalisation driven by commercial interests 'seeks to promote economic efficiency' betrays an implicit acceptance of conservative economic theory and its vacuous conception of 'efficiency'. Yet the evidence marshalled by the Report shows growing concentration and centralisation of capital and enhanced oligopoly/monopoly power of the big transnational corporations (misnamed 'multinational corporations' by the Report implying genuine multinationality of ownership).

TO be fair to the Report, it does recognise many negative features of globalisation. It does make a passionate plea for greater equity, for public provisioning for human development and for rules of ethics and global governance that would reduce inequality and provide for a more even sharing of the benefits of technological progress. Even in the midst of its espousal of proposals for 'globalisation with a human face', it allows reality to intrude when it admits that 'elite groups and other interest groups benefit from the present nature and structure of globalisation' (page 95).

Yet in the end its recommendations are quite tame and largely in line with prevailing orthodoxy. Neither the World Bank nor the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is likely to demur at the Report's assertion that the main policy components to generate growth are 'ensuring sound macro economic management and macro economic stability boosting domestic demand by appropriately adjusting real interest rates, adopting fiscal discipline, accelerating industrial production, reforming financial sector institutions and promoting good governance' (page 94). That the evidence on the economic growth of nations in the last two decades and more does not support this position, but in fact shows that the dominance of foot-loose finance capital makes all economies – including the G-7 economies – prone to deep recession and high levels of unemployment completely escapes the authors of the Report, even though elsewhere in the Report they document the facts of recession and unemployment. This is precisely because the theory to link the facts – the political economy of hegemonic globalisation under the dominance of large, foot-loose, transnational finance capital – is missing.

A consistent position would have to be one that is not merely against the negative inequalising features of globalisation but one which recognises these features as inherent in globalisation within a global capitalist system, sharply polarised between the imperial metropolitan countries and the Third World countries undergoing forcible integration into the system. It would have to reject the notion that new 'humane' rules of global governance will descend, like manna from heaven, to make capitalist globalisation serve human development. It would have to recognise, in particular, the legitimacy of the sovereignty of the Third World states as against the claims to global sovereignty of the transnational corporations and the G-7 which underlie the prattle about 'global governance'. It would have to reject the equating of the mythical 'free market' with democracy. It must instead work for a thoroughgoing democratisation of all aspects of global and national life – economic, political, social and cultural – by mobilising social classes to change the existing correlation of forces, and not by appealing to the loftier instincts of transnational corporations and the G-7 fraternity. ■

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Conduct Rules and Fundamental Rights

Democracy is based on fair criticism; and freedom of speech and expression is highly protected by the Indian Constitution. A blanket prohibition of criticism of the policies of the Government is invalid and void, and it makes no difference if the person criticising happens to be a government servant or the employee of a public institution.

ALLADI KUPPUSWAMI

CAN the Government or any public institution prohibit an employee from criticising the policies of the Government or a public institution, as the case may be?

Under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, all citizens have freedom of speech and expression. (Freedom of expression includes the right to write articles, speak on the radio and appear on television.) Article 19(1)(b) confers the right to assemble peacably and without arms. Under Article 19(1)(c), all citizens are guaranteed the right to form associations or unions. But these rights are subject to certain restrictions. The right of free speech and expression is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence (Article 19(2)). The right of assembly is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, or public order (Article 19(3)). The right to form associations is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interests of sovereignty and integrity of India, public order or morality (Article 19(4)). Issues such as sovereignty and integrity of India, morality, and so on, are not particularly relevant for discussion, since most often the rule forbidding a government servant is sought to be justified on the ground that it is a reasonable restriction in the interest of public order. In most cases that have come up for consideration before the Supreme Court, the Court had to decide whether the restriction imposed can be said to be a reasonable restriction in the interest of public order. Hence, the discussion in this article is mainly confined ro restriction on that ground, although there is also a brief discussion of Article 19(1)(g) and Article 19(5).

In the light of illiberal restrictions on freedom of expression sought to be placed or enforced by scientific research institutions funded by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), the question has arisen: Can the Government or any public institution, through Conduct Rules, prohibit an employee from criticising the policies of the Government or a public institution? A distinguished jurist, **Alladi Kuppuswami**, retired Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh, addresses this important question, basing himself on the Constitution, fundamental principles, and the law as expounded by the Supreme Court of India.

In *Kameswar Prasad vs. State of Bihar* (AIR 1962 SC 1166), the Supreme Court had to consider the validity of Rule 4A of the Bihar Government Service Conduct Rules which provided that no government servant shall participate in any demonstration in connection with any matter pertaining to his condition of service. The Supreme Court held that the prohibition of participation *in any demonstration* is invalid as violating Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b). It was sought to be argued that a person who voluntarily entered Government service must be deemed to have consented to such reasonable conditions as might be imposed for maintaining proper discipline in the service. Hence, the reasonableness and validity of the Government Servant Conduct Rules could not be tested solely by reference to the criteria laid down in Article 19. The Supreme Court rejected this contention, and held that, as Article 19 applies to all citizens, government servants in common with other citizens enjoy the protection of fundamental rights.

Further, Rule 4A was framed under Article 309 which enacts, "Subject to the Provisions of the Constitution, Acts of the appropriate legislature may regulate the recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public service..." Hence, if an employee agrees to be subject to the rules framed by the Government, they agree to do so because the rules are subject to the provisions of the Constitution. In other words, by agreeing to abide by the rules of the Government, they do not surrender their fundamental rights.

Relying on an earlier decision of the Supreme court in Bala Kotiah's case (1958 SCR 1052) some have argued that since a person has no fundamental right to be a government servant, there is no question of violating his fundamental right if disciplinary action is taken against him for violating the Government Servant Conduct Rules. This reasoning is not sound. The point is not whether a person has a fundamental right to be a government servant. The point is whether a person exercising his fundamental right can be punished. Under Article 13, the state shall not make any law which takes away or abridges fundamental rights and any law made in contravention of this clause shall be void. Hence, if the restrictions imposed are not reasonable restrictions, then the rule contravenes Article 19(1)(a) and hence is void. No punishment can therefore be imposed under a void rule!

THE next question is whether a rule prohibiting a government servant from criticising the policies of the



At a rally by Central Government employees outside South Block in New Delhi. It is clear from various rulings of the Supreme Court that a blanket prohibition on criticism of the policies of the government is not valid, and it makes no difference if the person criticising happens to be a government servant.

Government imposes a reasonable restriction in the interest of public order within the meaning of Article 19(2). In (1960) 2 SCR 821 *Superintendent of Central Prison vs. Ram Manohar Lohia*, it was held that "public order is synonymous with public safety and tranquility. It is the absence of disorder involving breaches of local significance..." In Kameswar Prasad's case, the Court observed that there must be a proximate and reasonable nexus between the nature of the speech prohibited and public disorder. The connection has to be intimate, real and rational. After referring to the above observation, the Supreme Court in Kameswar Prasad's case considered whether the prohibition of demonstrations could be said to be a reasonable restriction in the interest of public order. As the rule lays a ban on every type of demonstration, however innocent and however incapable of causing a breach of public tranquility, and does not confine itself to those forms of demonstrations which may lead to that result, the Court held that the rule was invalid. It was argued that the maintenance of discipline among government servants is necessary to maintain public order. If government servants were indisciplined and allowed to agitate in a disorderly manner for the redress of their grievances, it would lead to a demoralisation of the public and would be reflected in the disappearance of public order. This contention was rejected by stating that threat to public order should arise from the nature of the demonstration prohibited. This decision was followed in *O.K. Ghosh vs. Joseph* (1963 SC 812) which had to deal with Rule 4 of the Central Services Conduct Rules prohibiting any form of demonstration. The Supreme Court had also to consider the validity of a rule prohibiting the right to form associations under certain circumstances. This was also held to be invalid as the restriction in that case could not be said to be in the interests of public order. It relied on the following observation of Justice Patanjali Sastri in *Rex vs. Basudev*: "The connection between the restriction and public order must be real and proximate, not far-fetched or problematical."

Although the Supreme Court in *Kedaranath vs State of Bihar* (AIR 1962 S C. 955) held that Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code does not infringe Article 19(1)(a) and is valid, *the reasoning in the judgment supports the view that freedom of expression can be restrained only if it results in public disorder.*

Section 124A of the IPC along with the explanatory clauses is in the following terms (note the unambiguous nature of explanations 2 and 3):

Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India shall be punished with transportation for life or another term to which fine may be added or with imprisonment which may extend to three years to which fine may be added, or with fine.

Explanation 1: The expression disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.

Explanation 2: Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection do not constitute an offence under this section.

Explanation 3: Comments expressing disapprobation of the administrative or other action of the Government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection do not constitute an offence under this section.

In the course of the judgment, the Supreme Court observed: "... The provisions of the sections read as a whole, along with explanations, make it reasonably clear that the sections aim at rendering penal only such activities as would be intended or have a tendency, to create disorder or disturbance of public peace by resort to violence. As already pointed out, the explanations appended to the main body of the section make it clear that criticism of public measures or comment on government action, however strongly worded, would be within reasonable limits and would be consistent with the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and expression. It is only the words, written or spoken, etc., which have the pernicious tendency or intention of creating public disorder or disturbance of law and order that the law steps in to prevent such activities in the interest of public order..."

In 1998 (3) SCC *Devendrappa vs. Karnataka State Small Industries Development Corporation*, the Supreme Court was dealing with a case where the employee made allegations of corruption and maladministration, and expressed the hope that the Chairman of the Corporation be removed. In this particular case, the Court held that his conduct would not be in the interest of public order, as any action which would be detrimental to the interests or prestige of an employer clearly undermines discipline and the efficient performance of the organisation.

However, it cannot be said that every criticism of the policy of the Government would be detrimental to the interests and prestige of the Government and would undermine discipline and efficient performance of the Government! On the other hand, well-intentioned criticism may help in its efficient performance.

THE Supreme court also relied on Article 19(1)(g), which deals with the right of a person to carry on his occupation. Under Article 19(5), reasonable restrictions can be imposed on this right in the interests of the general public. The Court held that any rule that imposes such a restriction has to be read harmoniously with other freedoms such as the rights to freedom of speech and freedom to form associations. Service rules which are directly linked to and are essential for the duties of public office are protected by Article 19(1)(g) (read with Article 19(5)). The restrictions imposed by Article 19(5) cannot be questioned by exercise of freedom of speech. The Court, however, added, "Of course, the Courts will be vigilant to see that the code is not so widely framed as to unreasonably restrict fundamental freedoms."

There is no real and proximate connection between public order and criticism of the Government's policy. The reasoning that if every employee begins to criticise the policies of the Government, it will lead to indiscipline and affect public order is too far-fetched.

Certainly, a rule which places a blanket ban on criticism of the Government's policy is widely framed as to restrict freedom of speech unreasonably!

In view of the above discussion related to various decisions of the Supreme Court, it is clear that *a blanket rule that prohibits criticism of the policies of the Government is not a valid rule.* There is no real and proximate connection between public order and criticism of the Government's policy. The reasoning that if every employee begins to criticise the policies of the Government, it will lead to indiscipline and affect public order is too far-fetched. Criticising the policies of the Government is not equivalent to disobeying the orders of the Government. Democracy is based on fair criticism. That is why the freedom of speech and expression are protected. Day in and day out, parties in Opposition and other persons criticise the policies of the Government and yet they do not lead to public disorder. *It makes no difference if the person criticising happens to be a government servant.*

The same applies to employees of a public institution. Many such institutions are funded by the Government which also exercises control over the institutions. Such institutions have been held to be "States" within the meaning of Article 13. It has already been noticed that under Article 13(2), any law (law includes notifications, rules, and so on) made by a State in contravention of fundamental rights is void. Hence, a rule made by a public institution also, which is a State within the meaning of Part III (the chapter on Fundamental Rights), in contravention of fundamental rights is void. Thus, a general prohibition of an employee of a public institution criticising the policies of the institution or the Government is void. In this matter, there is no difference between the position of conduct rules made by the Government and conduct rules made by a public institution which is a "State" under Article 13.

It is also relevant to note the provisions of Article 33. Under this article, Parliament is empowered to modify, restrict or even abrogate any of the fundamental rights in their application to the armed forces, members of the forces charged with the maintenance of public order, persons employed in the intelligence department, or those employed in the telecommunication system set up for the purpose of any force. From this article it is clear that while Parliament is empowered to restrict or abrogate the fundamental rights of persons belonging to any of the above classes, no such power is conferred on Parliament to pass a law imposing restrictions on any other person or class of persons and any restriction on their fundamental rights must fall squarely within the terms of Article 19(2) to Article 19(5) of the Constitution.

Finally, the question which remains to be considered is: given that a person in service cannot be punished under a void rule (which prohibits him from criticising the policies of Government), can a person be prevented from being admitted as a government servant or a servant of a public institution under such a rule? It would logically follow that as the rule is void and therefore non-existent in the eye of the law, it cannot be relied on for refusing employment to a person who criticises the policies of the Government. But in practice, this is a matter difficult to prove unless it is noted in the records that his criticising the policies of the Government was the reason for refusing employment, though he is otherwise qualified! ■

This is an expanded (and updated) version of an article that appeared in The Hindu *a few months ago.*

A centre of hope

The T.T.K. Hospital in Chennai provides a fresh lease of life to many victims of substance abuse.

VINITA VISWANATHAN

"Trapped in a black hole,
Desperately trying to crush my soul,
My body is weak, my mind weaker,
As the hole encompasses me, I fall deeper
It's not my fault, I am not to blame,
For all this grief, pain and shame."

– Rahul, recovering alcoholic and drug addict in the US.

RAHUL is a friend one almost lost to drugs and alcohol. He was in the United States during the worst of his times. While visiting Rahul at a de-addiction centre in the U.S., one wondered about the kind of facilities available in India to help those in similar circumstances. The answer came during a visit to Chennai. One realised that people like Shanthi Ranganathan, the Founding Director and Honorary Secretary of the Chennai-based T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation (T.T.K. Hospital) were there to provide care and hope for the Rahuls in India.

The T.T.K. Hospital, a pioneer in the field of rehabilitation, is one among the over 300 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the country working on anti-substance abuse programmes. The T.T.K. Hospital, which was established in 1980, was recently in the limelight: Shanthi Ranganathan received the first United Nations Vienna Civil Society Award for her "outstanding contributions in the fight against drug-abuse and crime" from United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on July 19 (*Frontline*, August 13).

Shanthi Ranganathan started the specialised institution for rehabilitating alcoholics and drug addicts after she lost her husband to "the disease" (alcoholism) in 1979. "I did not know that alcoholism was a disease until my husband was taken to the U.S. for treatment," she said. After his death, Shanthi Ranganathan, who had a post-graduate degree in social service administration, besides experience in running a blood bank for five years, went to the U.S. and trained at the Hazeldon Institute in Minneapolis with the aim of setting up a similar de-addiction centre in India. "The common sentiment here (in India) is that alcoholism is one's own doing and is incurable," she said "But that is not so. It is a dreadful disease that has a cure and requires time, patience, understanding and cooperation from close associates of the victim, particularly the family."

The T.T.K. Hospital made a shift from the traditional "isolated psychiatric approach" to a more group-oriented form of treatment, and has, since its inception, treated about 11,000 patients, one-fifth of them free of cost. According to Shanthi Ranganathan, group activities enable the patients to realise that they are not alone in their battle. B. Mala, a psychologist at the de-addiction centre at the Voluntary Health Services (VHS), Chennai, shares this view. "Group therapy is definitely successful as the addicts share their experiences and are motivated by each other. Initially they have inhibitions but they gradually get over these," she said.

The T.T.K. Hospital, which started out as a small out-patient centre in Santhome, is now a 65-bed in-patient centre, located in a 41,000-sq ft premises in a calm and serene part of the city at Adyar. Initially the centre dealt with victims of alcoholism and in 1985 extended its services to drug-dependent persons. Patients are required to spend a month at the centre. Chronic addicts have the option of staying for an extended period of three months at the After Care Centre (ACC) that was established in 1989.

The centre was set up with a donation of Rs.1.1 crores from the T.T.K. group of industries. ACC has got funds also from the European Commission, the TVS group of companies and Birla Charities. The centre has a corpus fund of Rs.50 lakhs created by the T.T.K. group. It keeps increasing, with donations regularly pouring in from industries, individuals and organisations. Every year,



N. BALAJI

The T.T.K. Hospital in Chennai has played a pioneering role in anti-substance abuse programmes.

'To see a person recover completely is what is gratifying'

For **Shanthi Ranganathan**, awards are secondary. What makes her happy is the success in helping restore normalcy in the lives of those who come to her for help. To those undergoing treatment at the T.T.K. Hospital, she is "amma" or mother. "Amma gave us our lives back," they say. Shanthi Ranganathan spoke to **Vinita Viswanathan** on awards, addicts and more.

Excerpts from the interview:

▶ *First of all, congratulations on receiving the award. You must be an extremely happy person.*

Of course. I am delighted to be one of the first recipients (of the award). I knew I was one of the 100 or so nominees (Shanthi Ranganathan was nominated by the Indian government), but when I received the official letter from the U.N. office in Vienna, it came as a pleasant surprise.

▶ *What motivated you to set up the T.T.K. Hospital?*

When my husband was taken to the U.S. for treatment, I came to know that alcoholism was actually a disease and that it could be treated. His death affected us deeply. But instead of living in the past, I wanted to bring the knowledge available in the U.S. to India and implement it here. Initially, there was a lot of scepticism. Many said: 'Poor woman. She lost her husband at a young age, so she is trying to do something grand that will not work.' But we did not give up. We started small, but today we can look back in pride at our work.

▶ *How do families react to alcoholism and are these reactions different in India and abroad?*

Families anywhere in the world are affected if any of their member is an alcoholic. They go through the same feelings and traumas of anger, shame and resentment. In India, I notice a change in the social attitude towards alcoholics. Earlier it was a taboo to be a drinker. Therefore, it was that much harder to identify victims of alcoholism as it was hushed up within the families. Whereas abroad, even in schools, children are educated on the ill-effects of alcohol and drugs and on various other issues. While this may not necessarily bring down the number of victims, at least they knew that help was available and whom they could contact and how to go about with the recovery process. There is a change for the better in India now as more people are open about their drinking. The priority has shifted: from not letting the neighbours know to getting affected family member cured.

▶ *What do you feel about the phenomenon of 'social drinking'?*

The average age of initiation to alcohol has gone down. Earlier, young people would have their first drink at college. Nowadays, they are initiated into drinking at parties held to celebrate the conclusion of board exams. Children say it is just for one night and that they will not get addicted. But addiction is a process that does not start with a warning. My personal opinion is, why have that drink? Can one not have fun and enjoy oneself without alcohol?

▶ *Has the T.T.K. Hospital done anything to prevent youngsters from indulging in drinking, particularly drinking binges?*

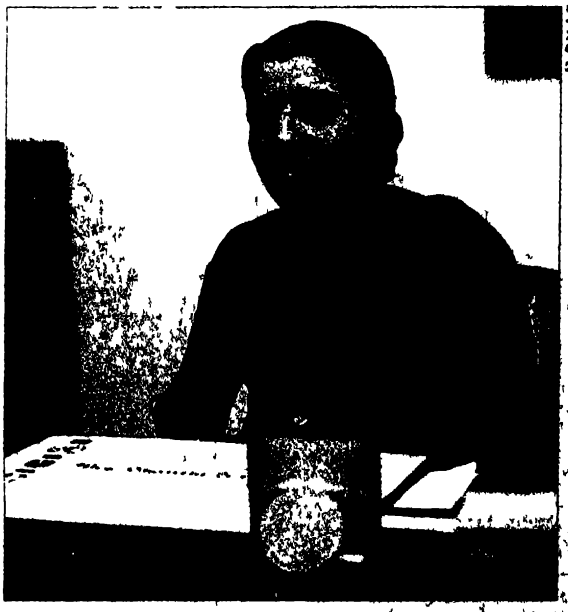
We have come out with two books that schools use. We hope they will be included as part of the curriculum. The books are designed and written in such a way as to appeal to youngsters. We have adopted a campaign similar to the 'Say No to Drugs', in the U.S. Ours is 'Alcohol - Not My Taste', where we tell children that there is no need to give in to peer pressure.

▶ *How different are the expectations of working with patients at the centre and working with those in villages?*

I think the success rate at the village camps is definitely higher than at the centre. For one thing, since we go through a host organisation, it is easy for us to win the trust of the people in villages in a short time. Once we have their trust, half the problem is solved. They give their complete attention and dedication to us and follow everything we say. Secondly, in case of a relapse, the whole village rallies behind the victim and supports him. This is because the village is a small community.

▶ *What has been the role of the government in your endeavour?*

The Central Government provides us with funds for bringing out our publications and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment gives us grants for community projects. The government involves non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in many of its programmes.



▶ *The centre is soon to complete two decades. What is it that keeps you going?*

When a rehabilitated patient comes to me and says 'I have been sober for so many years', or 'I am happy now', it gives me the strength and the will to keep going. Awards and recognitions are good, but ultimately what is most gratifying is to see a patient recover completely and lead a normal, healthy life.

▶ *Do you have more plans for the centre?*

Our immediate plan is to teach patients two vocations, tailoring and repairing household appliances. These skills would be a source of employment for them once they leave the centre.

the centre incurs an expenditure of Rs.60 lakhs. Treatment, which includes counselling, accommodation at the centre (excluding food) and medicines, costs about Rs.5,000 a patient.

The first week of treatment comprises detoxification. Patients experience severe withdrawal symptoms during this period as they are required to abstain from consuming alcohol or drugs. The withdrawal symptoms can range from loss of appetite and insomnia to delirium tremens, a condition in which patients suffer bouts of disorientation, tremors and hallucinations. The patients are treated for these symptoms.

After detoxification, patients undergo a psychological therapy. Trained professionals conduct this programme, with a strong emphasis on improving the quality of life. According to Shanthi Ranganathan, "The basic idea underlying the psychological therapy programme is to allow the patients to return to normalcy and a routine."



N. BALAJI

A group counselling session for family members of persons undergoing rehabilitation. The centre is keen that family members of every patient take active part in the rehabilitation programme.

On a typical day at the centre, patients wake up at 6-30 a.m., wash themselves, listen to a lecture and reflect on it, take part in group discussions, undergo individual counselling peppered with recreational activities and have meals. The day ends with a meeting of the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) or the Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.).

The A.A. and the N.A., which have chapters all over the world, are based on a non-sectarian spiritual programme; their central idea is that by helping others you help yourself. Past members of the group speak at these meetings and inspire patients to recover. Shanthi Ranganathan said: "Patients celebrate each year of sobriety as a new year of their life and continue to attend these meetings even after their stay at the centre ends."

Despite the excellent programme and efforts undertaken by the centre approximately 45 per cent of the patients end up in relapse. Dr. Anita Rao, Director of Medical Services at the centre said, "There is no single reason as to why a patient goes into relapse. A number of factors contribute to this phenomenon."

Raj has been seeking treatment from the centre for the past five years. His attempts at staying sober have been inconsistent. Raj attributed this primarily to "stress and frustrations at not being able to meet goals." Rachel George, a counsellor at the centre, said that a relapse does not occur overnight. It shows itself at first as craving. If help is sought, it can be prevented. Otherwise, it manifests itself as behavioural change. According to Rachel George, overconfidence, interaction with old drinking friends, refusal to change, grandiose, impulsive behaviour and workaholism are symptoms that can trigger a relapse.

After patients complete their treatment, they are asked to visit the centre on a regular basis. The number of visits come down as time passes. According to Dr. Anita Rao, "one of the steps taken to combat relapse is to prescribe a dose of disulfiram for recovering alcoholics and naltrexone for recovering drug addicts. These are medications that react violently with alcohol and drugs and cause adverse effects such as seizures and vomiting of blood, and serve as a deterrent to the consumption of alcohol or drugs."

In addition to the medication, the centre has a community support programme that involves a third party (other than the patient's immediate family) which alerts the centre in the event of a patient's relapse.

The centre is also a pioneer in Family Therapy Programme. Shanthi Ranganathan said: "While it appears as though the patient is the only affected person, one must remember that the family undergoes a similar, if not greater, trauma." The centre is strict in its insistence that the family of every patient takes part in the programme.

V. Thirumagal, Director of Quality Control and Patient Care, said: "The main focus of this programme is for family members to realise that their husband/son requires their complete support and understanding to recover, and for the family to maintain a normal routine." They are taught how to deal with an alcoholic and what to do when he goes into a relapse. The family members also meet with Al-Anon, a group that functions along similar lines of the A.A., but counsels family members and close associates of alcoholics.

Patients who approach the centre are first screened by the in-take counsellor. Thirumagal said: "If the patient has a severe medical condition that we are not equipped to handle then we refer him to another hospital. We take him after the condition has been brought under control." The centre admits about 900 patients a year. The patients are mostly men. The average age of alcoholics is around 35 years and that of drug addicts, between 25 and 35. The centre has also treated the odd female patient.

Shanthi Rang-anathan said: "While patients are brought here by their relatives or someone who has their best interests in mind, we don't accept anyone who comes here against his will." As is the case with almost all problems, the stepping stone to recovery is acceptance of the problem, she added.

Anand was a social drinker in college; gradually, his dependence on alcohol grew to unimaginable proportions. "I never thought I had a problem and always blamed external elements for my condi-

tion," he said. His job performance was at an ebb and he plunged into marriage in the hope that it would solve his problems. "After 22 years of addiction and four other centres, I came here in 1990. Today I have a new life and I repent for the pain I have caused to all those around me," he said.

Regret, remorse and a strong desire to make amends prevail among most patients at the centre. However, despite seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, they do not know how to get there. Keeping this in mind, the centre has a number of counsellors who provide individual attention to the patients and their families. All the counsellors hold post-graduate degrees in psychology and/or social work and devote themselves to the challenge of restoring stability to the shattered lives of families and patients.



N. BALAJI

At a counselling session.

The centre has, since 1986, conducted over 250 training programmes, 300 lectures and about 100 exhibitions for industries, medical staff and social workers throughout India. Among the industries and institutions that benefited from the programme are Tata Iron and Steel Company Ltd., Jamshedpur; Wheels India Ltd., Chennai; social workers and medical officers in Mumbai and Chennai; and the staff of the safety department of Southern Railway.

The T.T.K. Hospital is now working with two Chennai-based establishments to make them drug- and alcohol-free. It collaborates with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which, along with the United Nations Drug Control Programme, started the "Developing Community Drug Rehabilitation and Work Place Prevention Project" in India in 1995. The programme, which covers nine cities and 12 establishments in India, was formulated in response to the problem of the rising number of drug addicts in the country. For this programme, the ILO selected nine host organisations, one in each city. These organisations are trained to work with local establishments. The T.T.K. Hospital has been selected to work with two establishments in Chennai – Kasturi and Sons Ltd. and Hindustan Motors, two organisations that volunteered to be part of the programme.

Kasturi and Sons Ltd and Hindustan Motors had been making efforts to create awareness among their employees about the ill-effects of substance abuse even before the start of this programme. When they got the opportunity to join forces with an international agency, the managements extended complete cooperation. According to Mukthiar Singh, the National ILO Project Co-ordinator for India, "it was largely because of the enthusiasm shown by the managements of the two companies that they were selected for the programme." The ILO's primary role in this programme is to "train the trainers", that is, local host organisations such as the T.T.K. Hospital. Among other things, the programme teaches volunteers to identify addicts, deal with them and to bring down absenteeism in the establishments. The T.T.K. Hospital conducts seminars, meetings and awareness programmes for the employees and the employers of the two establishments on a regular basis.

Malini Roberts, Medical Social Worker at The Hindu Employees' Health and Welfare Centre run by Kasturi and Sons Ltd, is satisfied with the programme and says, "the management's role is crucial for the success of the programme." Since 1983, even prior to the ILO programme, Kasturi and Sons Ltd was referring employees with substance abuse problems to the T.T.K. Hospital. The management of Kasturi and Sons Ltd shows its support to the recovering alcoholics by paying for the treatment and granting medical leave for the period of treatment. Those undergoing rehabilitation are seen as victims, rather than as culprits. As part of the ILO programme Kasturi and Sons Ltd has laid down a policy on substance abuse at the workplace.

About 26 employees of Hindustan Motors underwent rehabilitation and all of them have remained sober since then. P.R. Santhanakrishnan, Divisional Manager, Industrial Relations, Hindustan Motors, says: "The collaboration with the ILO and the T.T.K. Hospital has proved to be excellent. Instead of just concentrating on alcoholics requiring rehabilitation, we now pay heed to employees who are non-alcoholics, urging them to stay so." The stress is on the maxim 'Prevention is better than cure'. Since the implementation of the ILO programme, there have been no new cases of alcoholism in Hindustan Motors.

It is community service projects such as these that place the T.T.K. Hospital in a class of its own. "People need to be made aware that such de-addiction centres exist," said Shanthi Ranganathan, "and that it is possible to cure alcoholism and drug addiction."

Apart from catering to individuals and industries, the T.T.K. Hospital has an extensive community project that involves conducting camps on alcoholism in villages. Currently, the centre has adopted six areas in Tamil Nadu and conducts camps on a regular basis. To date, about 60 camps have been conducted. The duration of each camp is 15 days, and includes a doctor, a nurse and counsellors.

Assisted by a host organisation (any organisation within the village that has earned the trust of the people, such as a school or a government agency) that acts as a medium, the centre interacts with the villagers.

The T.T.K. Hospital is waging a relentless war against drug and alcohol abuse. It has extended its activities to other States and even other countries. It has conducted over 1,000 training programmes for medical and social workers in India. It has also trained a number of health and social workers from Sweden, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Mongolia. Shanthi Ranganathan said: "We cannot reach out to everyone who needs our help. This is why we train people from various countries, particularly from the subcontinent." Shanthi Ranganathan and the T.T.K. Hospital are thus a great source of inspiration to other agencies and individuals all over the world in the battle against substance abuse. ■

Names of patients have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Wanted, bold decisions

India should accept that converting the Line of Control into an international border is the only solution to the Kashmir problem. It should ask the world to be firm with Pakistan for adopting fundamentalist Islam and sponsoring international terrorism.

B.G. DESHMUKH

THE Government of India has formed a Review Committee to look into what happened in Kargil, how and why it happened at all, what should be done and what remedial steps should be taken. No doubt the committee will do an excellent job, but I still think that it will not be able to tackle the basic issue, for which certain bold decisions will have to be taken by the government.

First, we must accept that Jammu and Kashmir is not a subject to be tackled by a single Ministry. At present the Jammu and Kashmir Cell in the Union Home Ministry looks after this, but even when I was in government I used to argue that this was not the correct approach. The Home Ministry is naturally concerned with the subject as it deals with all matters relating to States. There is also a tradition of Jammu and Kashmir being looked after by the Home Ministry. Years ago there used to be a Jammu and Kashmir Secretary whose sole responsibility and duty was to look after that State. But other Ministries are also vitally concerned with the subject: the Defence Ministry is concerned with it because of national security considerations; the External Affairs Ministry is concerned because a foreign country, namely Pakistan, is involved and there are international ramifications; the Finance Ministry is concerned because of huge financial outlays required to tackle the problem. Other Ministries are also concerned to a greater or lesser extent. I therefore used to argue that considering the multi-Ministry concern and the international importance of the subject, the Jammu and Kashmir problem should be handled by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). This will ensure proper coordination among the Ministries and any step or decision taken will have the authority of the PMO behind it. The matter should be under the charge of a young and dynamic Minister of State or even a professional technocrat working as an adviser to the Prime Minister but with the status of a Minister of State. One argument against this suggestion was that this would give an unnecessarily high profile to the Jammu and Kashmir problem when we may not want to do so. But the fact is that whether we like it or not, Jammu and Kashmir is going to be a high-profile problem until it is fully resolved and especially when Pakistan will continue to do its utmost to highlight it on the international plane.

I HAD also seen that the Jammu and Kashmir problem was not handled by the government on the basis of continuity. No doubt there are sections in the Home Ministry and also in the External Affairs Ministry dealing with this matter. But owing to governmental practices, the officers in charge of these sections or divisions change periodically and this change affects the continuity of handling. This is apart from the political direction given by the party in power. I had therefore thought that the government should encourage establishing think tanks outside the government. I had in mind something like the Rand Corporation or the Brookings Institute in the United States. As Cabinet Secretary I called a meeting of important Ministries to discuss this subject in a general way. The Finance Ministry was supportive and as a matter of fact established and then continuously helped non-governmental autonomous bodies. Even the Defence Ministry supported the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses and was prepared to accept the need for more such institutes. But the Home Ministry and the External Affairs Ministry were not prepared to consider the idea, especially in the case of Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan. I still think that we should have established a think tank outside the government to study the Jammu and Kashmir problem and a think tank to deal with the country's relationship with Pakistan. Such a measure would have ensured continuity in handling the subject; it would also have ensured that bureaucratic or political baggage would not affect the study of this subject. These think tanks could have then highlighted continuously the interests and concerns of the country and put them up before the public. This would have ensured that everything is not left to the government or to the discretion of politicians. The External Affairs Ministry at that time did mention the unit established in the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi to carry out studies about relations with Pakistan. But I was not very happy with this.

I was also not happy about the way the intelligence agencies were functioning (see the article "Central intelligence agencies – lack of standing coordinating mechanism" in my book *A Cabinet Secretary Looks Around*, 1993). At least when I was in government there was no standing coordinating mechanism to study, scrutinise and evaluate reports from all the intelligence agencies, civil and military. There was a Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), but it just went into limbo after its first chairman was shifted. The chairmanship of the JIC was used more to accommodate police officers who either were not wanted elsewhere or for whom another slot could not be found. Our intelligence agencies also suffered from their usual inability to share intelligence with other agencies or share sources because of the risk of their disclosure. There was no coordinating mechanism that could assign jobs to these intelligence agencies. I had therefore at that time suggested something like an Intelligence Coordination Committee on the pattern available in the United Kingdom. This would be a committee presided over by the Cabinet Secretary, and the chairman of the JIC would be its secretary. As usual the military intelligence was lukewarm to this idea. If only such a committee had been set up, there would have been better scrutiny and utilisation of intelligence for national security. Now that the National

Security Council (NSC) has been set up, hopefully its secretariat would discharge such a function. Its job has been laid down and the JSC should start tackling it urgently. For example, India has launched satellites and some of them must be orbiting over the Jammu and Kashmir area. I am told that such satellites pass these areas at least once a day. It is reasonable to assume that the Defence Ministry is getting photographs from such satellites and this should have helped in keeping a watch over the Line of Control (LoC). If this has not been done so far, it should be done immediately. Another point for the NSC is that the Security Adviser will have to be a full-time Adviser and not somebody, as is the case now, who also holds another post. The present situation is thoroughly unsatisfactory as the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister is, even otherwise, very busy as the head of the PMO.

WE are also very poor in projecting our case on Jammu and Kashmir on the international scene. We are always apologetic if not defensive. We should be bold and confident enough to tell the world that we are a mature working democracy while Pakistan is ruled in a dictatorial fashion by the Punjabi elite consisting of landlords, industrialists and a civilian-military complex. Such a government always needs an issue to divert public attention away from its dictatorial set-up. To achieve this there is no better way than India-bashing. The issue of Kashmir is not only emotion-charged as it is a Muslim-majority area which decided to remain in India; it is also a sensitive issue to the Punjabi military elite as it has suffered humiliating defeats in 1965 and 1971. India should be bold enough to tell the world that Pakistan cannot claim to be a protector of Muslims as it lost this claim when it butchered almost 18 lakh East Pakistani (now Bangladeshi) Muslims in the period up to 1970. What the Punjabi elite did to East Pakistani Muslims is as reprehensible as what Adolf Hitler did to the Jewish community. The East Pakistani population was very large compared to the West Pakistani population, especially its Punjabi component. On the basis of universal suffrage East Pakistanis should have therefore decided the choice of the Prime Minister. This idea was nullified by the Punjabi elite, and they therefore started butchering East Pakistani Muslims. They even boasted that they had created a generation of people of indeterminate parentage, who would serve the Punjabi elite in ruling East Pakistan. India should therefore make it clear to the Pakistanis that they had no case at all for being the champions of Muslims in India.

Not only that. They cannot even look after all Muslims in Pakistan. The predominant Sunni community is bent on subjugating the Shia minority. Other Islamic groups such as the Ahmedias are also marked out. India should therefore expose not only to the world but even to the Pakistani common man what a hollow claim Pakistan has for being the champion of Muslims in India. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder and first Governor-General, had declared in his address to the nation that "in Pakistan there are no Hindus or Muslims, they are all Pakistanis". I am told that these words have since been erased from his address. The minorities in Pakistan have now become second-class citizens. The number of Hindus now is one-tenth of what it was in 1947. The Punjabi elite has now embraced fundamentalist Islam to keep their grip on the people of Pakistan. It started with President Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. The final shape has now been given by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Even the Opposition in Pakistan has exposed this hypocrisy and has been alleging that the Punjabi elite is using Islam only to perpetuate its rule in Pakistan. The various Provinces in Pakistan, such as Sindh and Baluchistan, are seething with discontent against the domination of the Punjabi elite. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto did try to destroy the stranglehold of this elite and render social justice to the common man but he was overthrown by this section. Unless, therefore, there rises a strong middle class in Pakistan, which will challenge the dictatorial authority of the Punjabi elite, I do not think that there will be any durable peace between India and Pakistan.

FORTUNATELY this process has already started, although only in a very small way, because of the tyranny and oppression of the ruling elite. The Pakistani newspapers somehow manage to give expression to this discontent. Of course, India cannot and should not be seen to be supporting this movement, but should somehow convey support to it. For this purpose, India should encourage people-to-people contacts and exchanges, allow more people to travel freely and have more cultural intercourse and more free trade. Hopefully, this should help the democratic movement in Pakistan.

The Punjabi elite, and especially its civilian-military component, fully exploited the war in Afghanistan. It allowed Pakistan to be used by the Americans as a conduit for funds and military hardware to set up resistance and insurgency against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) set up training camps for Afghan militants and also recruits from all over the world to fight the Soviet Union. It also managed to keep a substantial portion of the proceeds of the aid in Pakistan itself, hoodwinking the Americans. This was the beginning of the Taliban movement, which ultimately took over Afghanistan. But in this process the Punjabi elite has created a Frankenstein which is going to be a threat to it. The Taliban philosophy has taken deep roots in Pakistan itself; I was told that it had infiltrated the Pakistani armed forces and secured a firm foothold among the junior officer cadre. The Punjabi elite uses the Taliban philosophy and approach to send trained men as "Mujahideens" into Kashmir. Many of them are not Kashmiris but Afghans, tribal people from the Frontier Province and even recruits from West Asia and North Africa. India should make clear to the world the devastating implications of this action of Pakistan. Pakistan is encouraging the Taliban movement, which would not remain confined to Pakistan and Kashmir but would create disturbances in the whole of Central Asia and even in Iran and West Asia. Russia is already aware of this and is fighting this menace. China is becoming aware of this new danger in its Central Asian province. India should, therefore, ask the world to be firm with Pakistan for indulging in this kind of international terrorism. India should also try to dissuade the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Group of 8 countries from giving financial help to Pakistan unless it changes its ways. A usual argument is that if such help is not given the Pakistani economy will collapse and there will be nothing but chaos and anarchy, which will benefit only the fundamentalists. But the fact is that the Punjabi elite is using this financial help not to improve the national economy but to perpetuate its grip over the country. If, therefore, such financial help is withheld, it could only result in helping the democratic forces in Pakistan.

India should take effective steps to educate Kashmiris on this situation. The Punjabi elite would like to have Kashmir but only as a fiefdom, as in the case of Sindh and Baluchistan. The Shia community in Kashmir would be gravely threatened by the Sunni community. Of course, minorities such as the Kashmiri Pandits would be almost wiped out. The history of terrorism indulged in by Pakistan should also be explained to

Kashmiris. In the beginning, Pakistan encouraged an autonomous, independent Kashmir for which the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front was fighting. Eventually, the Punjabi elite did not like the idea as it wanted Kashmir to be part of Pakistan. It therefore encouraged militant organisations such as the Hizbul Mujahideen and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, which wanted Kashmir to accede to Pakistan. Many of these organisations had a strong base in Kashmir, and Pakistan came to realise that this was not in its interest. By the end of 1988, the ISI had realised the potential of the Taliban philosophy and methodology. It, therefore, created militant groups outside Kashmir but firmly based in Pakistan, which were then used as Mujahideen groups to create insurgency in Kashmir. India should explain all this to the people of Kashmir, bringing out clearly the Pakistani strategy to capture Kashmir to make it a fiefdom of the Punjabi elite.

At the same time, India should accept that it has to do quite a lot in Kashmir. India should take immediate steps to give a clean, uncorrupt administration, which will really carry out poverty alleviation and other developmental schemes. It must be admitted that India has tolerated large-scale corruption in Kashmir. It has also misused its authority in certain cases. Putting Sheikh Abdullah in custody, the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah's Government in 1986, the rigging of elections in 1988, and again the dissolution of the State Assembly in 1990 are examples. India has also not handled the Kashmir problem imaginatively. It did not give funds to Farooq Abdullah to take over primary schools from the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1988-89. The funds needed were paltry, considering the importance of the step. I also wanted to introduce the system of leave-travel concession so that at least Kashmiri government servants and their families could come out of Kashmir once in three years and see what India is. But I could not push this through for lack of grants from Delhi. The unnecessary provocation of suggesting the abrogation of Article 370 should be avoided scrupulously. India must accept its responsibility for having created a fertile ground in Kashmir for Pakistan to launch successful operations of militancy and insurgency. This should not be lost sight of in the advocacy against the Pakistani proxy war.

Whether India must cross the LoC and destroy the bases and training camps of the militants in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) has been under discussion for a very long time. But India should also admit that such a luxury is now available only to very strong nations. The Americans could do this when they blasted Osama bin Laden's base in Afghanistan or bombed a factory in Sudan. China could send its divisions into Vietnam to teach the latter a lesson. Theoretically, India also could have done so in POK but it missed the chance. It could not even undertake what is called hot pursuit. And now India and Pakistan being nuclear weapon states, this is just not possible. Pakistan considers Jammu and Kashmir a disputed territory but treats it as part of Pakistan. Any attack on POK will therefore be considered by it as an attack on Pakistan itself and it will retaliate accordingly. In the bargain, India would lose international sympathy and give Pakistan a chance almost to create a nuclear holocaust in the subcontinent. India should therefore forget about crossing the LoC into POK.

AT the same time, India should also finally accept that converting the LoC into an international border is the only solution to the problem. Indira Gandhi could not do so at Shimla in 1971, but that is history. No Indian political party, or for that matter no Pakistan political party, would say so on a public platform, but there is a very good chance of the international community standing by India in this regard. India may not directly approach any foreign nation or even the United Nations for this as its policy is to treat this problem as a bilateral issue based on the Simla Agreement. But then there is no objection if India informally briefs some countries and statesmen who are friendly to it to float this idea and give it a push on the international circuit. This is not interference or internationalising the issue. There is a good chance of this strategy succeeding, at least at the present juncture. These countries are beginning to realise, and if they have not India should make them realise, that the Pakistani strategy of encouraging fundamentalist Islam at home and exporting international terrorism is a powerful destabilising force not only in the Indian subcontinent but in the whole of the Central Asian heartland. There are therefore good prospects of India's objective of getting the LoC converted into an international border being achieved. Of course, for this purpose there will have to be a national consensus in India. Otherwise any party in power advocating this would suffer heavy flak from the Opposition parties.

While dealing with the Kashmir issue, one cannot and should not forget the large Muslim community in India. It has suffered the consequences of Partition in 1947. It is most unfair that many members of the Hindu community have come to look at this community with suspicion for no fault of its. These Muslims are Indians as much as any other Indian is and it is not doing them justice if they are asked to prove their loyalty to the Indian nation. Such steps would only alienate them. Therefore, when the Kashmir issue is discussed or when Pakistan tries to internationalise it by consciously and deliberately heightening the proxy war, many people in the Indian Muslim community became unsettled and uneasy. Many people say that if Kashmir is given to Pakistan, it will reopen the wounds of Partition and that may be unfair to the Muslims in India. India has been their homeland and they are not going to leave it, whatever the provocation and allegation. India should also ensure that no political party is allowed to propagate the philosophy of holding the present generation of Muslims responsible for what their forefathers might or might not have done. There should be a national consensus on how to deal with this so-called question of the Muslim community and especially as to how not to exploit them as mere vote banks. It should be especially ensured that the Kashmir issue is in no way linked to the loyalty and patriotism of the Muslim community in India.

Even if the Kashmir issue is resolved, there is no guarantee that there will be no tension between India and Pakistan. One of the prominent militant organisations in Pakistan, the Lashkar -e-Taiba, is on record as saying that it would like to have Kashmir as a base and then destabilise India by using the large Muslim minority in India. A military solution by India of breaking Pakistan is also not practical. It will only create more unstable countries in India's neighbourhood. It would be worse than the geo-political situation as it exists today.

India must therefore try to negotiate bilaterally with Pakistan and its objective should be to make the LoC the international border. India should also bring to the attention of the international community the dangerous game being played by Pakistan by adopting fundamentalist Islam and sponsoring international terrorism. But, a real, lasting peace is possible only if the Punjabi elite are removed and their place taken by a strong, vibrant middle class in Pakistan. India should do its best to help create such a situation. ■

B.G. Deshmukh is a former Cabinet Secretary, who has also served as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister.

The myth of inflation control

The low rate of point-to-point inflation is not a reflection of the success of the BJP-led government's efforts at inflation control, but in large measure a result of its failure to control prices last year.

C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

STATISTICALLY speaking, the Bharatiya Janata Party could not have had it any better. The annualised, point-to-point inflation rate, as measured by changes in the wholesale price index (WPI), touched a historic low of 1.2 per cent during the week ending July 24. The party's propaganda machine was quick to add this to its list of "achievements" to be flaunted before the electorate in the course of the election campaign. In his Independence Day address, caretaker Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee did not fail to note that inflation in the country was at its lowest in 17 years at 1.3 per cent.

Vajpayee's claim is bound to carry some weight, given the veneer of precision associated with numerical economic indicators such as movements in the WPI. But given the perennial lack of correspondence between trends suggested by point-to-point inflation figures and 'felt realities' on the ground, a careful scrutiny of the claim is in order. An examination of point-to-point inflation rates indicates that the 1.2 per cent level was indeed the culmination of a medium-term decline in annualised rates of inflation from around 9 per cent in early November 1998 to 5 per cent in early February, 4 per cent at the end of April, 3 per cent in mid-June and 2 per cent in early July.

There are, however, a number of other noteworthy trends reflected by the evidence. To start with, while during the financial year 1998-99 a deceleration in the rate of increase of the prices of manufactured products played a role in dampening overall inflation, matters have since changed substantially. In recent weeks the rate of inflation for "all commodities" grouped together has fallen at a faster rate than that of manufactured products. This indicates that commodities other than manufactures have been responsible for the sharp decline (from 4 to 1.6 per cent) in the point-to-point inflation rate in the nine weeks starting with the one ending May 22, when the caretaker government was in place.

Second, the deceleration in the rate of overall inflation has occurred despite a stepwise rise in the rate of inflation in the Fuel, Power and Light group, where most prices are administered by the government. In other words, there have been other deflationary pressures at work in the economy, which have more than counteracted the inflationary impetus which is the usual byproduct of rises in the administered prices of essential and basic goods.

Third, it is the principal group "primary articles" which has (in the latest 14 weeks for which data is available) recorded an inflation trend very similar to the overall index of commodity prices. This makes it the principal contributor to the decline in the inflation rate. Within that group, the fruits and vegetables (F&V) subgroup has registered a dramatic decline in the rate of inflation from around 20 per cent on an annualised point-to-point basis in early March to -20 per cent in early July.

This suggests that a collapse in F&V prices explains the fall in the inflation rate. This is a collapse relative to the extremely high prices in this category which prevailed in these months of the previous year, so it reflects more of a reversion to the norm rather than a secular decline in the prices of these goods. For example, the index for vegetables during the week ended July 31 stood at 459.7, compared with 769 during the corresponding week of the previous year.

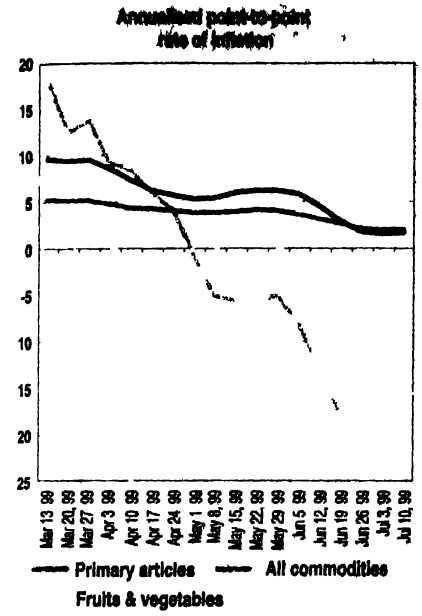
The implied role of the F&V subgroup in influencing price trends comes out more clearly from the evidence on trends in the monthly average wholesale price index for different groups and subgroups between March 1997 and April 1999. The All Commodities index is broken up into three principal groups: Primary Articles; Fuel, Power, Light and Lubricants; and Manufactured Products. Starting from March 1998, the movement of the WPI for All Commodities diverged noticeably from the trend warranted by movements in the indices for the Fuel, Power and Light and the Manufactured Products subgroup. This implies that the rise in the overall WPI as of March 1998 was substantially driven by increases in the index for Primary Articles.

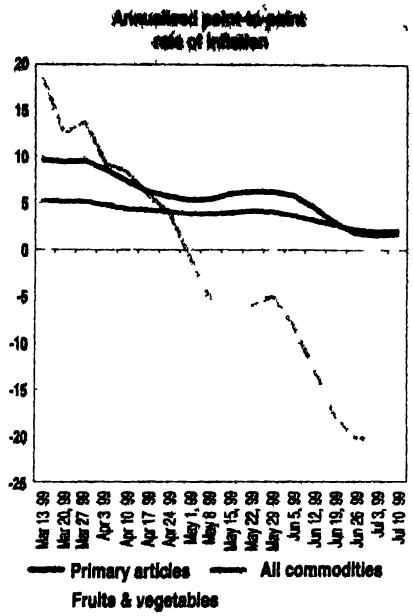
However, when we examine the constituent elements of the primary articles group, we find that while there has been a steady rise in the WPI for foodgrains, the behaviour of the index for F&V has been volatile. Between March and October 1998, the WPI for F&V rose by 63 per cent. This was exceptional, since there was no such similar rise in the F&V index between March and November 1997, when the F&V index rose by just 1.1 per cent. The increase between March and October 1998 was basically the result of an unprecedented increase in the prices of a few items such as onions and potatoes, which was primarily not owing to supply shortages but driven by speculation.

It is indeed true that the F&V subgroup accounts only for a weight of 4.1 (out of 100) in the WPI, while primary articles as a group carry a weight of 32.3. But the sharp increase in F&V prices between March and November 1998 would itself have contributed to an increase of 8.1 per cent in the primary articles index. During this period, foodgrain prices rose by 8.7 per cent, which – given the weight of 7.92 commanded by this category – would have pushed up the primary articles index by 2.2 per cent.

Thus fruits, vegetable and foodgrains together contributed to a 10.9 per cent increase in the WPI for primary articles. The actual increase in the primary articles index between March and October 1998 was 13.2 per cent, indicating that fruits, vegetables and foodgrains accounted for more than four-fifths of the increase in the prices of primary articles.

The significance of this comes through when we realise that the primary articles group contributed to a 4.3 per cent rise in the overall WPI, which rose by just 6.6 per cent during this period. Around two-thirds of the increase in the overall index during this period was owing to increases in the prices of fruits, vegetables and food-





grains

Given the unusual, dramatic and speculation-driven increase in F&V prices a correction was inevitable Starting November 1998, the WPI for the F&V subgroup virtually collapsed

This obviously affected the annualised rate of increase in the WPI for this subgroup as well, which came down sharply from 54 1 per cent in October 1998 to 6 7 per cent in April 1999 This was a period when the prices of both manufactured products and of fuel and so on were coming down as a result of the recessionary environment and because administered price hikes were limited As a result, the annual point-to point rate of inflation came down substantially and consistently during these months

There are a number of implications that follow from these trends To start with, declining rates of inflation in the prices of both manufactured products and primary articles appear to have played a role in reducing the point-to-point inflation rate, though primary product price trends have had a stronger effect The low rate of manufactured product price inflation is clearly the result of the recessionary environment created by the sluggishness of the domestic market and intense competition from abroad in the wake of economic liberalisation That is, the deceleration in the rate of manufacturing price inflation can hardly be attributed to any policy of the government specifically designed to moderate inflationary trends

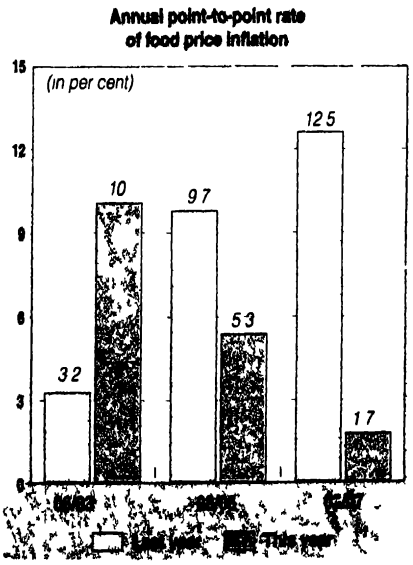
However, the principal argument here is that even the deceleration in primary article inflation is surprisingly not the result of any state initiative but of past state failure The massive inflation in F&V prices in the early part of the BJP-led government s term was, it was widely accepted even then, the result of poor supply management on the one hand and the failure to come down heavily on speculators in the trading community, who constituted an influential vote bank of the BJP In fact leading figures in the government virtually washed their hands of the problem arguing that hoarding and speculation were not crimes but legitimate activities in a market economy

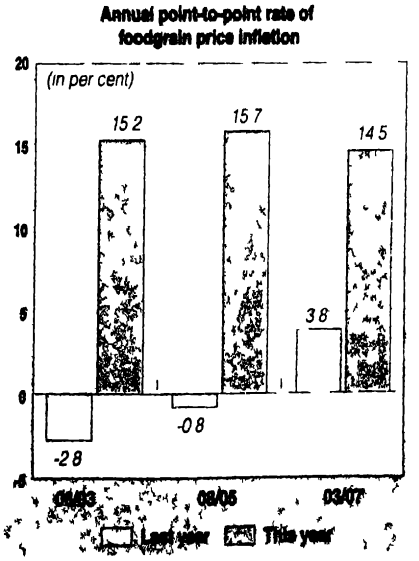
In the event the non-seasonal and high rate of inflation persisted for a long period till public opinion forced the government to act to roll back prices to levels warranted by costs and the supply-demand situation The fact that F&V prices were abnormally and excessively high during the first three-quarters of financial year 1998-99 obviously implies that once prices were restored to normal levels the point to point rate of inflation in the corresponding period of this financial year would be negative, given the high base value with which the comparison is being made In fact, the point-to-point rate of inflation has been consistently negative starting with the week ending May 1 1999 It is this negative rate of F&V price inflation that has brought the overall rate of inflation down to its present level of less than 2 per cent That is, the low point to point inflation rate is not a reflection of the success of the government's efforts at inflation control, but in large measure a result of its failure to control prices during the corresponding period last year

Going by the policy pronouncements of the government and the central bank, the principal instruments of inflation control in the post-reform environment are a curtailment of the fiscal deficit and a tight monetary policy In fact, policy on both these fronts has been particularly lax in recent times Not only was the fiscal deficit in 1998-99 high at close to 7 per cent of GDP, but the Reserve Bank of India has loosened controls on money supply to enhance liquidity in the system and bring down interest rates

While this suggests that the belief in a simple and direct relationship between the fiscal deficit and money supply increases on the one hand and price movements on the other is not warranted even on empirical, let alone theoretical, grounds, it also indicates that the government has not seriously pursued an agenda of inflation control

The evidence suggests that inflation control was not a priority objective for the





government. In fact, but for the collapse in F&V prices, it appears that the government's actions would have contributed to an acceleration of inflation. This comes through if we, for example, examine the point-to-point rate of inflation for three groups of commodities (all commodities, food articles and foodgrains) for three points of time during March-July 1999 and the corresponding points of time in 1998. Across these three points in time, the overall rate of inflation fell from 5.2 to 1.8 per cent during 1999, while it rose from 4.8 to 8.1 per cent in 1998. A similar trend prevailed in the case of food articles as a group, with the point-to-point inflation rate declining from 10.0 to 1.7 per cent in 1999 and rising from 3.2 to 12.5 per cent in 1998. In fact, as argued earlier, the trend in food prices as a whole was a major influence on the overall rate of inflation.

However, there is one subgroup included in the food articles group, namely, foodgrains, where these trends in inflation were not replicated. While the annual point-to-point rate of inflation of foodgrain prices was low or negative during March-July 1998, it was consistently high at around 15 per cent at all these points of time in 1999. The reason for this is that the government has in its procurement operations provided special bonuses above the support price recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices and backed them with rising issue prices for foodgrains distributed through the public distribution system. This has provided a high and rising floor for foodgrain prices, resulting in the trends observed.

Thus, if the sharp rise in 1998 and inevitable reversal in F&V price inflation had not occurred, and the industrial sector had not been mired in a recession because of appropriate state policy, we would in all likelihood have had a significantly high rate of inflation currently, driven by an engineered food price inflation and supported by buoyant manufacturing prices.

Clearly, therefore, the lull in the point-to-point rate of inflation is not an "achievement" of the BJP-led government, but a fortuitous consequence of its acts of omission and commission which in the first instance had deleterious consequences such as the speculative inflation in the early part of its term and the persistent recession right through its tenure. As is to be expected of a party that derives its sustenance from the rich, these acts have affected most adversely those commodities which dominate the consumption basket of the poor and the middle classes of the country. ■

■ COLUMN

A sordid record

The BJP's electoral tactics are calculated to cover up its misgovernance and political disorientation. Its nuclear muscle-flexing represents dangerous adventurism.

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE is the quintessential liberal, the soft, moderate, face of the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose natural instincts favour a consensual approach to contentious issues. He is not given to militant postures, or to war-mongering with neighbours. Domestically, he is loath to push the minorities into a corner. His real agenda is un-aggressive; it has nothing to do with reshaping and redefining Indian nationhood or promoting Hindutva. Vajpayee works at a high comfort level with his coalition partners. He inspires confidence among the larger public that the BJP is indeed a party that is "tried, tested and trusted".

Right? Wrong! Going by his Independence Day address, Vajpayee and his projected image could not be further apart. Despite the Election Commission's restrictions, Vajpayee went all out to project the BJP as a party that wants to alter the *status quo*, indulges in chauvinist drum-beating, plays up the "nation-in-peril" theme and lays claim to high "achievements", although these have little to do with its policies (for example, the 200 million tonnes grain output), or are otherwise questionable (for example, an inflation rate of 1.6 per cent). Kargil, *shaurya* and *parakrama* were central to his address. It was no aberration that Vajpayee played up Pokharan-II and announced that Agni-II would soon be inducted into India's arsenal.

This announcement was more an image-hardening exercise than something operationally significant. The Agni-II missile is nowhere near induction. If Agni-I, after three test-flights, was still considered a "technology demonstrator", not even a prototype, then Agni-II can hardly be characterised as something starkly different after one test. Usually, a missile goes through 10 to 20 tests before it can be declared operationally reliable.

This, typically, takes five to 10 years. Agni-II is not just a scaled-up, longer-range version of Agni-I. It uses a wholly different (solid) fuel in the second stage. Now, fuels usually require repeated testing because their performance has a serious bearing on the missile's range and accuracy.

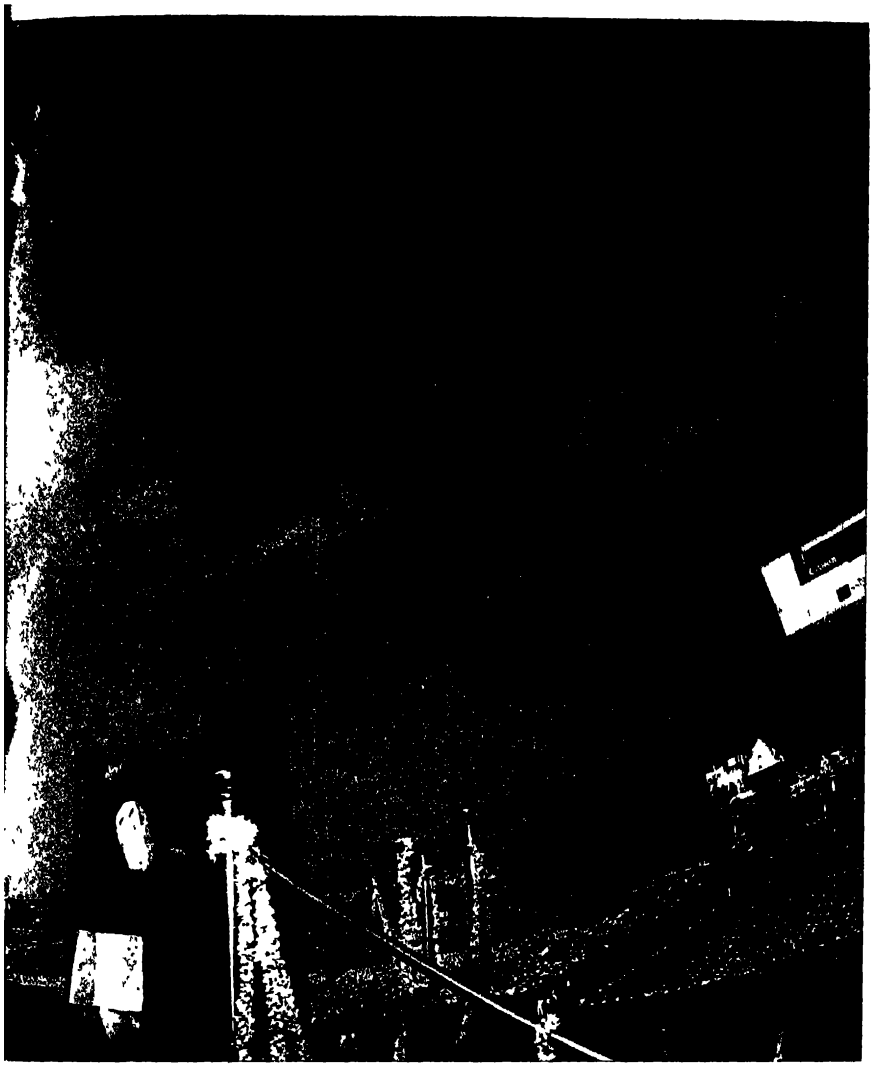
Even more significant was the August 17 release of the National Security Advisory Board's (NSAB) draft nuclear doctrine. This could not have been done by Vajpayee's security adviser Brajesh Mishra without high-level clearance, probably from the Prime Minister himself. This document represents *a further hardening of India's nuclear stance* and an attempt to put the country on the course of induction and deployment of these mass-destruction weapons, while abandoning the goal of nuclear disarmament altogether. The draft introduces menacing terms like "punitive retaliation" which were *never part of India's strategic discourse*. The timing of its release, amidst elections, and its content, are a big setback to the cause of sanity.

Vajpayee's post-Kargil attempt to paint himself in the colours of the Warrior Prime Minister sits ill with what the BJP itself considers – and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) concedes – as the source of his presumed appeal, namely the "soft" image of moderation. This image change would well cost the BJP many votes in the undecided floating part of the electoral spectrum. The militant rhetoric is, of course, guaranteed to please Hindutva hardlin-

■ BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI ■



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee at the Red Fort on August 15.

ers; but those are already with the party. The trick lies in attracting the uncommitted "middle ground". Whatever the recent highly upbeat opinion polls might claim on the basis of relatively small, unstratified samples, which lumped together "BJP & Allies" – even before the shape of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) became clear – we do not really know how the floating voter will behave. On an intuitive basis, it still is hard to imagine that the BJP will significantly improve on its tally. Where might it be able to make up the likely loss of many of the 90 seats it last year won in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where it is believed to have peaked? (These two States account for almost one-half its national tally.)

There are limits to how much the BJP can push and flog hardline themes like Kargil or the new nuclear doctrine. The shooting down of Pakistan's naval surveillance aircraft, Atlantique, has not gone down well. It now emerges that the plane was not even given a warning before being attacked (the Indian Air Force MiGs had only their radio channel working), and there may be some uncertainty about its precise location *vis-a-vis* Sir Creek, the disputed, still – undemarcated, maritime boundary – especially because the Creek has itself changed its course. (*The Telegraph*, Calcutta, August 14).

The fact that journalists flown from Delhi by the IAF to be shown the debris ultimately did not get to see it on the Indian side of the border speaks of bungling, which does not redound to India's credit. By several accounts (for example, Lt. Gen. V.R. Raghavan's), the IAF local units over-reacted. Even assuming that India was legally correct to shoot down the plane, the issue of *proportionality* of response to a violation of the 1991 airspace agreement is a nagging one. The incident reeks of post-Kargil arrogance.

As for convincing the domestic public that the Kargil crisis had nothing to do with gross intelligence and operational failures and strategic-political misjudgment at the very top (why was Gen. V. P. Malik on a "courtesy" visit to Poland even as Indian patrols were being killed?), the K. Subrahmanyam Committee is unlikely to be able to do the job. (*Frontline*, August 27). But such cover-up jobs seem to be part of a pattern with the BJP-led government.

The most glaring of these is the Wadhwa Commission report which all but gave the Sangh Parivar, especially its most lumpen formation, the Bajrang Dal, a clean chit as regards the burning alive of Graham Staines and his children. The report fails to link Dara Singh with any Sangh organisation, and his own action with the Orissa social context, defined by the Parivar's anti-Christian campaign. This, despite testimony from the Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar police that Dara Singh was an "active member of the Bajrang Dal", participated in RSS-run camps, and campaigned for the BJP in the 1998 Lok Sabha election.

The Commission ignored the statement of D.P. Mohapatra, Additional Director-General of Police (Intelligence), that "Dara Singh appears to be a supporter or fellow-traveller of the Bajrang Dal or even of the BJP though not a cardholder of these organisations". Remarkably, the Commission's own counsel, the highly regarded Gopal Subramaniam, himself noted: "There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Dara Singh's association with the RSS and the Bajrang Dal renders the matter open to further inquiry and investigation by the CBI..."

The Commission apparently launched into its investigation with an ant's eye view: looking at the event in a complete vacuum. It did not even bother to ask some obvious questions: What created the atmosphere, the political and social environment, in which communal passions could be so easily aroused? Why did anti-Christian prejudice become so vicious and *actively* vitriolic as to lead to the ghastly murder? What ideological and political influences impelled Dara Singh? The Commission brazenly ignored the testimony of Keonjhar Superintendent of Police Lalit Das who said: "Dara Singh's association with the BJP was so well-known that it was not necessary to inquire into his antecedents."

Amazingly, the report says that it could not find documentary proof of Dara Singh's membership of the Bajrang Dal, but that is such a literal interpreta-

tion of "membership" that it is laughable. And yet, the report also notes that anyone between 15 and 45 "can become a member of the Bajrang Dal with an annual fee of Rs. 5 but no membership card is issued..." (*The Indian Express*, New Delhi, August 15).

It is all very well for the BJP to shed tears for Staines, but the public is not likely to forget that it was Vajpayee himself who called for a "national debate" on religious conversions right in the middle of an anti-Christian pogrom in Gujarat – sending out the signal that his government has little respect for the constitutional right to the freedom to practise and propagate a faith of one's choice, and that it endorses, even if indirectly, "patriots" who brutalise the religious minorities. It is this kind of practised deception that marked the Sangh Parivar's campaign against the Babri mosque too, where it prevaricated, lied and told half-truths – to the people of Ayodhya, to Uttar Pradesh officials, to P.V. Narasimha Rao (who was only too willing to believe them), and to the highest court of the land.

The BJP-led government is again resorting to the worst forms of deception – not just through whitewash jobs *a la* Wadhwa and Subrahmanyam – but through open inducement and bribery, especially of the top echelons of the administration, and the media.

The BJP-led government is again resorting to the worst forms of deception – not just through whitewash jobs *a la* Wadhwa and Subrahmanyam – but through open inducement and bribery, especially of the top echelons of the administration, and the media. If you are one of 218 chosen journalists in U.P., you will be given posh bungalow lands at throwaway rates – at a hefty subsidy costing the near-bankrupt State Rs.1.09 crores. This violates all ethical codes and Election Commission directives. Then there is Pramod Mahajan who hardly conceals his intentions: he has just set up a 24-hour news channel on Doordarshan without Prasar Bharati authorisation and reportedly plans to offer favoured journalists a tidy Rs.1 lakh to do short Doordarshan interviews – a modest sum indeed! The BJP's media cell, run by people such as Ajay Singh and Sudhanshu Mittal, so openly interferes with Doordarshan's working, that the Prasar Bharati board had to pass a special resolution demanding that there be no direct "interface" between politicians and Doordarshan staff.

It is hard to see why the BJP would go to such absurd lengths in media rigging, and spend crores of rupees on advertising, if it were truly confident of winning the elections and had nothing to hide. But it does have a great deal to hide: incompetence, crony capitalism-style favouritism, promotion of communalism in education and culture, and stoking authoritarian tendencies and toxic forms of jingoism. The BJP has inflicted serious damage upon the statutory institutions by getting into a confrontation with the President (who had to intervene no fewer than 17 times to counsel restraint on the government), the higher judiciary (for example, questioning the High Court's authority over the telecom issue) and the Election Commission. It created contention and rancour where cooperation and restraint were all-important.

Perhaps the BJP's, or rather Vajpayee's, most deplorable action has been to create an extra-constitutional power centre in the form of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which bypasses the Cabinet and defies all accountability. The PMO has emerged not as a functional extension of the executive which supplements the Cabinet, but as a virtually *autonomous* decision-making caucus around one individual. Unlike in Indira Gandhi's time, it is run more by non-officials committed to Vajpayee than by regular civil servants. Today, a couple of persons who hold no positions in government operate with great clout out of the PMO and indulge in all manner of activity, from monitoring and bullying the media, to fixing steel prices, from organising extravaganzas to drafting disinformation reports and legal strategies.

The PMO today increasingly resembles its degenerate *avatar* during the notorious Emergency days. The difference is, Sanjay Gandhi then provoked anger and media revulsion, but Bhattacharya is sheltered by much of the media. The PMO now acts like a praetorian guard whose sole job is to defend and apologise for one *individual*. Its role has eroded the government's credibility and undermined the Cabinet system. In the long run, this does not bode well for Indian democracy. But in the short run, it cannot do the BJP much good either.

However, the BJP has again managed to inflict upon its coalition allies one of its pet agendas: an authoritarian proposal for a compulsory five-year term for Lok Sabha. The NDA has foolishly gone along with this without having considered the proposal's consequences for democratic accountability or the principle of representative government – just as the coalition did last year in the "National Agenda for Governance" on nuclear weapons and a review of the Constitution.

The NDA should know, if it has any sense, that the BJP is not an ordinary, "normal", party, with solely a parliamentary agenda. It is both a party *and* part of a social movement that challenges and seeks to redefine the very nature of Indian nationhood by giving primacy to just one of India's many, many communities. Its long-term goal is to transform this society along Hindutva lines. This totally violates the liberal-democratic, secular, federalist spirit of the Constitution and the foundational premises of our freedom struggle. The BJP resides in that twilight zone that lies between parliamentary democracy with its openness and pluralism, on the one hand, and parochial, paranoid, exclusivism, on the other. It has shown no signs of changing its character. This is unsurprising. Parties of its ilk do not change radically. They are not free to do so, being controlled from the outside.

The RSS-BJP link is not a marginal one, nor some kind of historic hangover. It is an organic, living connection. It is so intimate that the RSS could demand last year that all BJP State units be led by long-standing *pracharaks*. This was considered so "natural" that there was no fuss. It just won't do to pretend that the BJP under Vajpayee has evolved into a different party. For one, Vajpayee does not control the organisation; he ceded that function 15 years ago to others. And for another, he is not very different from Sangh hardliners on the core issues that matter. He is just a more shrewd, devious and manipulative – not "liberal" or pluralist – face of the Hindutva phenomenon, one that is more acceptable to our communalised upper class elite. ■

■ COLUMN

The G-15 and the WTO

There has been a singular lack of any concrete achievement at the Bangalore meeting.

THE meeting of the G-15 developing countries (which actually includes 17 countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America) that was held in Bangalore had a definite purpose. It was meant to work out a common strategy to present the interests of developing countries and force the agenda at the WTO Ministerial Meeting scheduled for November in Seattle, to consider more seriously their concerns.

Such an initiative is hardly new. Each of the previous WTO Ministerial Meetings has brought about such an attempt, and so far each of them has foundered in terms of achieving a common bargaining plank because of the remarkable ability of negotiators from industrial countries (especially the United States) to take advantage of differences amongst the developing countries.

But this time, it really looked for a while as if things could be different. The level of dissatisfaction of most developing countries with the functioning of the WTO and the skewed implementation of the Uruguay Round GATT accord has never been higher. World trade is on a major downslide: last year, world exports in volume terms increased by a paltry 3.5 per cent, while in terms of dollar values it actually fell, as international prices in all major categories of exports declined.

■ PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH

The tentative and fragile recovery in the crisis-ridden East Asian region is not occurring on the basis of renewed export growth to the industrial countries but rather because of Keynesian style revival measures based on increased government spending and a large dose of Japanese aid through the Miyazawa Initiative. Indeed, exports from this region remain subdued and continue to face a range of barriers in the developed countries. Similarly, exports from most other developing countries have recently been at their lowest levels of the past decade.

Internationally, exports from developing countries remain constrained by large and growing problems of market access, despite the many declarations in the various Uruguay Round agreements. The most important sectors, such as textiles and garments and leather goods, suffer from continued protectionist policies in the North, while others like consumer electronics and office equipment face genuine problems of market saturation in the industrial world.

Meanwhile, developing countries which had opened up their markets in the hope of a *quid pro quo* in other sectors have found their expectations belied. Their ability to undertake domestic technological change is being severely curtailed by the TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) agreement. Many of them have been forced to make major concessions in terms of opening up their financial and other services sectors. The groups of major food exporters (the Cairns Group) is agitated that the much promised liberalisation of trade and reduction of subsidies in Northern agriculture has yet to occur.

All this has made conditions particularly propitious for a genuine gathering of developing countries that could hope to evolve a common front for bargaining at the WTO. To add to this, the WTO itself seems particularly vulnerable at the moment. Not only has its authority been drastically undermined by the U.S. wilfully choosing to do whatever it wants in terms of unilateral trade actions, but it has been powerless to prevent an unseemly trade war between the U.S. and the European Union on even as trivial an issue as bananas. Most important, its manner of functioning has been such that even most developing country negotiators are convinced that it is being run as a rich man's club, where no more than lip-service is paid to the crucial interests of the majority of the developing countries.

And now, there is more than a whiff of scandal around the hosts of the November meeting in the city of Seattle, Washington. The members of the organising committee – co-chaired by such illustrious representatives of contemporary capitalism as Bill Gates of Microsoft and Phil Condit of Boeing – have been discovered with their hands in the till. They stand accused of offering large multinational companies access to the many government officials who will be present during the trade deliberations, in return for sponsorship money. The committee apparently hoped to raise as much as $9 million from this "innovative" scheme alone, along with other forms of sponsorship.

Private sponsorship of public and multilateral meetings is not new, especially in the U.S. where virtually everything is seen in terms of buying and selling. But this latest and most blatant instance of what would anywhere else be called corruption and lack of "governance", is likely to inflict further damage on the WTO's already battered reputation.

Even within the developed countries, more and more citizens have begun to realise that the supposed defender of free trade rules, that is the WTO, is disproportionately influenced by international corporations with very specific interests, rather than by the representatives of citizens in the member countries. This type of exercise not only confirms such a link, but even puts up price tags for the favours being offered to big business.

IN this background, it was to be expected that the Bangalore meeting would offer a major opportunity to the G-15 to seize upon the general sense of dissatisfaction and work out a joint approach and strategy that would force the important issues of common concern back on to the trade negotiating table. But somehow, despite the circumstances, this did not

happen. Instead, the meeting in Bangalore remained at the level of general complaint and platitude, and did not work out any specific bargaining points, much less a cohesive strategy.

A major reason for this failure must lie with the hosts of that meeting, the current Indian government. Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde did indeed make a rambling speech in which he made the usual noises about the unequal manner of implementation of the GATT accord. Thus, he is reported to have said that "trade negotiations cannot continue to be an exercise in which we yield market access, even as access obtained by us is thwarted and undermined." He also dubbed the attempt to introduce into the WTO non-trade related issues, such as social clauses or clauses on governance, as "thinly disguised efforts to impede the free flow of trade" by erecting new barriers against products from developing countries.

But in terms of achieving some degree of coherence towards a common negotiating strategy, the Commerce Minister contributed effectively nothing. Indeed, his preference for generalities also meant that the entire meeting did very little in terms of planning concrete action, and became a harmless exercise in letting off steam that would certainly not cause any sleepless nights among developed country negotiators.

WHY should this have been the case? Some of the reason may lie in the actual agenda of the government, as opposed to its declared agenda on this particular occasion. The actions of the Commerce Ministry over the past 15 months have been remarkable for the way in which they have systematically furthered the interests of large multinational capital over those of domestic producers and workers.

Thus, the very sweeping import liberalisation – including in consumer goods – that has occurred so rapidly in the short tenure of this government, has taken place during a period of domestic industrial recession, and has allowed multinational penetration in a wide range of production activity, much of which has adversely affected small producers in particular. The measures supposedly designed to promote exports have created not a level playing field but a highly sloping one, in which domestic small entrepreneurs are practically being forced to fight gravity.

How much of this is inadvertent, and how much deliberate, can of course become a subject of fierce debate. But the effective implications of this strategy are less open to question, Thus, to take only one example, cuts in import duty on edible oils, in the context of the very low international prices that are currently reigning, have most certainly had a negative impact on the viability of the domestic edible oils industry. Similarly, the failure to increase the import duty on sugar at least to the levels common in almost every other country has meant that the domestic sugar industry is not only facing low prices but is being forced to hold large stocks while cheap sugar is being dumped from abroad.

But these decisions have simultaneously benefited some. These of course include traders who are making money at the expense of producers, but also consumers, among whom are large multinational companies, including Nestle, Levers, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, who are now large buyers of oil and sugar and are probably waiting to take over the domestic downstream industry once sickness drives them out of business. Such examples proliferate across the manufacturing sectors.

Of course, the Commerce Minister cannot be held solely responsible for what has been a remarkable feature of this government in general: the mouthing of "swadeshi" or nationalist slogans while simultaneously doing more than any government before it to promote the interests of foreign capital and to ignore the legitimate economic demands of the Indian citizenry. Given this overall tendency, the singular lack of any concrete achievement at the G-15 meting should come as no surprise. ■

The Ministerial Meeting of the G-15 in Bangalore remained at the level of general complaint and platitude, and did not work out any specific bargaining points, much less a cohesive strategy. A major reason for this failure must lie with the host, the current Indian government.

■ TRADE ISSUES

RAVI SHARMA
in Bangalore

FEW people expected the meeting of Trade Ministers and officials of a group of 17 developing countries – called the G-15 after the founding quorum of members – to produce a dramatic breakthrough in strategic perspectives. Meeting in Bangalore on August 17 and 18, the G-15 showed ample evidence of all the infirmities that it has been beset by since its founding, notably a conspicuous lack of shared trade interests which impede the evolution of a strategic consensus. Since it was expected to evolve a common developing country perspective for the third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to be held in Seattle, United States, between November 30 and December 4, the Bangalore meeting must count as an opportunity lost.

Given the differences in perception that emerged, observers were left in bleak contemplation of the possible impact that developing countries, whether individually or in blocs such as the G-15, would be able to make in Seattle. The stakes, undoubtedly, are high. The U.S. is leading the push towards a fresh round of global trade negotiations that will seek to open up unexplored vistas before the WTO. Several industrialised countries have generally lent their authority to this initiative, which could seek to put in place a regime of intrusive trade regulation by the WTO.

Reflecting the G-15's dilemma on what could be legitimately placed on the agenda in Seattle was the chairman's "summary of discussions" that was released after the Bangalore meeting. The summary ended up being just that – a statement of intentions rather than a united stand on issues. As Union Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde, chair of the Bangalore Ministerial Meeting, said, it is "not a resolution, but a statement reflecting the views of various delegates".

It was evident from the chairman's statement and from conversations with delegates that the stands differed widely. Either individually or collectively, the member-countries of the G-15 forum took stands on specific issues that on various occasions identified them with the advanced countries.

Existing differences were neither

An opportunity lost

Evolving a common developing country perspective and approach ahead of the crucial Seattle Ministerial Meeting of the WTO proved an elusive dream at the Bangalore meeting of the G-15.

resolved nor mitigated Malaysia and Indonesia, members of both the G-15 and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), are for example ready for a new round of discussions that would cover the reduction of industrial tariffs This position arises from their shared interest in lowering customs duties on consumer electronics in their major export markets Two G 15 countries, Argentina and Chile, both members of the Cairns Group of agricultural export ing countries – are open to negotiations on further liberalisation of trade in agri culture This is a position that puts them at odds with fellow G-15 countries, India and Egypt There are also differences on whether the WTO should be allowed to draw up a global pact on foreign invest ment While some of the G-15 countries, notably Brazil and Chile, are open to the idea, India and Egypt are against it

The Bangalore meeting reiterated the willingness of some members, notably the Latin American states, to enter into a new round of trade negotiations where all issues would be negotiated as part of one single undertaking This again is a view that is at variance with the current Indian position

As spelt out by Ramakrishna Hegde India is clearly opposed to any new round of all-encompassing trade talks India also holds the position that the Seattle meet ing should confine its attention to a review of the problems and unfulfilled promises of the Uruguay Round As far as negotiations are concerned India believes that only areas that have already been entrusted to the mandate of the WTO, such as agriculture and services, should be taken up for talks after Seattle

We have emphasised that promises made at the Uruguay Round should be fully and faithfully implemented, said Ramakrishna Hegde He added No purpose will be served by taking on new issues before that And we do not want to overload the agenda, since this only c ius es delay as happened in Uruguay

In a shift of emphasis, Ramakrishna Hegde made it clear that India would not oppose the introduction of new issues such as tariff reduction that may be brought for negotiations But he stressed caution Let us first review what resolu tions we have already adopted The touchstone of any agreement will be the extent of benefits developing and least developing countries have derived from so called free trade "

Despite the major differences, consensus was possible, though in limited spheres The chairman's statement in no uncertain terms stressed that the G-15 was totally opposed to any WTO talks that sought to link trade with core labour or environmental standards Consensus was also achieved over the need to oppose the introduction of issues such as national competition policies, electronic commerce and government procurement in the negotiating agenda of the WTO

There was unanimity also on the removal of inequities in the existing agreements and on the restoration of "the balance of rights and obligations forged in the Uruguay Round' Also arousing the unanimous concern of the G-15 was the non realisation of benefits by many developing countries in areas such as agriculture and textiles because of the failure of the developed countries to honour obligations in spirit and the non-implementation of special and differential provisions made during the Uruguay Round

The mood that permeated the meeting was not a new one a disappointment with the responses from the developed world to the problems and concerns of



T.L. PRABHAKAR

At the opening session of the Group of 15 Ministerial Meeting at the Vidana Soudha in Bangalore on August 17.

Against social clauses as a trade measure

Interview with Dr. Ahmed Goweily.

Coordinating a group as disparate and large as the G-15 can be a diplomatic nightmare. Attempting to do just this is Egypt's **Dr. Ahmed Goweily**, the current chairman of the G-15. Making the task even more challenging for Goweily is the fact that the third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle is coming up. The G-15's actions and responses are of crucial importance not only to its 17 members but to the developing world as a whole Goweily, who is Egypt's Minister for Trade and Supply, spoke to **Ravi Sharma** in Bangalore. Excerpts:

▶ *The Uruguay Round of discussions did not benefit the developing countries. What can the G-15 do to avoid a repetition of Uruguay as preparations begin for the third Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Seattle?*

The Uruguay Round did not benefit the developing countries. What the G-15 has to do is to make a good review of the costs and benefits to the developing countries, analyse where we failed and prepare to face the new round of discussions and negotiations. The Bangalore meeting, where the agenda for Seattle is the main issue, is part of this plan.

▶ *What were the chief failures of the Uruguay Round?*

The chief failure – or shall we say shortcoming – has been the discrimination that has been practised by several developed countries to block the exports of developing countries. For example, if you look at textiles we have had anti-dumping cases against India, Egypt, China, Indonesia and Bangladesh. This anti-dumping (measure) has been applied in a very unfair manner. This affects our exports. There are other unfair and discriminatory practices as well. Now there is a move towards linking labour and environmental concerns with trade. We would like to see a review of the Uruguay Round agreements. Market access is the biggest problem for the developing countries, especially when you produce raw materials and consumer goods but have low market access.

▶ *The promises that the developed world made to the developing world have not been fulfilled.*

This is why the G-15 is saying that implementation (of promises) comes first, before any new issues are added for discussions. We feel that the implementation of the commitment of the developed countries to the developing countries isn't there, especially in the case of the LDCs (least developed countries).

The LDCs were promised several things, such as market access, cut in tariffs, more technical assistance, more financial resources... But these have not come. The LDCs have been left out of not only globalisation but also human development. These countries have become even more backward.

▶ *The developing world does not have a commonality of trade interests. In the G-15 there are sharp differences. How can the G-15 evolve a common approach to issues?*

It is not important to have a common agreement. The G-15 represents developing countries in three continents – Asia, Africa and Latin America – and each country has its own features. The Bangalore meeting is a coordinating meeting, where we exchange views. All the G-15 countries have firmly agreed, for example, upon the implementation (of unfulfilled promises). We have also agreed on a programme for the LDCs.

▶ *Differences persist in the G-15 with some countries being in favour of adding new issues to the Seattle agenda.*

Well, there are already lots of issues to be negotiated because implementation is very broad. We have agendas which include negotiations in agriculture, trade and services, revision of TRIPS... If you add more issues it will take longer and get complicated.

▶ *But all the member-countries do not feel this way.*

This is the general view, with a few exceptions.

▶ *Some G-15 countries not only are in favour of negotiations on further liberalisation of agriculture and services but welcome the framing of a WTO agreement on foreign investment. What is the G-15's position on foreign investment?*

Our position is that over 90 per cent of the investment in our countries is for developmental purposes rather than for trade. We feel that investment should not be discussed as a trade issue.

▶ *Many a time foreign investors' interests are out of step with the policies of the countries they operate in. How does the G-15 see this?*

We are against discrimination against foreigners or native persons who make investments within the boundaries of any country, but we are against forcing this from outside through a multilateral agreement.

▶ *What can the G-15 do to force the developed world to fulfil the unfulfilled promises of the Uruguay Round?*

We are the market (laughs). They will have to fulfil promises.

The earlier agreements were not finalised. Now they are coming to the negotiating table. The developed countries will have to listen. They know that today we are working in a highly liberalised world economy and that for global economic stability there has to be a more balanced situation between the developed and the developing world. For example, the economic crisis that affected South-East Asia, Russia and Brazil also affected growth in Europe and the United States.

▶ *How do you see the G-15 evolving?*

We would like to have more consultations, more exchange of meaningful notes and more programmes.

▶ *Many of the WTO-directed reforms are viewed in most if not all G-15 countries with a fair share of suspicion.*

In any country, whether it is a private economy like Egypt's or a market economy like India's, you have to be transparent while opening up the economy. There has to be the involvement of the people right from the beginning.

▶ *The developed countries want social and governance clauses introduced in the Seattle agenda.*

This is unfair. We are totally opposed to the use of a social clauses as a trade measure. Social clauses are to be addressed to the International Labour Organisation rather than to the WTO. They are developmental issues related to poverty, not trade issues. We reject as unfair any WTO talks that link trade with environment or trade with labour. ■

For strategic coordination

RAVI SHARMA

WITH the third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to be held at Seattle in the United States, between November 30 and December 4, fast approaching, social organisations across the world are trying to influence the stand of the governments in their respective countries. A two-day conference of consumer groups, organised in Bangalore by the Jaipur-based civil society Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) on the occasion of the G-15 Ministerial Meeting, supported this strategy, and called for unity among the countries of the South (developing countries) in achieving their goal.

The message from the conference titled 'Southern Agenda for the Next Millennium: Role of the Civil Society' was primarily three-fold – oppose any new round of negotiations, discuss existing problems, and, most important, urge governments of the South to involve civil societies as they prepare for the Seattle Round.

The conference exhorted developing countries to coordinate strategically in order to identify common interests and negotiate collectively to advance them. It called upon the civil societies to ensure that equity and social justice are given priority at the negotiations and the interests of consumers, rural and urban workers, small farmers and other vulnerable groups are safeguarded. The conference asked governments of the South to encourage, support and collaborate with civil society organisations in their countries, and not to put issues such as investment and government procurement on the agenda of the WTO until existing and negotiated issues were resolved satisfactorily.

Pradeep Mehta, secretary-general of CUTS, said: "While civil societies in the North (developed world) are pushing issues, in India (as in other developing countries) the Government does not even want to acknowledge our presence. The U.S., for example, is encouraging trade unions to talk about social clauses. The Indian Government should want us to be part of the bandwagon opposing new WTO rounds like the Millennium Round, which is being advocated by some countries of the developed world. Civil society participation can help sharpen the Government's agenda on specific issues like environment, labour standards, investment policy, competition policy and government procurement – issues that are likely (disregarding the G-15 opposition to it) to be pushed at Seattle."

Delegates at the conference, such as former Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey, opined that developing countries should realise that "bargaining positions of countries are not equal". He cited the example of the U.S., which, because it was not pleased with the conclusions of the initial round of negotiations on telecom and financial services, saw to it that another round was held. This it did by first using the Association of Petroleum Exporting Countries (APEC) forum as a building block, getting APEC to endorse the need for a fresh round of negotiations. Subsequently, the U.S. stand was reaffirmed at the recent ARF Foreign Ministers' meeting in Singapore.

Dubey also felt that the G-15 would be unable to forestall the WTO sponsoring another round (the Millennium Round), of discussions which would in all probability take up such issues as e-commerce and investment. Dubey said: "For one thing the G-15 is not organised enough and for another, it is too vulnerable."

The conference also expressed the need for the governments of developing countries to be pragmatic – by refraining from saying 'no' for the sake of it, realising their positions, strengthening them and then bargaining effectively.

The message conveyed by the conference was that governments from developing countries should work at two levels – public posturing and private preparation. While a G-15 Ministerial Meeting can provide the public posturing, it was, according to Mehta, "equally important to put forward privately one's concerns and be prepared to negotiate them".

Mehta said that non-governmental organisations like CUTS could make effective contributions if they were allowed to participate in the negotiating process. "We are not asking for a seat at the negotiating table since the WTO is a contractual body. What we want is transparency. For example, we could be given the annotated agenda in time. This will help us talk to our governments and, through our sister organisations, to their governments." ■

he developing world, especially the least leveloped countries. As Ramakrishna Hegde said during a presentation by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) coinciding with the G-15 event, the experiences of the last two years had been that 'there was sympathy and plenty of crocodile tears for the developing world but no free access to the markets of the developed world".

The Bangalore meeting was a continuation of the process of consultations hat the G-15 started in Cairo in May 998, prior to the 1998 Geneva Ministerial Conference. Delegates of the G-15 countries had also met in a WTO-issues-related symposium in New Delhi in November 1998 and then again during the Ninth Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the G-15 in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in February 1999. With the third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle ahead, it was decided at Montego Bay that a G-15 Ministerial Meeting would be held before finalising a common stand on issues.

The G-15 countries account for more than 43 per cent of GDP of all developing countries, have an average per capita GDP of $2,116 and is home to 30 per cent of the world's population. But its large size could be the grouping's biggest stumbling block. Perceptions, needs and responses are as large and as varied.

Curiously, despite all the hype on the importance of the G-15 standing together and straining every sinew if it is to prevent a repeat of the raw deal handed down to the developing countries at the Uruguay Round, only eight of the G-15's 17 members decided to depute a Minister – among whom three were junior Ministers – for the Bangalore meeting. Worse still, many of the representatives did not quite seem to be in tune with all the intricacies of processes of the WTO. ■

An astronomical event

The total solar eclipse of August 11, the last of its kind in this millennium, has yielded a wealth of scientific data.

R.RAMACHANDRAN

A TOTAL solar eclipse (TSE) is the most spectacular celestial event that can be viewed from the earth. Another great thing about this majestic event is that it recurs: on an average, 66 TSEs occur in a century, with the longest period of totality being about 7.5 minutes.

The last time a TSE occurred over India was on October 24, 1995, the track of which passed over northern and eastern India. It was the shortest TSE of the decade, the duration ranging from 45 to 76 seconds, but the time of the year was ideal for clear skies unlike in the case of the recent TSE of August 11, the last of the millennium. It was more or less a wash-out because of the cloudy monsoon skies all along its track from northwestern Kutch to Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. Also, in most parts the timing was close to sunset and, even where people could catch a glimpse of it, it lasted only for a short time. Even over the dry regions of Kutch (around Bhuj), where the probability for clear skies based on historical meteorological data was given as over 70 per cent, it was cloudy. At some places like Warara near Nagpur, groups of people were reported to have witnessed totality thanks to clouds lifting just at the right time.

The next TSE visible over India will be 10 years hence: on July 22, 2009. Its path will span from China to Bangladesh via Bhutan and the Indian States of Assam and Meghalaya. However, that will be during the monsoon season too. After that a TSE over India will not occur for about four decades.

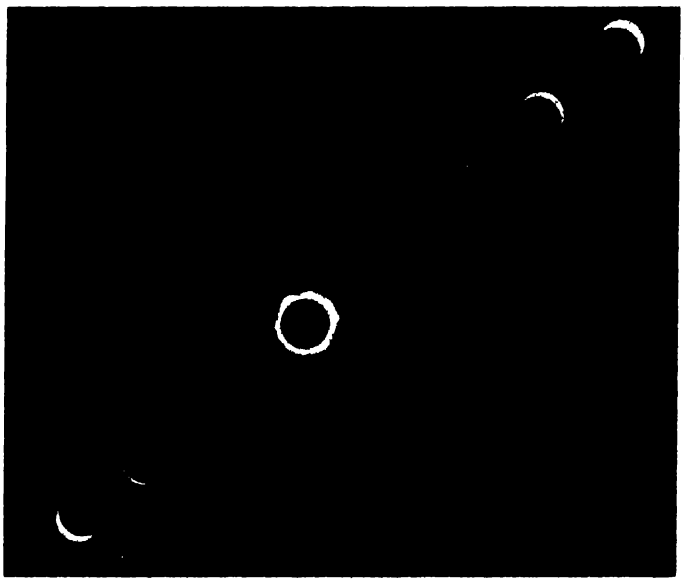
A TSE is an eagerly awaited cosmic event for an astronomer. For, even in these days of satellites and orbiting astronomy laboratories, a TSE still provides the best occasion to study the sun. Astronomers travel thousands of kilometres to where the combination of viewing and duration is best, lugging tonnes of equipment. Jay M. Pasachoff, an astronomer from Williams College in the United States, has become a legend in this respect and is referred to as Mr. Eclipse within the astronomical community. This time Pasachoff travelled to Rimnicu-Vilcea near Bucharest where the duration of totality was the longest. Pasachoff has reported that he got 2 minutes and 23 seconds of "the rarest solar observing time".

A team headed by Dr. Jagdev Singh, from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bangalore, which has acquired a reasonable reputation over the years for terrestrial eclipse experiments, travelled to Chadegan (about 15 km from Isfahan) in Iran where the totality lasted for one minute and 33 seconds. According to Jagdev Singh, the sky at Isfahan was clear during totality and he and his team obtained considerable amount of data.

Interesting results are expected from the latest eclipse because it occurred close to a maximum in the 11-year cycle of solar activity, just nine months before the predicted maximum. During a solar maximum there are frequent solar flares and lots of sunspots, and the corona (the outer solar atmosphere) expands to many times its average size; the sun has been seen to be very active around the time of the eclipse.

The solar eclipse is so spectacular owing to a rather fortuitous circumstance which causes the solar disc to be covered by the moon completely and exactly – no more, no less – when the sun, the moon and the earth are perfectly aligned in a straight line. This is an interesting cosmic coincidence, as if nature conspired to provide scientists with a convenient laboratory to study the sun, where the sizes of the sun and the moon and their distances from the earth are in such proportions (of 400:1) that both subtend the same angular size (of about 0.5°) at the earth. Because of this, during a TSE the moon exactly covers the solar disc as if by design.

If the moon were slightly smaller, the best eclipses would be annular ones with no dramatic blackening of the sky and the streaming corona. If the moon were slightly larger, the full glory would be absent. Fortunately, the moon is "just right". This, on the one hand, enables the clearest view of the solar atmosphere for solar experiments, and, on the other, provides the dazzling spectacle of Baily's Beads and the diamond ring effect. This happy coincidence is not present any where else in the solar system.

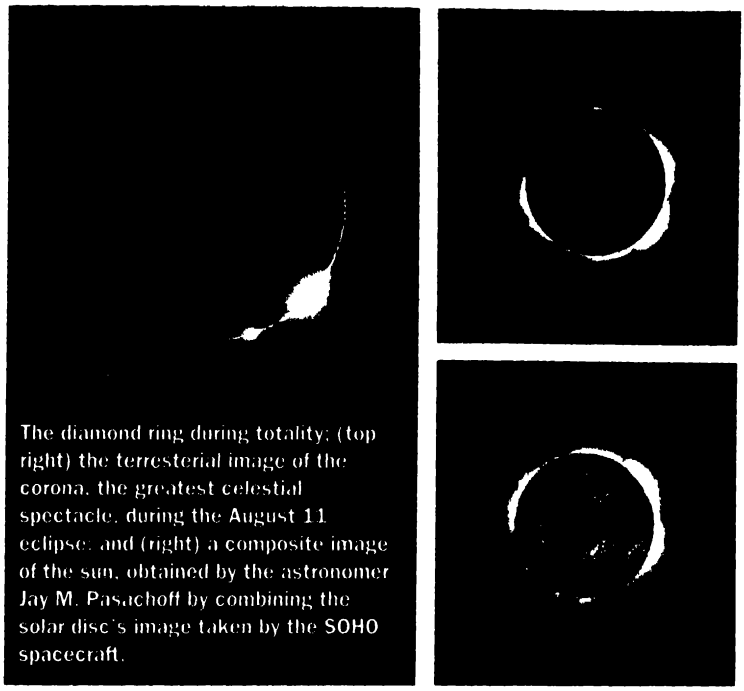


The different phases of the solar eclipse of August 11, as seen from Austria.

Most eclipse watchers consider the corona to be the most beautiful of all phenomena during totality. The super-hot outer atmosphere of the sun glows with the intensity of the full moon when the solar disc is fully occulted. Pearly white coronal streamers sometimes stretch several degrees across the sky near a solar maximum. According to Jagdev Singh, the corona was indeed

brighter this time. Corona is the focus of eclipse experiments.

Much of humankind's understanding of the sun has actually come from studying the fully blocked sun during a TSE. Eighteenth century astronomers, including Edmund Halley, routinely monitored eclipses to refine the orbits of the moon and the earth. In the 19th century, astrophysicists realised that the chromosphere (the reddish layer above the solar surface, the photosphere, which forms part of the solar atmosphere), prominences (large flame like structures extending from the chromosphere to the lower corona that follow the sun's magnetic field) and the corona were important physical aspects of the sun. Indeed, helium was discovered from the existence of a new bright yellow line in the spectrum of the sun's prominences during the TSE on August 18, 1868, by six different observers in different parts of the world.



The diamond ring during totality; (top right) the terresterial image of the corona, the greatest celestial spectacle, during the August 11 eclipse; and (right) a composite image of the sun, obtained by the astronomer Jay M. Pasachoff by combining the solar disc's image taken by the SOHO spacecraft.

In the 20th century, the TSE of May 29, 1919, provided a dramatic verification of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity by measuring the bending of light from a distant star that grazes the sun. Einstein's theory predicts that light would bend when traversing close to a gravitating mass and a large object like sun can cause perceptible shift in the path of light. But with a dazzlingly bright sun in the foreground, it would be otherwise impossible to verify this. Under a suggestion from the astrophysicist Sir Arthur Eddington, the 1919 TSE was utilised to show that light from a star close to the sun in the sky did bend as predicted by Einstein's theory which he had propounded in 1916.

Since then there have been no such dramatic discoveries during eclipses, but TSEs have continued to offer a great deal of insight into solar physics. Only during eclipses can the solar corona and the chromosphere be studied in detail. This is because in normal daylight, even under the best possible conditions at high altitudes, the sky brightness is about a millionth of the value at the centre of the solar disc and the coronal intensity close to its limb is only marginally higher than that of the sky. On the other hand, when the moon blocks out the solar disc, the predominant white light emission from the photosphere is absent and the sky brightness near the limb during totality falls to very low levels. Coronal intensities then become 1,000 times brighter than the sky and the corona can be observed as far as 4-5 solar radii (solar radius = 700,000 km). If one wishes to go beyond 5 solar radii, one needs to go to altitudes of about 30 km, beyond the earth's atmosphere where atmospheric scattering is totally absent and the sky becomes black.

With the discovery of the coronograph (a device which occults the solar disc) in 1930 and the advent of orbiting telescopes, it may seem that eclipses are no longer that useful for scientific purposes. This is not so because, on the one hand, ground-based coronograph observations cannot see the corona very far because of the day sky. On the other, out there in space, to limit the scattering, space-based coronographs have had to block the inner corona. An intermediate approach is to take the coronograph above the major portion of the atmosphere in a sounding rocket when the corona can be observed to larger distances against a much reduced background of scattered light. But such artificial eclipses using coronographs are no match to the natural eclipse, according to Pasachoff. The moon is still the best coronograph that nature has given the scientist, and a TSE remains the best means to observe a solar corona, though space-borne data serve to refine terrestrial observations and complement in frequencies beyond the visible in X-ray and the ultraviolet in which the sun emits strongly.

One of the questions astronomers have been asking is: why does the corona exist and why is it so hot? Compared to the 6,000° Kelvin (0° Celsius = 273°. K) of the surface of the sun, coronal temperatures rise up to between two and three million degrees K over a distance of 2,000 km, which is very small compared to the sun's dimensions. Indeed, the million-degree hot corona gas was discovered in 1942 with the identification of coronal 'green' spectral line of Fe XIV (highly ionised iron atoms which have been stripped of 13 of their 26 electrons) and 'red' line of Fe X during total eclipses. The corona is now known to be a region of very hot, electrically charged gas streaming away into space. But what is the source of the energy that drives the corona is the long-standing astronomical mystery and most of the eclipse experiments are designed to address this question. Indeed, if the corona were cooler, it would be much closer to the sun's surface and, therefore, would be invisible even during a total eclipse.

Because of the high temperature, the corona emits high-energy radiation in the X-ray and the ultraviolet frequencies, while the sun itself is a poor emitter in these frequencies. The earth's atmosphere absorbs these but satellites above the atmosphere can observe in these wavelengths. If so, much of the corona (outside the white-light region) can be studied using space-borne systems on a regular basis without having to wait for eclipses.

But still, terrestrial experiments are important because satellites are expensive and have only limited life, points out Jagdev Singh. He adds: "Also, there are limitations in getting the data at faster rates owing to limited telemetry capabilities. Space-borne telescopes observe in the limited wavelength region and with limited spatial and spectral resolution. When these provide data in soft or hard X-ray wavelengths, we would like to know how the observation is linked to the surface phenomena on the sun. It is much easier and less expensive to study the surface features of the sun, like solar flares and fast events,

The eclipse and the Foucault pendulum

R.RAMACHANDRAN

A CURIOUS experiment was undertaken during the recent August 11 eclipse to seek to resolve a 45-year-old mystery: does a solar eclipse affect the behaviour of the Foucault pendulum? David Noever and Ron Koczor of the Marshall Space Flight Centre of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) headed this experiment to verify some measurements on the motion of the Foucault pendulum during a solar eclipse reported by the Nobel laureate Maurice Allais in 1954.

Allias in 1988 won the Nobel prize for Economics, but he is a physicist as well. At the urging of the rocket pioneer Werner von Braun, he undertook experiments between 1954 and 1960 on the motion of metallic and glass pendulums to detect any connection between the two disparate forces, magnetism and gravity. He did not discover any such link. But he observed something extrordinary in his laboratory in Paris. During the total solar eclipses of June 30, 1954, and October 22, 1959, he detected "anomalies in the movement of the (Foucault) pendulum". However, Allais' strange observations have not been taken seriously all these years, even though occasional experiments to verify this effect, including an Indian one during the 1995 TSE, produced conflicting results.

A Foucault pendulum is a pendulum supported by a long wire with its motion restricted only in the vertical direction; that is, it can swing (in a plane) as well as rotate. In 1851, Jean Bernad Leon Foucault, the inventor of the gyroscope, demonstrated how such a pendulum could track the earth's rotation. What happens is that with the rotation of the earth, the plane of the pendulum rotates clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anti-clockwise in the southern hemispehere. The rate of this rotation is dependent on where you are located. This is an amazing effect in itself that one can detect the earth's rotation even from a sealed room.

Now what Allais observed was that, instead of the normal 0.19°-a-minute rotation in Paris, during eclipses the plane took an unexpected turn of 13.5° and this abrupt turn persisted during the entire duration of the eclipse. However, in 1954 itself, the experiment was repeated in Shetland, Scotland, using a gravimeter but a null result was found. In 1965 again the experiment using a gravimeter was repeated in Trieste, Italy, and no anomaly was detected.

In Harvard during the March 1970 eclipse, the experiment was done using a torsion pendulum. In the observations, a 0.0372 per cent increase in the baseline period (29.570 second) began with the onset of the eclipse. It peaked just after the eclipse (29.581 second) and then decreased to an offset value. The researchers concluded that this "agrees qualitatively with the work of Allais".

The Allais effect was observed again in 1981 in Romania in a Foucault pendulum. A number of observations were made of the behaviour of a Foucault pendulum during the eclipse of February 15, 1981 by G.T. Jeverdan and associates, and a similar shift in the oscillation plane of the pendulum was seen.

During the July 1990 eclipse over Helsinki, Finland, the torsion pendulum experiment was repeated. Using a set-up very similar to the Harvard University experiment, a group took a set of four measurements over nine hours – the night preceding, during and the night after the eclipse and also two weeks later. But no effect was observed. However, during the 1991 eclipse in Mexico City, the same Finnish team detected an inconclusive signal. The researchers found two distinct shifts in the pendulum plane at the beginning and the end of the eclipse. But they concluded that the effect could not be unambiguously attributed to some eclipse-coordinated phenomena.

During the 1995 TSE over India, Dr. D.C. Mishra and Dr. M.B.S. Rao of the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad, detected slight changes in their gravimeter readings over an hour of magnitude "that can neither be classified under short period variations due to tidal effect or drift of the gravimeter nor under high frequency noise which have special patterns." The researchers observed in their paper published in the journal *Current Science* in 1997: Therefore, this variation is highly significant as it occurs with the onset of an eclipse... to understand its actual nature and mechanism, more planned experiments of this kind should be carried out during solar eclipses throughout the world whenever such opportunities are available."

The NASA experiment involves Internet and video collaboration among observatories and universities in seven countries (the U.S., Austria, Germany, Italy, Australia, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom) and 11 cities (Huntsville, Indianapolis, Louisville, Denver, Boulder, Richmond, Vienna, Greifswald, Trento, Abu Dhabi and Sydney). Noever is, however, sceptical. He says: "The idea that some unexplained aspect of gravity is at work seems nonsensical when you consider that it would seem to imply planets spinning out of their orbits over very long time scales, among other things. Also, why would the effect show up only during a solar eclipse? The sun, the moon and the earth are nearly aligned once a month." In order to settle it once and for all, NASA/Marshall conducted the experiment using a high precision gravimeter and, if the Allais effect is real, and if it has to do with gravity, this experiment would have measured it to an accuracy of 10 decimal places.

In order to determine whether or not the effects of any single eclipse are one-time, localised events, many observing stations are needed to test eclipse phenomena. While Noever's team used a high-precision gravimeter, the network of scientists elsewhere simultaneously observed Foucault pendulums. The results will now be compared and analysed.

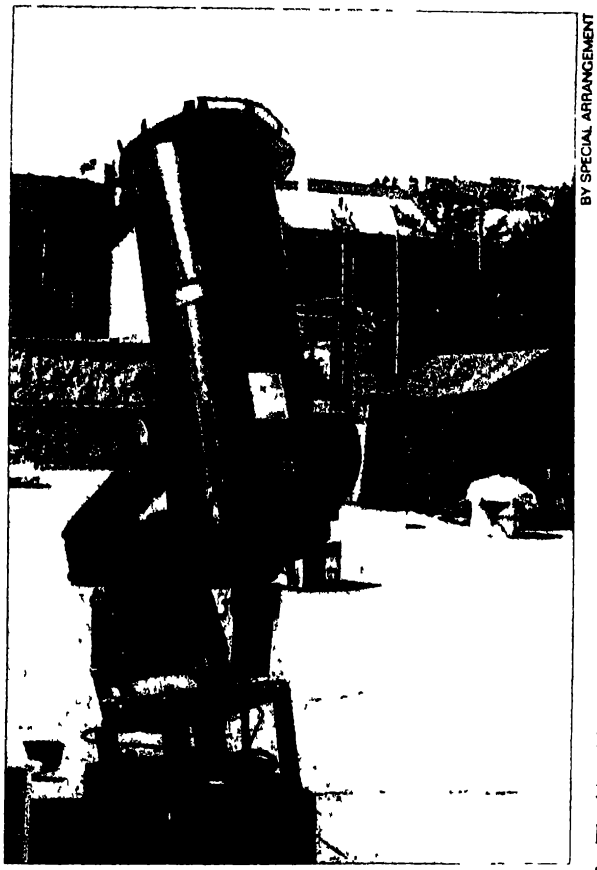
If the scientists do observe the Allais effect, the natural question will be "Why does it occur?" So far, explanations have included the anisotropy of space (the condition of having different properties in different directions), gravitational waves, and solar radiation. But, it could take years for a final settlement of the question, given that gravity has been tested many times over a wide range of conditions and no anomalous situation has ever been observed.

in the visible region by doing terrestrial experiments. Eclipse experiments, both terrestrial and space-borne, are designed keeping these various factors in view."

The coronal heating problem has received quite a bit of attention in solar physics in recent years, and an explanation seems to be at hand. It is believed that energy transfer into the corona is likely to be in the form of waves of magnetic energy because it is physically impossible to transfer thermal energy from the cooler surface to the much hotter corona. But no measurement until the results of the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1997 had found an adequate level of energy to account for the coronal temperature.

The Theory of Magneto Hydro Dynamics (MHD) tells us that regions overlying magnetic structures can be hotter than those over non-magnetic structures. Earlier it was assumed that such magnetic structures were concentrated in isolated spots on the sun's surface and hence were not an adequate source of energy for coronal heating. SOHO's results show that such magnetic concentrations, each of which is thousands of kilometres across, are now in tens of thousands, forming almost a "magnetic carpet" spread across the sun's surface. Loops of magnetic wave energy connecting opposite poles of such concentrations transfer energy from the solar interior into the corona. With each loop carrying energy that a power plant would generate over a million years, enough energy transfer from the "magnetic carpet" can take place to heat up the coronal plasma to over a million degrees.

Magnetic waves carrying energy from sun's interior up into the corona are likely to produce oscillations in the white-light region of the corona which is visible during TSEs. These oscillations are expected to be very fast (at least once a second). If one does not see such oscillations at regions above a given level in the outer corona, it would imply that these waves are being dissipated and energy is being deposited. It is best to search for them with ground-based electronic cameras (like charge coupled devices) and photometers during TSEs as spacecraft instruments cannot yet operate at high speeds. However, most terrestrial experiments for the August 11 event were designed in conjunction with the space-borne instruments which were appropriately positioned to complement these terrestrial observations.



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

At an eclipse camp of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics at Chadegan near Isfahan in Iran.

The solar eclipse corona imaging system (SECIS) is a rapid scanning instrument which was deployed by British scientists at a site in Bulgaria. This is also designed to search for short-period modulations in the corona. The CCD cameras used in SECIS had the capability of imaging a selected portion of the corona at the rate of 50 images a second.

The coronal diagnostics spectrometer (CDS) aboard SOHO had been geared to support this experiment with coronal scans in the extended ultraviolet region. A description of this experiment, with which Dr. B. N. Dwivedi of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is associated, is expected to appear in the November issue of the Indian journal *Current Science.*

The IIA expedition to Isfahan was part of a large internationally coordinated white-light photometric measurement project by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) under its Joint Organisation for Solar Observations (JOSO). The IIA team included two students from Iran Institute of Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences, Zanzan, and was led by Jagdev Singh. The team conducted two experiments: one imaged six locations on the northeastern side of the corona up to 1.5-2 solar radii using a telescope designed to look at the corona and measure the intensities using an array of photomultiplier tubes. This was to study the variations in intensities which would be there if there are coronal oscillations.

The other experiment involved high-resolution two-dimensional imaging of the corona using CCD cameras and the group has obtained 11 images. If there are waves carrying energy into the corona, such an experiment (which is like the British SECIS) can give an idea of the nature of the waves. Jagdev Singh's team had earlier observed short-period coronal oscillations during the 1995 TSE over India and the February 1998 eclipse in Venezuela. The latest experiment has been further refined and, according to Jagdev Singh, preliminary results show that these short-period intensity oscillations were detected this time as well.

While future TSEs will provide opportunities to refine data on coronal oscillations, increased sophistication in instrumentation has also given new directions for eclipse research. For example, a Japanese research team has devised a CCD-based instrument to measure coronal temperatures directly. This is different from temperatures derived from the SOHO data or emission line spectra, says Jagdev Singh. Coronal temperatures, according to him, need to be determined accurately for a good model of the corona and this experiment should enable that. Despite very advanced orbiting platforms on the anvil, terrestrial experiments do not seem to be anywhere close to being given up.

Considering that the latter come cheap, and with least noise, astronomers will continue to chase eclipses carrying heavy equipment across countries. Tomorrow coronal heating may find a solution in eclipse experiments but the sun holds many secrets that need to be studied over for many more eclipses. There are also terrestrial phenomena which eclipses may help unravel. In any case, even if one understood the sun fully, an eclipse will continue to dazzle scientists and the public alike.■

Dear power

Following the commissioning of the first phase of the Enron power project, the Maharashtra State Electricity Board purchases power from the Dabhol Power Company at an exorbitant cost, which may soon be passed on to consumers.

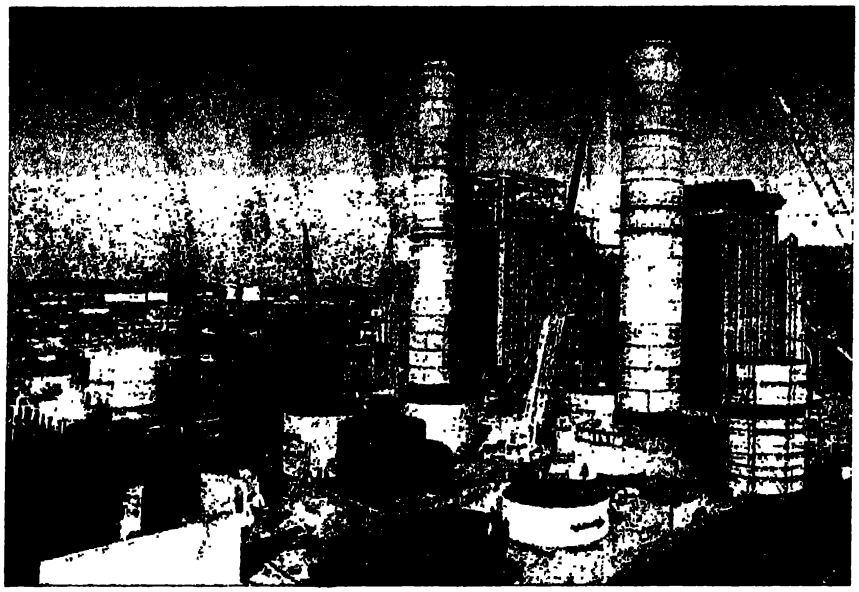
LYLA BAVADAM
in Mumbai

THE controversial Enron power project is back in the news, and the price of governmental profligacy, and worse, is becoming all too evident. Power consumers in Maharashtra will soon begin to feel the direct impact of the extremely unfavourable terms on which the project was finalised. Initiated in 1993 when Sharad Pawar was Chief Minister, it was subsequently scrapped and "renegotiated" by the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party coalition Government.

In May, 1999, Phase I of the project was commissioned, and in June the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) purchased 236 million units of electricity from Enron's Indian subsidiary, the Dabhol Power Company (DPC), at the exorbitant rate of Rs.4.96 a unit. This burden is certain to be passed on to the consumers in the near future, according to A.D. Golandaz, vice-president of the Mumbai MSEB Workers Federation. He said: "There is likely to be an increase in the power tariff after the Assembly elections. Consumers will soon be paying higher rates." Only by hiking the power tariff could the MSEB hope to meet the high cost of the power it purchased from the DPC, Golandaz added.

In addition to the cost of acquisition of power, the MSEB is to pay the DPC Rs.230 crores towards pre- and post-commissioning charges; the DPC has sought an additional Rs.120 crores towards fuel charges incurred during trial runs.

There are two issues at stake here. One is that consumers will soon be paying a far higher tariff for power purchased from the DPC compared to power that the MSEB purchases from other producers. The other is that the MSEB's purchase of power from the DPC, with which it has entered into an agreement, will have a deleterious impact on other power producers. They have already been forced to cut back on generation since the MSEB no longer purchases power from them. The MSEB has a 30 per cent stake in the DPC, and under the terms of a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the DPC it is committed to purchasing power from the DPC.



Construction work under way at the Dabhol plant in June 1998. The first phase of the project was commissioned in May 1999.

Power that was hitherto purchased at a far lower per-unit cost from other power utilities in the State, such as the Tata Electric Company (TEC) and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), will now be purchased from the DPC at a higher rate. The MSEB purchased power from the TEC, which generates a surplus of between 200 and 400 MW, at the rate of Rs.2 a unit; in the case of the NTPC, the rate was Rs.1.35 a unit.

Power costs in Maharashtra

The following is a comparison of the per-unit cost at which three power producers in Maharashtra sold power to the Maharashtra State Electricity Board.

Tata Electric Company	Rs. 1.00-2.00
National Thermal Power Corporation	80 paise-Rs. 1.50
Dabhol Power Company	Rs. 4.00-4.96

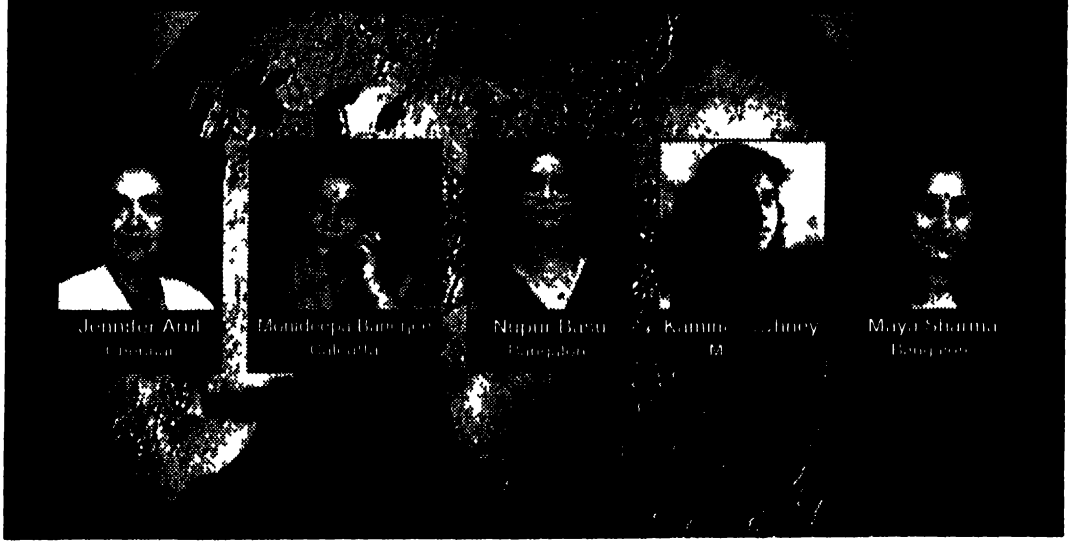
The MSEB says that despite a claimed power shortage in the State a few months ago, it did not purchase power from the NTPC because its units were shut down for maintenance. However, a trade union source said that the Government's claim about a power shortage was intended to prepare the ground for power purchase from the DPC. The source alleged that in May the Government deliberately slowed down the pace of maintenance work at the MSEB power stations in order to induce an artificial shortage.

The MSEB has reportedly asked the TEC to step down its power generation by about 200 MW. The TEC, which sells power to Gujarat, could be in trouble with its lending agencies if its capacities remain underutilised. According to TEC sources, in the absence of a regulatory authority the company is unable to force the MSEB to honour a standby agreement under which the MSEB should purchase power from the TEC if its own plants are shut down.

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Power politics

LYLA BAVADAM

DURING the Maharashtra Assembly elections in 1995, the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party combine promised in its manifesto that its government would scrap the Enron power project that had been finalised by the Sharad Pawar Government in 1993. Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray frequently referred to the project as "Sharad Pawar's white elephant" and the alliance characterised it as a symbol of the corruption of the Pawar regime. Bharatiya Janata Party leader Gopinath Munde even threatened to "throw Enron into the Arabian Sea".

Accordingly, immediately after coming to power the Shiv Sena-BJP combine began investigations into the award of the contract, the economics of the project and the consequences for Maharashtra if the project was to go ahead. A Cabinet subcommittee was constituted to review the project and report whether it "subserves the interest" of the State.

Based on the subcommittee's recommendations, the Cabinet decided in August 1995 to "scrap" the project. On August 3, 1995, Chief Minister Manohar Joshi made a formal announcement to this effect in the Assembly. Days later, however, he said that anybody could make representations to him. Taking its cue from this, Enron re-established a dialogue with the ruling establishment, including Thackeray. Enron Development Corporation's chief executive officer Rebecca Mark flew down to meet Thackeray. By end-September the Government had decided to explore the possibility of reviving the project. On November 8, 1995, a committee of experts was constituted to renegotiate the agreement.

The committee submitted its report to the Government on November 21, and about seven weeks later the Cabinet decided to revive the project, claiming that the Government had induced Enron to lower the project cost and, consequently, the per-unit cost of power. The "renegotiated" deal, however, retained some of the most objectionable features of the original agreement.

Four years later, the tables have been turned yet again. This time, it is Sharad Pawar, who now heads the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), who is critical of the agreement with Enron. The NCP manifesto promises an inquiry into the manner in which the "renegotiated" deal has been implemented by the Shiv Sena-BJP Government on the ground that the State is losing entrepreneurs because of the high power tariff that the agreement entails. ■

UNDER the terms of the PPA with the DPC, the MSEB is committed to purchasing 90 per cent of the 740 MW of power generated during the first phase of the project. This is because the PPA was negotiated by reckoning the MSEB's requirement at 90 per cent of the Plant Load Factor(PLF) of the DPC plant. Under normal circumstances, the per-unit cost of purchase decreases as the quantum of power purchased draws nearer to the plant's generating capacity. However, in this case such a deal benefits only the DPC, not the MSEB, because estimates by a variety of independent experts have shown that the MSEB's needs will rarely exceed 70 per cent of the PLF of the DPC. In effect, the MSEB will purchase from the DPC more power than it needs; consequently, its requirements from other utilities will decrease and it will also have to step down generation in its own units.

In addition, under the terms of the PPA, for the next 20 years the MSEB is contract-bound to purchase 90 per cent of the power produced by the DPC regardless of whether or not the power is required or used. A clause in the PPA specifically forbids the MSEB from asking the DPC to cut back production levels.

The Shiv Sena-BJP Government was a trenchant critic of the PPA that had been finalised by the Sharad Pawar Government in 1993; in fact, it scrapped the project in August 1995 stating that it was "anti-Maharashtra". In a statement in the State Assembly in 1995, Chief Minister Manohar Joshi said that "a wrong impression" had been conveyed to the people that consumers would pay only Rs.2.40 a unit, and that in fact the price would be closer to Rs.5 a unit. He highlighted the fact that the price at which the MSEB would procure power from the DPC would depend on the rupee-dollar exchange rate and the price of fuel. Joshi said that "while negotiating the agreement no thought was given to protect the interest of the State and consumers." The Joshi Government "renegotiated" the deal (in the process adding a much bigger Phase II at higher costs), but the revised agreement retained some of the most objectionable features of the original agreements.

Energy analyst Abhay Mehta, who is authoring a book on the Enron deal, says that the PPA was weighted heavily in favour of Enron. Citing secret internal documents with the MSEB, he alleges that the per-unit cost of electricity purchased from the DPC would be higher than what is claimed by the Government. Under the terms of the PPA, two costs are factored into the tariff: capacity charge and the charge for fuel. Mehta states that there was "no mention anywhere in the PPA of the capital expenditure on the plant." According to him, the officially mentioned cost of Rs.9,053 crores did not factor in the capital recovery charge; further, the variables in the formula for the payment of capacity charges had not been stated. The variables in calculating the capital recovery charge include the dollar-rupee exchange rate, inflation rates in India and in the United States, the U.S. labour inflation index, and the U.S. materials inflation index. Mehta states that between 1993 and 1998, a single variable – the dollar-rupee exchange rate – accounted for a 40 per cent increase in capacity charges. Furthermore, he says, under the agreement, even if the MSEB picks up only half the contracted capacity (as seems likely), it would have to pay the full amount agreed upon, which would effectively double the per-unit cost.

The PPA, in Mehta's view, is very one-sided in that the MSEB has no rights under it. It is virtually impossible for the MSEB to terminate the agreement, but the DPC can do so unilaterally if things do not go its way. There are certain clauses in the PPA which permit the DPC to dictate specific terms to the MSEB: for instance, the DPC maintains the right to decide which MSEB official will inspect its plant.

Anti-Enron activists have for long been warning against the Enron project. The controversy over the high power cost, which is certain to be passed on to the consumers, may be only the tip of the iceberg. ■

Narmada

The way the Narmada issue is being handled by the government causes concern. It is now clear that most of the so-called benefits of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) are to be cornered by Gujarat, while the tens of thousands of people who will be displaced are primarily from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has filed an affidavit with the Supreme Court, stating that it does not have enough land to resettle the people, while the Maharashtra Government has conveyed the same message to the media. In this background, it is shocking to see the apathy exhibited by the Central Government, the Supreme Court and the Gujarat Government.

Vijay Kumar Manghnani
North Carolina, United States

Mobilisation of Dalits

It is true that Dalits have been politically mobilised in Tamil Nadu as never before ("A consolidation of forces", August 27). But it appears to have happened more on a casteist basis. Could it be owing to the failure of major political parties to organise them on the basis of principles and policies? Does it mean a setback to democracy? It is clear that the Tirunelveli massacre and the continued oppression of Dalits in the South have created a new awareness among them about the need for unity. It is essential to ensure that caste differences are not widened. Instead of looking for short-term gains, the political leadership should show the vision to foster harmony.

A. Jacob Sahayam
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Nuclear weapons

In "A flawed character" (August 27), the author quotes Henry Kissinger as saying that "the strategic arsenal of nuclear warheads is useful to deter nuclear attacks from the enemy and for little else" and makes a comment that this should provide a sobering thought for "our nuclear hawks". The so-called "nuclear hawks" have no problems in accepting this reasoning. Strength in conventional arms is not a sufficient deterrent against a state like Pakistan, unless it is made known to it that any first strike with nuclear warheads would invite instant retaliation. In fact, it is the numerical and technological superiority of India's armed forces and its conventional weapons that would tempt Pakistan to deploy nuclear weapons and venture a first strike.

R. Anjana
Chennai

Neelan Tiruchelvam

Your coverage of the assassination of Neelan Tiruchelvam (August 27) was comprehensive. Several prominent personalities from different parts of the world have condoled the death of the Tamil leader. However, what puzzles and disappoints me is that neither the Tamil Nadu Government nor any prominent politician from Tamil Nadu has issued any statement in this regard.

K. Sabesan
Madurai

Solar eclipse

The article on the solar eclipse (August 13) was informative. It was an authoritative description of the natural phenomenon.

A.K. Bose
Calcutta

Kargil

In "A probe and its prospects" (August 27) the author says that the committee on the Kargil conflict has no statutory authority. Could he cite even one instance of any committees appointed by government in free India having statutory powers? The BJP is playing the same game that was played by its predecessors in power. At least in the future all political parties should agree to respect and follow the findings of inquiry commissions. Their findings should be treated in the same manner as Supreme Court verdicts.

R. Rajaraman
Chennai

★ ★ ★

As you rightly pointed out ("Now the cover-up", August 13), the decision of Lt. Gen. N.C. Vij, the Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO), to brief the BJP National Executive was indeed disgraceful. But the question is: did he do so on his own initiative? The Chief of the Army Staff has disowned any responsibility, saying that he had no control over the senior officer who did the briefing. If that is so, did the DGMO carry out the briefing without clearance from his chief? Or does the Army chief's statement betray a lack of moral courage? The Army should clarify.

Col. D. Lal (retd)
Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh

★ ★ ★

The quality of the victory in Kargil is questionable ("The unending cost", August 13). The conflict was the result of the BJP-led government's misgovernance. In order to evict a handful of infiltrators, the Indian armed forces had to fight a "war" for 50 days. They had to deploy powerful war machines, and hundreds of soldiers had to sacrifice their lives.

Rajan Ramarao
Mumbai

BJP government

By a strange stroke of luck, the BJP-led government's handling of the Kargil crisis has heightened the rating of A.B.Vajpayee and his government although it was they who were responsible for the crisis, as it was their failure to prevent the infiltration that resulted in the avoidable national tragedy. There is no reason to give special credit to the BJP-led government for the "Kargil victory". At best, it may be partially ascribed to Vajpayee's ability as an individual.

Democracy in India has reached a stage where a government which lost the confidence of the House and was voted out continues in office and functions with more independence, fearlessness and vigour than before. The reason is simple, while in power, it was subjected to pushes and pulls from its coalition partners.

But once it lost the confidence motion, it had nothing to fear because it could not fall any further and has therefore become hundred per cent stable. Neither house of Parliament is in session. The Government is no longer subject to its coalition partners' pulls and pushes – and herein lies the strength of a voted-out government.

Even if the prediction that the National Democratic Alliance will win over 300 seats in the September elections comes true, Vajpayee of "Kargil fame" cannot be the same again. For, when every partner of the NDA – more than 20 parties that have temporarily come together in search of power – starts demanding its pound of flesh, Vajpayee will become his old self – a person who could not lead an alliance. Unable to control the affairs of the NDA, the government will soon meet with the same fate of the previous government.

C.K. Lawrence
Shillong

The telecom tangle

My attention has been drawn to an interview given by Mr.Arun Jaitley to *Frontline* ("It is a revival package", August 27), in which he has referred to some alleged excerpts from my letter dated May 12, 1999, written to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to the effect that "those who are overstating the ability of the industry to pay this licence fee are the interested quarters who want the industry in India to collapse. There is now an urgent need to change." After the quotation, he has said that he was quoting from the letter.

I am enclosing a copy of my letter dated May 12, 1999, addressed to Sri Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister. There is no such sentence as has been purported to be "extracted" from my letter dated May 12, 1999, and in fact my letter does not contain any observation to that effect at all.

It is strange that a Senior Advocate of Mr. Jaitley's standing, claiming to be a key strategist of the BJP, is indulging in total disinformation, if not fabrication, trying to make out a desperate case finding that the government led by Sri Vajpayee has indulged in gross anti-people and anti-national activity.

Mr. Jaitley has questioned why the revenue sharing system of March 26, 1999 was not opposed. That policy was not applicable to the existing cellular operators. By my letter of May 12, 1999, I actually brought the representations made by the existing cellular operators to the notice of the Government of the day and I categorically stated in my letter that "If it is ascertained by the Government, on a proper review, that the existing cellular operators cannot survive without introduction of a revenue sharing arrangement, then obviously proper consideration has to be given upon an objective assessment of all the issues with an open mind." I further mentioned that upon such review and assessment, if the apprehensions of the cellular operators were found to be justified then the question of integration might be worth considering. Significantly, till today, the Government of India has not disclosed whether any study or review was made and if so, to what effect. I never asked the Government to take any wrong or anti-people decision based upon their subjective feelings.

I charge that the BJP and its so-called spokesmen and strategists are deliberately misleading the people in an attempt to extricate their government from a very murky situation, knowing that they have no proper answer and they are making insinuations and indulging in false propaganda in spite of the fact that their own Minister for Communications and Minister for Finance had objected to the change of policy regarding the existing operators, which clearly points to corruption at the highest level, which prompted the Government to take such a controversial decision.

I hope Mr. Jaitley would tender an apology in writing for the deliberately misleading and incorrect allegations made against me. I am enclosing a copy of this letter to Mr. Jaitley.

Somnath Chatterjee, ex-M.P.,
Leader CPI(M), Lok Sabha

Following is the text of the letter written by Somnath Chatterjee:

Dear Prime Minister,

During my tenure as the Chairman, Standing Committee on Communications, and even thereafter, several cellular operators belonging to the concerned Association met me and brought to my notice the problems faced by them. They have been requesting for due consideration by the Government of the disadvantaged position they are occupying.

The Telecom Policy of 1994, it seems, very significantly, failed to achieve most of, if not all, its objectives. As a result, the expansion of the network that was expected through the efforts of DoT as well as the private operators, both in basic telecom and cellular operations, has not been achieved.

The cellular operators have very categorically denied that they have received premium by sale of shares at a discount as has been alleged against them in some interested quarters. It has been represented by them, and as the facts appeared to be, that the Indian operators have not only participated in equity but also have had to provide guarantees to DoT apart from debt funding, which their foreign collaborators did not have to do. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the final stake of cellular operations in the different regions has been substantially more so far as Indian operators are concerned, compared to their foreign counterparts.

It is well-known that the cellular operators have not been able to have the targeted number of customers as per the projection of DoT, which, according to them resulted in poor cash flow, culminating in the failure on the part of cellular operators to pay the licence fees. The Indian cellular operators have represented to me that by reason of additional induction of funds, their financial capability was put under great strain.

The new Telecom Policy formulated by your Government has provided for a dual system – one for payment of licence fees by existing operators and the other for revenue sharing by the new operators. This has, as has been represented by the cellular operators, not only created an anomaly but has also made their future operations totally uncertain and unviable. Such operators, from time to time, have been requesting for review of the position.

If it is ascertained by the Government, on a proper review, that the existing cellular operators cannot survive without introduction of a revenue sharing arrangement, then obviously proper consideration has to be given upon an objective assessment of all the issues with an open mind. Indian concerns, who genuinely wanted to make a contribution for the development of the telecom network in our country, are almost now out of business for no direct fault of theirs. Certainly the Government has to ensure that the foreign telecom companies should not at any time be able to take over our telecom network and for that reason also, it is essential that the Indian operators should be provided due consideration so that their financial viability is not affected.

Integration of the existing cellular operators into the new Telecom Policy framework seems to be worth considering, in the face of apprehensions that have been apparently expressed in some quarters. I feel that since there is considerable justification in the representations that are being made by the existing cellular operators, this matter should be brought to your attention so that no Indian operator is ultimately denied justice, considering the present situation in an objective manner, consistent with national interest.

Somnath Chatterjee

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

India votes for the second time in less than 20 months, and for the first time in five phases, spread over a month. A look at the line-ups, electoral mood and prospects in the States that go to the polls on September 5 and 11, some of which have simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly.



RAJASTHAN

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

WHEN Congress veteran Balram Jakhar arrived in Jaipur *en route* to filing his nomination for the Sikar parliamentary constituency, it was to a strangely subdued reception. Absent was the customary effervescence with which the Jat community in Rajasthan welcomes a leader of national stature. Local enthusiasm remained subdued as he proceeded to Sikar the following day in a cavalcade of cars. Although he has represented Sikar for two full terms in the Lok Sabha, Jakhar does not maintain a permanent establishment in the constituency. Nor does he depend upon local talent for his closest campaign managers.

Elsewhere in the constituency, Amra Ram, the sole legislator from the CPI(M) in the Rajasthan Assembly, was stepping up the tempo of his campaign for the Lok Sabha. Where was Balram Jakhar, he asked a gathering at the village of Bhakhron ki Thani, some 30 km from Sikar, when the peasants of Rajasthan were mobilising in their thousands to demand an assured minimum supply of electricity? Where was he when prices of phosphatic fertilizer were sharply raised, causing distress to the farming community? Where was he when Sikar received its dead heroes from the war in Kargil?

Jakhar is returning to Sikar after contesting and winning the 1998 elections from distant Bikaner. Apart from Amra Ram, he is facing Subhash Maharia of the BJP, the winner the last time around. Maharia himself seems to embody some of the malleable political loyalties of the locally powerful Jat community. His uncle Ramdeo Singh Maharia represented the Dhod Assembly segment of Sikar in the Rajasthan legislature virtually without break till 1993. He has since suffered two successive defeats at the hands of Amra Ram.

For his part, the CPI(M) candidate seems clearly to perceive Jakhar as the man to beat. When he chooses to direct his



GOPAL SUNGER

Amra Ram, the CPI(M) candidate for the Sikar constituency, addressing an election meeting.

rhetoric against the BJP's Mehariya, it is only as a minor distraction from the main task of skewering the "intruder" from Punjab. Accompanying him on the campaign trail, Sheopat Singh of the All India Kisan Sabha puts his own interpretation on the stakes involved for the people of Sikar. Amra Ram is one of our own, he declares. He was born in a small peasant household and has steeped himself in the struggles of his class. Sikar has had a history of sending large landholders, business tycoons and rootless outsiders to Parliament. It is time now for the constituency to have its authentic voice heard in New Delhi.

Rajasthan (1998)	
Seats:	25
CONG.	18
BJP	5
Ind & Oth	2

Since the Janata Dal began disintegrating in 1991, Rajasthan has, by all appearances, been settling into the relatively predictable framework of a two-party system. However, periodic disturbances in the settled course of bipolar contests have arisen from within the ranks of the two main parties. Violent eruptions of factionalism within the two principal contestants have been a feature with often decisive influence in most elections over the last decade. In the 1993 Assembly elections, the Congress suffered grievous losses because of an upsurge of dissidence within. It was the turn of the BJP to suffer likewise in 1998. Today, just nine months after a historic landslide in the Legislative Assembly elections, the Congress in Rajasthan is facing a tide of resentment among one of its principal constituencies.

The Jat Mahasabha, which was till recently a social organisation dealing with matrimonial and such other matters, has issued an edict that the Congress should be defeated in the Lok Sabha polls. Jat ire has been provoked by the Congress' perceived obstruction of a move to bestow upon them the status of a "backward class". More than opportunities in public employment, the Jats in Rajasthan are being impelled into this demand by backward class reservations in local self-government. Once a channel for mobilising Jat power, panchayati raj has today become a serious obstacle to the projection of their political might.

The Jat Mahasabha's edict is not good news for the Congress. Except for 1989, when they strayed into the embrace of the Janata Dal, the Jat community – by some estimates the most numerous caste grouping in the State – has been one of the main pillars of strength of the Congress in Rajasthan.

The Mahasabha's strategy is simple. It will not contest elections directly, since it is not a registered political party. But prominent community leaders are being fielded as independent candidates in the hope that they will cut into the vote share of the Congress. Sumitra Singh, a senior politician till recently associated with the Congress, is contesting in Jhunjhunu. Her presence could make a material difference to the fortunes of the Jat patriarch Sis Ram Ola, who has returned to the Congress fold after a brief interlude in Third Force politics.

As an individual, Ola has proven twice in the recent past that he can win even without the label of the big parties. This endows him with a special confidence in the battle. His personal standing, when bolstered by the stamp of approval of the Congress, should prove an irresistible formula for success.

The situation in Nagaur is not dissimilar. Ram Raghunath Chaudhary won the seat for the Congress in 1998, taking it out of the grasp of the Mirdha family for the first time since 1971. Bhanu Prasad Mirdha, son of Nathuram Mirdha, brought the seat into the BJP fold in a byelection in 1997. But he proved a fickle customer and was replaced by his cousin Richpal Singh as the BJP candidate in the 1998 general elections. Ram Raghunath's massive victory proved, however, that the Jats of Nagaur were uncomfortable with the BJP and would even abandon their fealty to the Mirdha family to make this point.

Ram Raghunath enjoys a personal stature in the constituency which should see him through. The likely bearer of the Jat Mahasabha mantle, Vijay Punia, was till recently in the Congress, where his penchant for unsavoury deals was a perennial source of embarrassment. But an element of collusion is evident in this constituency, where the BJP has fielded a little known Bania, Sham Sundar Kabra.

Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the BJP's old warhorse, sees nothing amiss in this decision. A split in the Jat vote between Punia and Ram Raghunath, he says, could see Kabra through in Nagaur. But public perceptions of the individual worth of the two Jat candidates makes this a less than credible proposition.

This suggests two kinds of strategies that the BJP could adopt – it could bank on a deep division in the Jat vote that could secure victory for itself. Or it could, in a last minute switch, transfer its core votes to the Mahasabha candidate, supplementing whatever he may be able to attract from his caste constituency.

Five constituencies in northern Rajasthan (Ganganagar, Bikaner, Churu, Jhunjhunu and Sikar) and five in the west (Pali, Jalore, Barmer, Jodhpur and Nagaur) go to the polls on September 5. Eight constituencies in the east (Jaipur, Dausa, Alwar, Bharatpur, Bayana, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer and Tonk) and seven in the south (Banswara, Salumber, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Kota and Jhalawar) follow on September 11.

The first phase of polling covers the core areas of Jat political influence. Gyan Prakash Pilania, a former Director-General of Police who today heads the Jat Mahasabha, admits that the crusade against the Congress will not be fully reflected in this belt of the State. Rather, the deepest impact would be in the eastern and southern constituencies, where Jat voting behaviour does not follow long-established custom and is prone to volatile shifts.

Congress Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's first reaction to the prospect of a Jat rebellion was insouciance. "Where will they go if they do not vote for the Congress," he is reported to have said. At a later stage, when the threat became real, he apparently amended this early formulation, reflecting a definite strategic shift: "Let the Jat go; others will then come on board".

This stands at the core of the Congress' rather confident strategy in Rajasthan. As the first Chief Minister from the backward classes, Gehlot is acutely aware of the potential to create a fresh Congress consolidation by recruiting these segments of the electorate. Malis, Yadavs, Gujjars and Rawats are the principal backward class communities in the State, which are yet to develop any fixed political loyalties. In seeking to safeguard the rights of these communities against dilution by the inclusion of Jats within the category of backward classes, Gehlot is essentially stepping on to uncertain terrain. He is seeking a tranformation in the representative character of his party, which could cause turbulence for his Ministry in the near future.

A positive feature for the Congress is the continuing disarray within the BJP after the electoral rout last November. Once a powerful figure in the central councils of his party, Shekhawat is today physically frail and politically isolated.

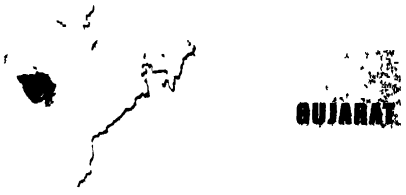
The distribution of the party ticket in Rajasthan led to a minor revolt: Kirorimal Meena parted ways in ire at being denied the Sawai Madhopur seat. This is expected to have repercussions in at least one other seat – Kota.

An element of disorientation is also evident in the BJP's choice of candidates for crucial seats. In fielding an outsider Bangaru Lakshman, the head of its Dalit cell, from the Jalore reserved constituency, the BJP has virtually conceded the seat to the Congress' Buta Singh. Also an outsider Buta Singh has, however, won the seat thrice before.

The free-floating political loyalties of Rajasthan's old feudal dynasties are another factor. In Bharatpur, the BJP has put up Vishwendra Singh, a descendant of the erstwhile Jat dynasty. He will face Jagat Singh, son of senior Congressman K. Natwar Singh. Vishwendra Singh, winner on the Janata Dal ticket in 1989, has a well-remembered history of political eccentricity. He was a defeated candidate from the area in the 1998 Assembly elections. The BJP's rather optimistic predictions of success in Bharatpur may be premature for this reason.

In neighbouring Alwar, Mahendra Kumari, who lost by a whisker as an independent candidate in 1998, is expected to return to the fray as the Congress nominee Mahendra Kumari won the seat in 1991 on the BJP ticket and sat out the next elections. The BJP candidate is Jaswant Yadav, who would presumably be counting upon the rather substantial number of voters from his community. The Congress could well seek to neutralise this element of caste solidarity by fielding a proxy Yadav candidate through its electoral ally, the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Recent electoral encounters in Rajasthan have witnessed a rapid increase in voter turnout. Notably, women voters have been turning out in large numbers in a State once sunk in feudal torpor. The flux of political loyalties that is being witnessed today points to deeper undercurrents. Increasingly, the two-party framework is proving incapable of containing the articulation of contending aspirations in a State where community loyalties run deep. The large chunk of votes that has gone to independent candidates in recent elections, points to this reality. For the Congress, holding on to some of the gains made in 1998 seems clearly dependent upon subtly altering the character of its core constituencies, without seriously disturbing the equanimity of its traditional loyalists. ■



V.VENKATESAN

AT his first press conference as the Congress(I) candidate in Gandhinagar where he will take on the Bharatiya Janata Party veteran and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani, former Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan – a terror for the political class till three years ago – posed most of the questions himself, and held the ground for nearly an hour. Was he a Sena loyalist? It so happened that of all the parties he approached for support to his candidature for the presidential election in 1996, only the Shiv Sena kept its word, he explained.

How could he win when the BJP has fielded a much stronger candidate from Gandhinagar? Seshan remarked:"As the tough get going, the going gets tough". Why did he choose Gandhinagar for his maiden contest? Gandhinagar is the best constituency, he is the best candidate, and the Congress(I) is the best party, he would say. "You have been very strict in enforcing the ceiling on election expenditure. How will you campaign in Gandhinagar, without incurring huge expenses on conveyance," asked one scribe. "I will campaign through your hearts. Front page of your newspapers would be my medium", came Seshan's reply.

Indeed, by announcing Seshan's candidature after much suspense, the Congress(I) has scored a tactical victory over the BJP. The BJP has re-nominated most of its 1998 election candidates. Some of these, who were successful, are now unpopular in their constituencies. Advani is seeking re-election for a third successive time from Gandhinagar. "Advani's visits to the constituency have been less frequent after he filed his nomination last time. He has not been able to fulfill the constituency's aspirations," said a voter in Gandhinagar.

However, the electorate of Gandhinagar, in general, seem to be impressed by the Congress(I)'s selection of Seshan, who is seen as having contributed greatly to make the electoral system effective. A cross-section of voters in both rural and urban areas, whom this correspondent met, endorsed the candidature of Seshan, who remains a "hero" particularly to the middle class people. "The Congress(I) has fielded a good candidate. He is sure to win," said a Government official. The voters seem to be not bothered about Seshan's origins outside the State. "After all, Advani is

T.N. Seshan, the Congress(I) candidate from Gandhinagar constituency.

PARAS SHAH



equally an outsider," remarked a voter

However, the BJP circles dismiss Seshan's entry as nothing more than a "comic relief"

Gujarat has a special significance in the BJP's scheme of governance, as it is the only State in which the party has been in power with a comfortable majority of its own in the Assembly since 1998. Gujarat was also the only State in western India, in which the BJP won a substantial number of Lok Sabha seats (19 out of 26) in the 1998 elections. In Maharashtra and Rajasthan, the BJP's tally was only in single digits. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel has claimed that the BJP will win all the 26 seats in the September 5 elections.

The BJP owed its landslide victory in 1998 to a peculiar social arithmetic, which enabled the dominant Patel community to avenge the perceived "injustice" caused to their leader, Keshubhai Patel, who was dethroned as the Chief Minister within six months of assuming office after the 1995 Assembly elections. The Patel caste rallied in support of Keshubhai Patel. The people belonging to the numerically stronger, non-Patel castes, which comprise the Durbars, the backward castes, minorities, and the Scheduled Castes were sought to be mobilised by two of BJP's rivals, the Congress(I) and the Rashtriya Janata Party (RJP), formed by a breakaway BJP group, which was instrumental in pulling down the Keshubhai Patel Government. As a result, the anti-BJP vote was divided. In at least eight constituencies the combined votes of the RJP and the Congress(I) exceeded the votes secured by the BJP.

The merger of the RJP with the Congress(I) is expected to have an impact on the results. The leader of the erstwhile RJP and former Chief Minister Shankarsinh Vaghela has lost some clout but he still wields considerable influence among the Kshatriya community, which is said to be traditionally hostile to Patels. The consolidation of Patels in the 1998 elections in favour of the BJP has seemingly united the people belonging to the non-Patel communities, who are likely to vote for the Congress(I), simply because the Patels will vote for the BJP.

The chances of Vaghela, who is the Congress(I) candidate in Kapadwanj, appear to be bright. He is banking on the substantial number of Kshatriya voters in this constituency. A Kshatriya voter in a village in the Saurashtra region told *Frontline* that he would vote for the BJP, if it is known that the Patels would vote the Congress(I). Such is the divide between the two rival communities. The animosity between the two communities has its roots in the emergence of Patels as the neo-landlords in this century.

Gujarat (1998)	
Seats:	26
BJP	19
CONG	7

However, it is pointed out that Patels have no rallying point now, with their leader firmly in the Chief Minister's chair. The Lok Sabha elections do not seem to have any special significance for them particularly when there is no prospect of a Patel Prime Minister and in the absence of any reason for them to feel insecure. In fact, Keshubhai Patel's style of governance has seemingly disappointed his constituency, the Patels.

Another factor that brought victory to the BJP in 1998 was its excellent organisational network in the State, which is fine-tuned to fight elections, more particularly when it is in the Opposition. Drawn from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharaks, the BJP's campaign machinery found it easy to ensure that grassroot workers were sufficiently motivated. No doubt the organisational network continues to call the shots. However, there appears to be a divide between the activists in the constituency and the organisational leaders, who are generally RSS men from outside the State.

There is resentment among party activists over the functioning of the secretary of the BJP State unit, Sanjay Joshi, who is playing a key role in the party's strategy. Joshi hails from Nagpur. Local BJP leaders feel that they are being sidelined by the State-level party functionaries. The attitude of the functionaries, drawn from the RSS, is attributed to their fears of a repeat of the Vaghela episode, which split the party.

Besides, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, of the Sangh Parivar, have reasons to be dissatisfied with the Chief Minister's approach to the communal issue. Starting from the anti-Christian bashing early this year to the recent Ahmedabad riots, these organisations expressed their reservations over the State Government's handling of the inci-



L.K. Advani being taken in a procession through Gandhinagar.



PARAS SHAH

dents, for which some of their members were arrested. It is not clear whether the Sangh Parivar activists would show the same degree of enthusiasm to work for the BJP's victory. After all, it is the Chief Minister who will ultimately take the credit for victory.

The results of the 1999 Lok Sabha election could see the principal parties in the State exchange their seats-tally, if the mood of the people is any indication. The ruling BJP has not so far succeeded in transforming the election to a referendum on the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his so-called success in tackling the Kargil conflict, as it would desire. Local issues, the lacklustre performance of the BJP-led Government in the State, and of the BJP MPs in the dissolved Lok Sabha, appear to dilute substantially any mileage that the BJP seeks to gain from its record in the Centre.

Water scarcity in the Saurashtra, Kutch, and North Gujarat regions is expected to affect the prospects of the ruling party. The Congress(I) appears to have achieved significant gains in Saurashtra, where the BJP won all the seven seats in 1998. Voters in both urban and rural pockets appear to be dissatisfied with the local BJP units and the BJP MPs, and are ready to vote for the Congress(I), although some of them would endorse Vajpayee as Prime Minister.

Allegations of misuse of power by the Chief Minister's son-in-law, Dr. Mayur Desai, and centralisation of power in the hands of the Chief Minister, have led to disgruntlement within the Keshubhai Patel Ministry. A senior Cabinet Minister, who did not want to be identified, alleged that the Chief Minister sought to have direct control over the key Ministries by appointing Ministers of State with independent charge and thus violated the principle of governance by a cabinet system. These Ministers, who are not free to take independent decisions, are asked to serve the interests of those close to the Chief Minister, the senior Minister alleged.

Can the Congress(I) effectively make use of the opportunity provided by the BJP's ineptitude? Although there are several factions in the Congress(I), they seem to be united in their objective of defeating the BJP. The party has strived to balance all the major factions in distributing the seats. Shankarsinh Vaghela's group got a couple of seats. The party did not give the ticket to its veteran leader, Sanat Mehta who had narrowly lost to the BJP in Surendranagar in 1998. The party has fielded Savsibhai Kanjibhai Makwana in Surendranagar against BJP's former MP, Bhavanaben Dave. Mehta has apparently paid the price for making critical remarks against Sonia Gandhi in an interview. Dave's popularity seems to have nosedived because of her failure to keep in regular touch with the voters. The Congress(I) has fielded several new faces in those constituencies which it lost in 1998.

The outcome of the election is expected to have an impact on the State politics as well, with many fence-sitters in the BJP waiting for an opportunity to challenge Keshubhai Patel. The pro-Congress(I) undercurrent in the run-up to the poll is a pointer to the turbulent days ahead for the BJP in the State. ■



MAHARASHTRA

LYLA BAVADAM

THE first campaign rally of the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party coalition on August 9 might politely be described as a damp squib. Less than 20,000 people turned up on Mumbai's Chowpatty beach. The vast sprawl of sand accentuated the thinness of the crowd, and even the party faithful appeared to lack enthusiasm. Giant cutouts of Prime Minister and BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee did little to conceal the fact that no national-level leader had turned up to endorse the start of the Sena-BJP campaign. There will be a simultaneous two-phase polling to the Assembly and the Lok Sabha on September 5 and 11.

Among the Shiv Sena's principal problems in this election is the unconcealed war of succession that has broken out in the household of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray. He shared the platform at Chowpatty with his son Uddhav Thackeray and nephew Raj Thackeray, but this show of unity did little to paper over the battle for power between the two heirs-apparent. A fortnight earlier, Uddhav Thackeray's supporters had assaulted his cousin's followers in Mumbai. Raj Thackeray was for long seen as the Shiv Sena supremo's natural successor. But voter anger with the Sena's criminality, as illustrated by Raj Thackeray's alleged involvement in the death under suspicious circumstances of Ramesh Kini a few years ago, led Uddhav Thackeray to emerge as the chosen successor.

The factionalism has taken several forms. Former Minister Babanrao Gholap, indicted earlier this year for his role in the embezzlement of state funds meant for the welfare of the poor, is believed to have threatened the Sena leadership that he would contest the Assembly elections as an independent if denied the party ticket. After a protracted battle, a compromise was reached through which Gholap's nephew Ravikiran Gholap was made the candidate from Deolali. Former Sena Minister Shashikant Sutar, facing similar corruption charges, was also denied the ticket, and this angered his supporters in the Pune area. In the Pimpri-Chinchwad constituency, Sena workers were so infuriated by the renomination of sitting MLA Gajanan Babar that they gheraoed State Culture Minister Pramod Navalkar.

Relations between the Sena and its coalition ally, the BJP, are increasingly strained. Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Gopinath Munde recently alarmed Sena leaders by putting out advertisements proclaiming himself to be Maharashtra's future leader. Sena apparatchiks have long complained that Munde harbours ambitions to displace their party as the princi-

pal formation of the Hindu Right in the State. That prospect may just come true if the Sena loses the bulk of the 171 Assembly seats it is contesting. The BJP is contesting in 117 constituencies.

BUT it is the five-party Progressive Democratic Front (PDF), with former Congress(I) heavyweight Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) at its apex, that will shape the election outcome in the State. Most observers believe that any division of votes as a consequence of formation of the PDF, made up along with the NCP of two Republican Party of India (RPI) factions, the Samajwadi Party (S.P.), the Janata Dal (Secular) and Sharad Joshi's Swatantra Bharat Paksh, will help the Sena-BJP alliance.

In 1996, fissures within the Congress(I) led to the emergence of a welter of breakaway party candidates. As a result, the Shiv Sena-BJP grouping won 33 of the 48 seats it contested, with the Congress(I) taking just 15. In 1998, with the right-wing alliance considerably less discredited than it is now, a united Opposition platform made up of the Congress(I), the major factions of the RPI and the S.P., won 33 of 48 Lok Sabha seats – wins which covered 220 of the 288 Assembly segments.

Pawar's PDF is named after the formation that propelled him to power in 1978. Although the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), which was a key member of that front, is contesting alone this time, the NCP is supporting the sole MP of the PWP in the just dissolved Lok Sabha from the Kulaba Lok Sabha constituency in Mumbai.

NCP strategists have been seeking to broaden the organisation's base. In the first week of its formation, the NCP had attracted 45 of the State's 77 Congress(I) MLAs and 15 of 78 MLCs into its fold, along with six independent MLAs. Pawar has since been focussing on breaking the Sena-BJP grouping. Two former BJP MPs and six persons who were Ministers in the coalition government have joined the NCP. Former Sena Minister Ganesh Naik, who formed the Bharat Vikas Party after being sacked by Thackeray, will also receive NCP support. The NCP has not been particularly fastidious in its search for allies. Sachin Aher, general secretary of the Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh and nephew of Mumbai underworld figure Arun Gawli, along with Keshavrao Khed, accused of involvement in the landing of smuggled goods on the beach along the Raj Bhavan grounds in Mumbai some years ago, are contesting the Assembly elections on the NCP ticket.

NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal pointed out that such criminality is minor in a political terrain where the Chief Minister himself has been the principal accused in a murder case. But voters might be less forgiving of the NCP's backing of discredited Sena-BJP figures. Muslim voters, accounting for some 12 per cent of the State's electorate, are central to the NCP's prospects. The PWP and the Communist Party of India, earlier sympathetic to the NCP, have refused to campaign for such candidates. Pawar has sought to regain ground by promising to implement the recommendations of the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry on the Mumbai riots, to set up a corporation for the economic welfare of the minorities, and to "restore the cosmopolitan character of Mumbai".

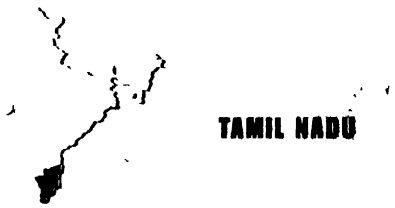
Just how these promises will play is hard to say, but one fact remains: the Congress(I) is in at least as much of a mess as the PDF. At the time of writing, the party had produced lists for only 35 Lok Sabha and 112 Assembly seats, a sign of its difficulty in finding credible candidates in several areas. Maverick politician Suresh Kalmadi, who allied himself with the BJP in 1998, has returned to the Congress(I), proclaiming himself to be "a Congressman at heart". The Mumbai North-West seat will see former actor Sunil Dutt contesting on the Congress(I) ticket. In 1996, Dutt withdrew from the fray reportedly as a favour to Thackeray, who had played a key role in securing the release of his son Sanjay Dutt, jailed on charges of involvement in the Mumbai serial bombings.

The decisive battle between the NCP and the Congress(I) will be in western Maharashtra, a region that has 12 Lok Sabha seats, the largest number among the State's six distinct regions. Western Maharashtra, flush with wealth generated from sugar, has traditionally backed the Congress(I). Three of the four seats that went to the Sena-BJP in 1996 were regained by the party in the last Lok Sabha elections, and a fourth one, Ahmednagar, was lost only because a sugar baron shifted his allegiance to the Sena. But this time the Congress(I) faces a new threat. Its MPs from Khed, Pune, Sangli and Kolhapur in the last Lok Sabha shifted their allegiance to the NCP, along with Nivedita Mane, the Shiv Sena candidate who came second to the Congress(I) winner in Ichalkaranji. PDF candidate and Dalit leader Ramdas Athavale will also give the Congress(I) a tough fight in the Pandharpur reserved constituency.

Pawar's record of not having led any party to an Assembly election victory in Maharashtra has given the Sena-BJP more than a few reasons to gloat. Congress(I) leader Murli Deora said that the NCP is working to an agenda in seeking to split the secular vote. "It is obvious that his agenda is to damage the party that he used to belong to," says Congress(I) leader Arjun Singh. "The very act of setting up a new party in Maharashtra has been of the greatest help to the Shiv Sena and the BJP." ■

Maharashtra (1998)

Seats:	**48**
CONG.	33
BJP	4
SHIV SENA	6
RPI	4
PWP	1

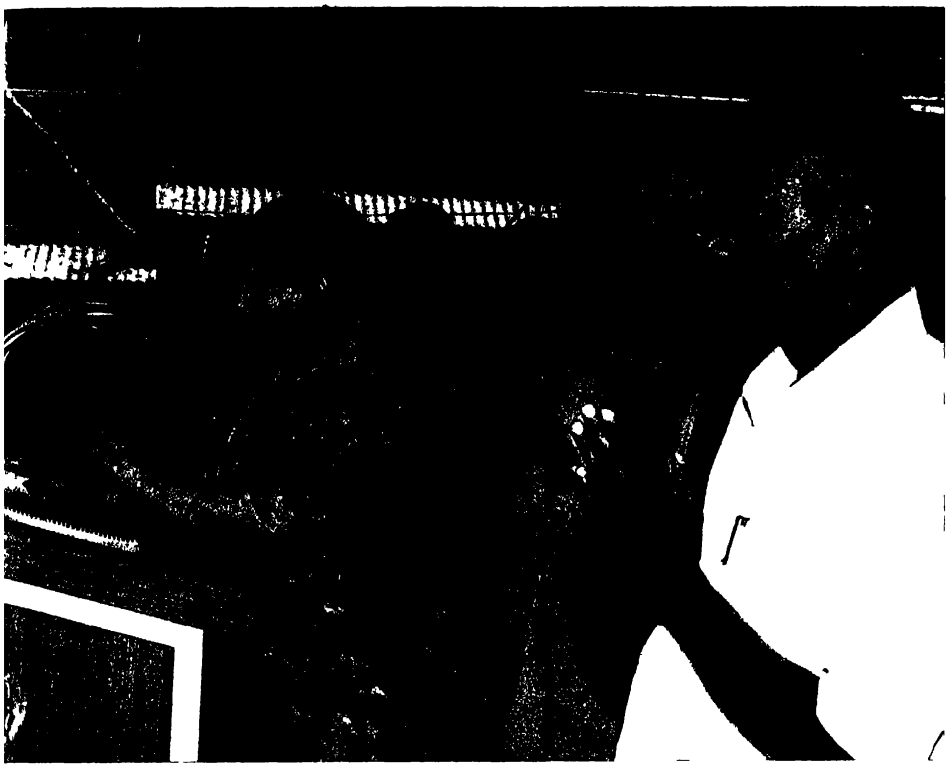


T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

THEKKUR is a picturesque village in the Sivaganga Lok Sabha constituency in Tamil Nadu. A big open space leads to the village, with several neem trees. At the centre is a tamarind tree. Next to it is an open shrine for the village deity. Some feet away is a newly painted primary school. The village looks spic and span.

It is afternoon when P. Chidambaram, Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) candidate for the constituency, drives in, followed by only two vehicles. He walks up to the tamarind tree, where a table and a microphone are kept. He waves to children trooping out of the primary school. On the tamarind tree is pinned a TMC poster. There are a few TMC flags and festoons on the branches. A group of people gather.

In fluent Tamil, Chidambaram comes straight to the subject. He says: "We warned you that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government will not last long and that the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) will withdraw support to it." He adds that Rs.484 crores was allotted to the villages in Tamil Nadu when he was Union Finance Minister but the BJP-led government had ignored villages. He promises the residents that the 1.5-km-long gravel



K. GANESHAN



K. GANESHAN

(Top) AIADMK general secretary Jayalalitha addresses a public meeting in Madural. On her left is CPI(M) candidate P. Mohan. (Above) A section of the crowd at the meeting.

road to the village would be made a *pucca* road. He concludes: "In this constituency, the DMK and the AIADMK are not contesting. So I appeal to you to vote for the cycle (TMC's election symbol)."

A villager angrily asks him why this gravel road had not been blacktopped earlier. Another joins him in the demand. Chidambaram remains unruffled and drives off.

S. Adaikappan, a Thekkur resident, says: "This road is our only grievance It is full of protruding blue metal, which topple cycles and mopeds." But Adaikappan and others acknowledge the good work done by Chidambaram. There is a primary school now, a water tank, a road leading to the cremation ground and a ration shop in the village

Chidambaram's campaign style is simple and direct. He has no retinue of supporters He goes to the villages by himself Opposing him is H. Raja of the BJP, backed by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Tamilaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) Another candidate is E.M. Sudarshan Nachiappan of the Congress, backed by the AIADMK, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Indian National League

While Chidambaram is touring villages, Raja is concentrating on towns such as Karaikudi, Tirupattur and Sivaganga Raja said on August 16 'There is time There are 18 more days to go I will go to the villages" The DMK has plunged headlong into the battle, and wants to put up a stiff fight against Chidambaram who has won consecutively for the last five times from the constituency

WITH the crises over seat-sharing resolved, three political fronts have emerged in Tamil Nadu The DMK-led front includes the BJP, the MDMK,the PMK and the TRC. The AIADMK-led front has the Congress, the CPI(M), the CPI and the INL The TMC front is backed by the Janata Dal (Secular), the Puthiya Tamilagam headed by Dr Krishnasamy, the Dalit Panthers led by R. Tirumavalavan and the Republican Party of India

There are 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in Tamil Nadu and they go to polls in two phases on September 5 and 11. With 19 out of 39 constituencies going to polls on September 5, election fever is building up. Leaders have hit the campaign trail. The first off the block, after performing *pujas* at home, was AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha, on August 1 She travels in a custom-built, air-conditioned van, from which she addresses roadside gatherings in the villages In cities and big towns, she takes part in public

meetings. Karunanidhi also travels in a van, addressing roadside gatherings and public meetings. Moopanar hit the campaign trail after worshipping at the Ashtalakshmi temple in Besant Nagar, Chennai.

Among the issues in the campaign are provision of basic amenities for people in villages, the Kargil war, federalism, regional parties, stability at the Centre, 33 per cent reservation for women in the legislature, constitutional guarantee for 69 per cent reservation in Tamil Nadu, the Cauvery issue, the Sethusamudram project, and so on. The level of the debates ranges from the banal to the dignified.

Tamil Nadu (1998)

Seats:	39
AIADMK	18
DMK	5
PMK	4
BJP	3
TMC	3
MDMK	3
Ind. & Oth.	3

The mood of the people ranges from enthusiasm, indifference to sullenness. A few are scared to voice their opinion. At Jayamkondan, a couple of youths politely declined to say anything because "this is a bad area". While some readily reveal their preferences, many hedge their bets. N. Narasimhan, a youth, asked: "Did Jayalalitha allow Vajpayee to have a peaceful meal even for a day?"

The DMK and its allies project Vajpayee as the prime ministerial candidate of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and as the man who brought "honour to India in war and peace." While the NDA trains its guns on the AIADMK-Congress-Left front and vice versa, both the alliances ignore the TMC front.

The AIADMK, the PMK and the TMC have had their share of setbacks following desertions. AIADMK legislator from Srivilliputhur R. Thamaraikani filed his nomination papers as an independent from the Sivakasi constituency after a tiff with Jayalalitha over an extremely poor gathering at Srivilliputhur to hear her on August 16. Thamaraikani is opposing the official AIADMK candidate V. Ramasamy, former Supreme Court Judge. Consequently, Thamaraikani was expelled from the party.

Union Minister of State for Health Dalit Ezhimalai of the PMK quit his post and decided to join the AIADMK after his party denied him renomination in Chidambaram. Former Union Minister M. Arunachalam deserted the TMC and joined the Congress after his suggestion to align with the DMK or the AIADMK was rejected by the party.

Cracks appeared in the AIADMK-Congress(I) alliance on August 22 when Jayalalitha failed to turn up for a public meeting at Villupuram that was to be addressed jointly by her and Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. AIADMK district secretary S.S. Paneerselvan claimed that Jayalalitha was held up by a "sea of humanity" on the way. Besides, he added that she was to attend a function at which Dalit Ezhimalai would be admitted into the AIADMK. After waiting for an hour, Sonia Gandhi went ahead with her address. She said: "What our country needs is a government with genuine concern to improve the lives of the poorest people. Only the Congress can do it. The BJP has been given a chance, but it failed miserably."

The previous day, Atal Behari Vajpayee said at a public meeting on the Marina beach in Chennai: "For me, dealing with the AIADMK was one of the most painful periods of my public life." Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, who read out portions from the National Democratic Alliance manifesto, assured the minorities that their interests would be protected.

The campaign has shifted to high gear in the Sivaganga constituency. As one drives from Puduvayal village to Karaikudi and beyond, there is a surfeit of cycle symbols on walls. Partymen were busy drawing lotus or cycle symbols. The DMK is active here on behalf of the BJP. Indeed, the DMK volunteers had outstripped the BJP cadres in the campaign for Raja everywhere in this constituency.

A big battle is in prospect in the temple town of Madurai. Here the fight is mainly between two heavyweights, P. Mohan of the CPI(M) and Pon. Muthuramalingam of the DMK. A.G.S. Rambabu of the TMC and Subramanian Swamy of the Janata Party are also battling it out. Posters hail Swamy as the "Chanakya of politics". The BJP posters call Vajpayee "the *sanyasin* of politics".

Karunanidhi's son M.K. Alagiri, who hitherto used to work in the background, is now the manager of Muthuramalingam's campaign. Alagiri was present on the dais when BJP leader and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani addressed a public meeting on August 17 near the Meenakshi temple.

Advani denounced Jayalalitha for demanding the dismissal of the DMK Government. According to him, Jayalalitha rang him up in June last year on the eve of the Rajya Sabha elections from the Tamil Nadu Assembly, which would have returned six DMK candidates. Advani said Jayalalitha demanded either the dismissal of the DMK government or postponement of the Rajya Sabha elections. He replied that neither was possible. "That was the last conversation I had with her," he added.

P. Mohan of the CPI(M), backed by the AIADMK, is running a powerful campaign. There is general admiration for Mohan as a man of integrity, who champions the cause of the daily-wage labourers, petty traders, the working class and the middle class. Mohan was the unsuccessful CPI(M) candidate here in the 1991, 1996 and 1998 elections.

According to R. Jothi Ram, CPI(M) district secretariat member, Mohan's campaign was largely based on the basic facilities that Madurai lacked. There was no underground drainage in 36 out of 72 wards in the Madurai municipal corporation, now controlled by the DMK. The civil body lacked funds; it is short of sanitation workers; and work on a ring road was proceeding at a snail's pace. There are not enough ration shops. The CPI(M) is demanding a High Court Bench in Madurai. "Our allies, the AIADMK, the Congress, the CPI and the TMMK (Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam) are fully coordinating with us," Jothi Ram said.

Subramanian Swamy claimed that the going was good for him. According to him, the presence of the CPI(M) candidate had hampered him from attacking the BJP effectively. He had to train his guns on the CPI(M) too now.

In the Sivakasi constituency, it is a colourful and noisy campaign by both the MDMK candidate Vaiko and his rival Ramasamy of the AIADMK. The BJP and the DMK workers are behind Vaiko in his campaign.

Jayalalitha's avowed plans to defeat Vaiko, who was her erstwhile ally, received a setback when Thamaraikani decided to contest as an independent. Jayalalitha set out in her caravan on August 16 to seek votes for Ramasamy. If poor attendance at Rajapalayam annoyed her, she was shocked that there was hardly any crowd at Srivilliputhur and Sivakasi. There were only a few hundred people at Tiruthangal where she was to address a public meeting. So former Minister K.A. Sengottaiyan announced that the meeting was postponed to the next day and appealed to the people to "gather in waves".

An angry Jayalalitha lambasted Thamaraikani, and Virudhunagar district AIADMK secretary K. Sundara Pandian

for the poor turnout. Their explanations that people were in their workplaces because it was afternoon then and because of the condescending attitude of Ramasamy towards local party leaders cut no ice with her.

Jayalalitha returned the next day to Virudhunagar, Tiruthangal and Sivakasi to a better reception. At many roadside villages, village bands were in attendance, presenting songs from films that featured M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalitha. Women waited with "arathi". AIADMK youths, in white shorts and white T-shirts, controlled the crowd.

Jayalalitha and her friend Sasikala Natarajan reached Amathur in their van, followed by about 60 vehicles. Alongside was an open vehicle in which Ramasamy stood. A woman went ecstatic. Jayalalitha spoke from inside the vehicle, repeatedly calling the BJP an "evil force". She dwelt on why the AIADMK withdrew support to the Vajpayee government. According to her, it betrayed Tamil Nadu on the Cauvery issue; it did not give a constitutional guarantee to 69 per reservation in Tamil Nadu; it did not provide for 33 per cent reservation for women; and it compromised India's security. She described Justice Ramasamy as "a good man and a tough man".

When Advani addressed a meeting at a school playground at Virudhunagar on behalf of Vaiko, all around the dais were big cutouts in blue depicting the Indian Army's victory in Kargil – ten "heroes" (soldiers) from Tamil Nadu, holding aloft the national flag on a peak; a howitzer firing; Army trucks moving in a convoy in a valley; and Indian soldiers freezing Pakistan soldiers with bullets. Advani admired "the magnificent stage and the cut outs" and said: "I am greatly impressed with Vaiko for recreating a scene from Kargil." Advani praised Vaiko's interest in the welfare of the match and fireworks industry workers, and called him a man of integrity. Vaiko said that he would be the voice of the suppressed people and peasants if elected to the Lok Sabha.

Traffic chaos prevailed in Tiruchi town for a few hours on August 18 when two candidates, Union Power Minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam of the BJP, and L. Adaikalaraj of the Congress went in separate processions of vehicles to file their nomination papers. M. Rajasekaran is the TMC contestant here. In terms of the sheer number of vehicles and supporters, Rangarajan outdid Adaikalaraj.

A. Ilankumar Sampath, election officer-in-charge for Rangarajan, summed up the BJP's strategy: "We will list out our achievements and request people to vote for us." According to Sampath, Rangarajan's achievements were: four bridges under construction at Palakkarai, Thennur, Srirangam and Othapalam; Tiruchi airport renovation and runway expansion work; putting Tiruchi on the internet server map; rural roads for Rs.33 crores at Lalgudi, Puvalur, Siruganur and Tirupattur; orders placed with BHEL, Tiruchi, for four 500-MW boilers; a check dam to be constructed near Musiri which will irrigate about 10,000 hectares.

To counter this, Adaikalaraj's supporters claim in a pamphlet that he was really the architect of many achievements that Rangarajan claimed as his own.

From Tiruchi to Chidambaram lies a part of the PMK belt that includes Jayamkondan and Minsuruti. In Chidambaram, another PMK (Vanniya) stronghold, three important candidates are P.Ponnuswamy of the PMK; Dr. Sumathi Udayakumar of the Congress; and R. Tirumavalavan of Dalit Panthers, who is backed by the TMC. Although the PMK campaign here is in high gear, the exit of Dalit Ezhimalai has disappointed Dalits. Informed political sources said that Dalit Ezhimalai did not get the ticket because top PMK leaders were afraid that he would "overtake them in status".

K. Balakrishnan, State Secretariat member of the CPI(M), said that though communal clashes used to break out occasionally in Tamil Nadu, it was the advent of the PMK that led to "long-standing communal strife" in the State. According to Balakrishnan, this had its echo in the southern districts too where caste-based parties had come up.

According to TMC leader V.M.S. Chandrapandian, chairman of Chidambaram municipality, Dalits were happy with Moopanar for giving "recognition" to the Dalit organisations such as Puthiya Tamilagam, Dalit Panthers and RPI.

In the neighbouring Pondicherry constituency, which is a Union Territory, there is a triangular contest among P. Kannan of the TMC, M.O.H. Farook of the Congress and Dr. M. Ramdas of the PMK. The DMK's offer of the seat, which it held, to the PMK was a surprise. So also Kannan's decision to resign his post as Home Minister and file his nomination paper. A third surprise was the choice of Farook, which set off a revolt in the Congress. All the eight Congress(I) members in the Pondicherry Assembly submitted their resignations as legislators to local Congress president P. Shanmugham to protest his being denied the ticket.

Shanmugham, however, made light of the resignations, asking the MLAs to accept Congress president Sonia Gandhi's decision. According to Shanmugham, the issues were administrative inefficiency and protection of Pondicherry's special status. Farook declared that he would launch a "dharma yudh" to cleanse politics in Pondicherry. According to Farook, it was "political buffoonery" that the TMC and the DMK should run a coalition government while the two parties had parted ways in Tamil Nadu.

Kannan promised to "bring back the lost charm of Pondicherry" if elected to Lok Sabha and gave a string of assurances for this.

In terms of sheer distance, the largest constituency is the archipelago of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, whose capital is Port Blair. The Campbell Bay, which is the southernmost tip of India (not Kanyakumari) is several hundred km and four days' of boat travel away from Port Blair. Those who will be voting include tribal groups such as the Sentinelese, Great Nicobares, Onges and Andamanese living in far-flung islands. Ballot boxes by boats will be reaching remote islands where forest personnel live. Five candidates are contesting in the constituency which goes to the polls on September 5. They are: Uma Bharati of the Nationalist Congress Party; Bishnu Pada Ray of the BJP; the incumbent M.P. Manoranjan Bhakta of the Congress, and independents Agapit Kujur and K. Kalimuthu Thevar. ■



KARNATAKA

PARVATHI MENON

BELLARY, the constituency in Karnataka's heartland where the Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi and the Bharatiya Janata Party's Sushma Swaraj face each other, has become the focal point of Elections 1999 for Karnataka, and perhaps for the rest of the country as well. This constituency, which has returned Congress candidates in the last 12 elections, has been pushed into the centre stage in the election campaign of both parties. They will put to test their philosophies, and a victory in Bellary will be seen as a vindication of the fundamental issues both the parties are fighting these elections on.

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Karnataka, which faces its 11th State Assembly elections along with the Lok Sabha elections, the pre-poll picture is fundamentally different from that of any previous election. With the split in the centrist Janata Dal, a prominent player in the last several elections, the fight in the State has essentially become a bipolar one – between the BJP and its allies and the Congress(I).

Karnataka (1998)	
Seats:	28
BJP	13
CONG.	9
JD	3
LOK SHAKTI	3

Under the BJP umbrella are the Janata Dal (United), which includes the Lok Shakti and the Samata Party (which has negligible support in the State). The Janata Dal (Secular) under former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda will be a force to reckon with in the Vokkaliga-dominated areas of southern Karnataka. The BJP sees itself on the threshold of power in the State and is making a serious bid for forming the next government. The State unit of the party has successfully resisted pressures from its central leadership to dilute its dominant position in the alliance in the overall 'national' interests of the party.

Another notable feature of these elections is that although it is essentially a bipolar contest, alliances are a vital part of the election scene. The major alliance is that of the BJP and the JD(U), formalised just a couple of days before the last date for the filing of nominations on August 18. The JD(U) itself is an alliance between the Lok Shakti of Ramakrishna Hegde and the J.H. Patel-led faction of the former Janata Dal. Conflicting interests over seats and nominations within the alliance partners delayed the sealing of the alliance between the BJP and the JD(U). There are also differences within the parties that comprise the alliance. Uneasy alliances, therefore, are a significant aspect of the pre-poll scenario in the State.

KARNATAKA goes to elections in two phases – on September 5 and September 11. In the first phase, voters of 15 Parliamentary and 120 Assembly constituencies will exercise their franchise. In the second phase, the remaining 13 Parliamentary and 104 Assembly constituencies will elect their representatives. (On August 22, the Election Commission cancelled the election process in five Assembly constituencies in the State.) The five Hyderabad-Karnataka constituencies of Bidar, Gulbarga, Raichur, Bijapur, Koppal and Bellary vote in the first stage, as do the central Karnataka constituencies of Davangere, Chitradurga and Tumkur. Voting will also take place on the same day in Bangalore North and South, Chikkaballapur, Kolar, Mandya and Kanakapura.

The 13 Lok Sabha constituencies that go to the polls on September 11 include constituencies in coastal Karnataka (Mangalore, Udupi, Kanara, Shimoga), Bombay Karnatak (Dharwad North and South, Belgaum, Chikkodi, Bagalkot), and some constituencies in the Old Mysore area (Mysore, Chamrajnagar, Hassan, and Chickmagalur).

The BJP-JD(U) alliance is anything but united and there is anger and resentment in both parties over the seat-sharing agreement that was hammered out as late as August 15 between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and JD(U) leaders George Fernandes and Ram Vilas Paswan in New Delhi.

According to this the BJP will contest 18 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats leaving the remaining 10 for the JD(U), the same formula of sharing worked out between the BJP and the Lok Shakti in the 1998 elections. (The BJP won 13 out of the 18 seats it contested, and the Lok Shakti three out of 10). Of the 224 Assembly constituencies, the BJP will field candidates in 129 and the JD(U) in 95. Left to itself, the State unit of the BJP would not have agreed to a tie-up with the JD(U), even if it meant breaking relations with the Lok Shakti and going it alone.

The State unit of the BJP has resisted the centrally imposed alliance with JD(U). It feels that the seat-sharing agreement is unwarrantedly generous to this new formation. It argues that the Patel faction of the JD(U) is a liability to the alliance as the anti-incumbency factor will work against it.

The JD(U), on the other hand, says that it is entitled to a larger share of seats owing to what it feels is the 'winnability' factor of the Patel faction. The BJP's original demand for 180 Assembly seats was rejected by Ramakrishna Hegde, who dubbed it as "greedy". "In the 1994 elections they won 40 seats, and suddenly they think they have grown so strong that they can contest 180 seats," he said.

As the last day for filing of nominations drew near and with no firm agreement over seat sharing emerging, the BJP made arrangements for the issue of 'A' and 'B' forms to all its candidates to contest from all the 28 Lok Sabha and 224

Assembly constituencies. The final seat-sharing agreement was clinched just a day before the last day for the filing of nominations. Candidates from both parties, the JD(U) and the BJP, have filed nominations for the same seats.

Thirty-eight JD(U) candidates, it is reported, have filed nominations in constituencies allotted to the BJP for the first phase of polls. Some BJP candidates have also filed nominations in constituencies allotted to JD(U) and will withdraw only if the rebel JD(U) candidates do so. There is resentment amongst 'rebel' candidates from each party against the 'official' candidates from the other party.

With seat sharing turning out to be a matter of such acrimony between the BJP-JD(U) front, the joint campaign is not likely to be a particularly smooth or effective one. No joint manifesto has been released by the alliance.

No less bitter is the relationship within the JD(U) among its constituents – the Lok Shakti and the Patel faction. The party is in a state of disarray with its constituents fighting over the number of seats that each should contest out of the quota allotted to it.

The Lok Shakti, whose leader Ramakrishna Hegde was responsible for the entry of the Patel faction into the JD(U), now feels short-changed in the seat-sharing exercise. Although the precise number of seats allotted to the Lok Shakti has not been agreed upon, party sources say that of the 95 Assembly seats given to the JD(U), the Lok Shakti has been given only 29 while the Patel group kept the rest for itself. Angry ticket seekers of the Lok Shakti thronged the residence of Ramakrishna Hegde on August 17, sitting in dharna and shouting slogans against party bosses. In the JD(U) too, more than one candidate was given the 'B' form for one constituency resulting in the rejection of a large number of nominations of Lok Shakti applicants.

With seat sharing turning out to be a matter of such acrimony between the alliance partners of the BJP-JD(U) front, the joint campaign is not likely to be a particularly smooth or effective one. No joint manifesto has been released by the alliance. Indeed the issue of the JD(U) joining the National Democratic Alliance has been deferred to after the elections as the BJP continues to be wary of sharing a platform with the party.

Meanwhile, the Congress(I), immersed in its own internal problems, has been unable to cash in on the opportunity presented by the inter- and intra-party acrimony in the opposition camp. The State unit has been confronted with a storm of protests by party members over the delay in nomination of candidates, and the selection of the candidates by the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and the Karnataka Pradesh Committee. Following the split in the Janata Dal, a number of leaders of the Janata Dal have joined the Congress(I). They include former Ministers in the J.H. Patel Cabinet, Roshan Baig and V. Somanna, former JD Member of Parliament Qamarul Islam, film star-turned-politician Ambarish and Siddaraju, a backward class leader.

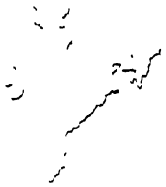
Bellary, the constituency of Sonia Gandhi, will be the focus of the Congress(I) campaign. She inaugurated the party's campaign from Bellary on July 14, and although there was speculation that she might file her nomination papers from there, none of the State leaders was taken into confidence regarding this matter.

Many State party leaders are unhappy with the way Sonia Gandhi was spirited into the State under a cloud of secrecy and high security, and feel that the party lost considerable campaign mileage from having been kept in the dark about the nomination of its star candidate. Bellary has successively returned Congress candidate to the Lok Sabha in the past 12 elections. In the 1996 and 1998 elections K.C. Kondaiah won from the constituency bagging 43.89 per cent and 39.76 per cent of the total votes respectively. Kondaiah won the seat by a margin of 63,000 votes in 1998.

The fight this time round is not going to be easy as the BJP too will concentrate its electoral resources on Bellary. In the 1998 elections the combined votes of the Lok Shakti and Janata Dal candidates exceeded the votes polled by Kondaiah by over a lakh. On the other hand, the BJP by itself has a limited committed vote-base in the district and will have to rely heavily on its alliance partners for its campaign.

THE Janata Dal(S) under Deve Gowda is perhaps the only party to have started active campaigning in the State. After some hectic campaigning in Bangalore, where Deve Gowda rode through the streets in a tractor, his party's election symbol, he went on to Mangalore and Shimoga. The party has worked out electoral arrangements with the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Bahujan Samajwadi Party and a faction of the Dalit Sangarsh Samiti (DSS).

Some of the prominent political personalities who have filed their nominations for the first phase of elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly are Chief Minister J.H. Patel, who is standing for the Assembly from Channagiri in Devangere district; H.D. Deve Gowda, who is contesting for the Lok Sabha from Hassan; H.D. Kumaraswamy from Kanakapura Lok Sabha and Satnur Assembly constituencies; former Cabinet Ministers P.G.R. Sindhia and M.P. Prakash, both JD(U), from Kanakapura Lok Sabha and Hadagali Assembly constituencies respectively; Lok Shakti State president Jeevaraj Alva from Jayamahal Assembly constituency; and State BJP president K.S. Eashwarappa from Shimoga Assembly constituency. ■



DELHI

S.V. PANDE

DELHI is all set to witness one of the closest electoral battles in its history. In the absence of a credible third force, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress(I) are locked in a straight contest, as it used to be in the 1960s. For the moment, the BJP appears to be marginally better prepared. However, at the popular level there is an air of cynicism, and this is manifested in the low turnouts at most of the public meetings.

The BJP has been shaken a bit by the decision, after a fortnight of vacillation, of Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister, to contest. His presence has galvanised the Congress(I) organisation in South Delhi, where he will take on the BJP's Vijay Kumar Malhotra. Besides, there are signs of swing of

Delhi (1998)	
Seats:	7
CONG.	1
BJP	6

Sikh votes back to the Congress(I). The Congress(I) had indeed played its trump-card in fielding Manmohan Singh. Yet South Delhi is a seat which has returned only BJP candidates since 1989. It was held last time by Sushma Swaraj.

In the historic Chandni Chowk, it is a battle royal between the BJP's giant-killer Vijay Goel and the Congress(I) stalwart J.P. Aggarwal. The presence of Shoaib Iqbal of the Janata Dal (Secular) in the fray will only decide the margin of victory of either of the former two. The BJP could suffer a shock reverse, here. The result depends on the Muslim vote, and it seems to be shifting towards the Congress(I).

In Karol Bagh, the Congress(I) member in the previous Lok Sabha, Meira Kumar, is pitted against the BJP's Sunita Arya, a new face. Last time it was a close race. Meira Kumar won by just 4,847 votes.

A keen tussle is on in the Sadar area, between the BJP's Madan Lal Khurana and one-time Congress(I) strongman Jagdish Tytler, who won the seat three times – in 1980, 1984 and 1994 – and lost it once, in 1996. The several controversies that have chased Khurana, which include those about his virtual revolt against the party leadership, battle with party colleague and former Delhi Chief Minister, Sahib Singh Verma, may fetch him an upset defeat. There are reports of party rebels working actively against Khurana.

In East Delhi the Congress(I) was unable to find a strong candidate against the BJP's Lal Behari Tiwari, who scored an emphatic victory in 1998. Its candidate is former Lieutenant-Governor H.K.L. Kapur. This seat where Chief Minister Sheila Dixit lost last time by over 45,000 votes, offers the BJP a strong wicket.

In the vast Outer Delhi constituency, the BJP stalwart Kishan Lal won last time by over 98,000 votes. This time the party is represented by Sahib Singh Verma, and the Congress(I) ticket has gone to Deep Chand Sharma. Congress(I) stalwart Sajjan Kumar is sulking on being denied the ticket, and this could mean some trouble for the Congress(I) candidate.

Another keen contest will be in New Delhi, between former Communications Minister Jagmohan, who won the seat last time, and Congress(I) Working Committee member R.K. Dhawan. Jagmohan is a two-time winner. Dhawan, a good campaigner, has chosen the new plank of full statehood to Delhi.

The noise and dust is yet to come, though Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee struck an aggressive posture at the rally he addressed. The BJP is preparing a list of the lapses of Delhi Congress(I) Government, which was elected last November.

Elections in Delhi University to the students' union and the teachers' association are scheduled to precede the Lok Sabha elections. The results of these could provide some indications. In the elections to the teachers' association both the Congress(I) and the BJP have betrayed a lack of confidence and are looking for alliances.

The traditional Left parties, that is, the CPI and CPI(M), are not contesting in Delhi. This, coupled with the disarray in the Janata Dal, could mean the shifting to the Congress(I) of a crucial, though not considerable, chunk of the vote. There is also another new factor – the presence of over two lakh new voters. Which way will they go. Last time the Congress won one seat. This time it could be one more for the party, in the best of situations. ■



PUNJAB

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

THE National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the umbrella grouping of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies, does not appear to be as optimistic about its poll prospects in Punjab and in the adjacent Union Territory of Chandigarh, as is the case in other parts of the country. Elections will be held in Punjab and Chandigarh in the first phase of polling on September 5.

The BJP and its State-level allies, the Akali Dal (Badal) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (Ambedkar), convey a sense of unease, which manifests itself in several ways. The Akali Dal-BJP pair was once considered invincible because it supposedly brought together the two dominant communities, the Jat Sikhs and the Hindus.

In a series of meetings with BJP cadres in several constituencies, senior party leaders such as general secretary Narendra Modi pointed out how difficult it would be for the NDA to repeat the 1998 performance. Of the 13 constituencies in Punjab and the lone seat in Chandigarh, the Akali Dal had won eight and the BJP, four (including Chandigarh). Janata Dal candidate and former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, who was supported by the Akali Dal, won in Jalandhar. Gujral has refrained from contesting this time as he is not sure of Akali Dal backing.

Modi and other leaders spoke about the "need to concentrate on the battle for each polling booth and win it convincingly so that Vajpayeeji is not defeated again on the floor of the Lok Sabha". They highlighted that there is no alternative to Atal Behari Vajpayee as Prime Minister.

In a meeting in Amritsar on August 19, where this correspondent was present, Modi said that a major handicap faced by the NDA in this region was the anti-incumbency factor, which stemmed from the shortcomings of the Akali Dal Government. "There could have been hundreds of limitations in the way the State government performed and addressed your genuine concerns, representations and demands. You could have got humiliated time and again by the representatives of our NDA partner (Akali Dal), which is running the State government," he said. He wanted BJP workers to forget the insults and strive wholeheartedly for the success of all NDA candidates, remembering that every single seat was important to ensure Vajpayee's return as Prime Minister. This defensive approach has not done the NDA campaign much good.

All constituents of the NDA focussed on a Vajpayee-centric campaign in villages and towns. Even Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal stressed on the "Kargil victory" and the "need to bring back Vajpayee". His campaign underscored the fact that the State Government does not have much to speak of in terms of achievement. It failed to address key issues, such as the revival of the agricultural economy it promised when it assumed power in 1997, improving the lot of government employees and the promises made to the business community.

The inability to highlight the Government's performance has been the bane of the Akali Dal since the Adampur Assembly by-election last year. The Akali Dal lost the seat for the first time in over two decades. According to Congress(I) State president Amarinder Singh, the Lok Sabha polls would mark a continuation of this trend. He added that the Congress(I) is quietly confident of making gains. In 1998, the party failed to win a single Lok Sabha seat in Punjab. This time, it has worked out electoral adjustments with the Left parties. The Communist Party of

India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have been allotted one seat each – Bhatinda and Sangrur. The CPI and the Congress(I) are conducting a joint campaign, while the CPI(M), campaigning on its own, is urging voters to defeat the communal BJP and its friends.

Punjab (1998)	
Seats:	13
SAD	8
BJP	3
Ind & Oth	2

Apart from the mood against the Badal Government, other factors going against the NDA include the split in the Akali Dal, which led to the creation of the All India Shiromani Akali Dal (AISAD) under the leadership of former Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) president Gurcharan Singh Tohra; a significant shift of the Dalit vote from the BSP to the Congress(I) and the relatively poor selection of candidates by the Akali Dal and the BJP. The Congress(I), on the other hand, seems to have come up with a better list of candidates.

In 1998, the NDA constituents had polled 45 per cent of the popular vote. The Akali Dal, the BJP and the BSP(A) accounted for 32.93 per cent, 11.67 per cent and 0.40 per cent respectively. The Congress(I), which fought the last elections in alliance with the BSP, polled 25.85 per cent of the popular vote. Of this, the BSP accounted for 12.65 per cent.

Observers said that the AISAD would drain away between 25 and 30 per cent of the Akali Dal vote. In Patiala, Ropar and Ludhiana constituencies, where Tohra has a personal following, the damage could be greater. The AISAD has utilised former Akal Takth Jathedar Bhai Ranjit Singh for its campaign. Ranjit Singh is conducting a high-voltage campaign that highlights the connection between Akali politics and Sikh religious ideology. He has emphasised the perceived transgressions committed by the Badal Government on the Khalsa Panth.

These developments are bound to make an impact on a section of ardent Sikhs. District-level Akali Dal leaders agree that AISAD would make a dent in the NDA's fortunes, although the State leadership put on a brave face and described Tohra as a non-starter.

The NDA leadership argued that the Congress(I) would also suffer because the BSP has parted ways with it and joined hands with the AISAD. Congress(I) leaders said that the Dalit vote is no longer under the BSP's control. Impartial observers also believe that a section of Dalit voters would prefer the Congress(I).

In at least 15 villages spread over four Lok Sabha constituencies, this correspondent came across scores of BSP activists and supporters who left the party to support the Congress (I). In Budhipura village of Gurdaspur constituency, a group of Dalit Sikhs, who had returned to the Congress(I) since the last election, explained this shift as the result of the BSP's "high promise and low yield" politics. A local resident, Satnam Singh, said: "The BSP leadership talks about Dalit assertiveness and the supremacy of the BSP only to play second fiddle to the Akalis and the BJP from time to time. Socially too, the BSP has not improved the lot of Dalits in Punjab unlike in Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh."

The Congress(I) also stands to gain from its association with the Left parties, which had polled 4.5 per cent votes in 1998; of which the CPI accounted for more than 3.4 per cent. The support of Left parties and the split in Akali Dal would be crucial for the Congress(I) in Faridkot, Patiala, Ludhiana and Ferozepur constituencies, which the party lost by margins of less than 50,000 in 1998.

In Patiala, where AISAD leader Prem Singh Chandumajra is pitted against Parneet Kaur of the Congress(I) and Surjit Singh Rakhra of the Akali Dal, there will be a keen triangular contest. Chandmajra has taken a lead on the campaign front. In Faridkot, Prakash Singh Badal's son and Union Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal's re-election bid has run into rough weather against Congress(I)'s former MP Jagmeet Singh Brar. There are indications that the Akali Dal is trying all methods to turn the tide in its favour. Talk about the use of money, muscle and wine is common in the Akali Dal offices in the villages and towns. The appointment of Harchand Singh, a Senior Superintendent of Police in his home district of Faridkot, was cited by the Opposition as a ploy to influence the polling process. The Election Commission cancelled the appointment.

The NDA seems to be banking on the internal dissent within the Congress(I). In Jalandhar and Amritsar, the selection of Congress(I) candidates caused resentment among a section of aspirants. In Amritsar, the Congress(I) had earlier considered the young city Mayor O.P. Soni as a candidate only to sideline him at the last minute. Former Union Minister R.L. Bhatia will contest from here again. Supporters of the immensely popular Soni were upset and they made moves to make him contest as an independent. Amarinder Singh intervened to stop Soni from contesting, but the BJP is hopeful that the bitterness of Soni's supporters will continue.

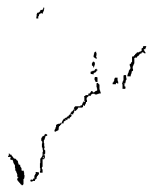
In Jalandhar, the Congress(I) chose Balbir Singh, a former State Minister and Member of Parliament, despite opposition from many aspirants, including Umrao Singh, a former MP from the constituency. The BJP hopes to make some inroads in the constituency even though the initial mood of the electorate was pro-Balbir Singh.

The NDA too has faced problems on the selection of candidates in Chandigarh, Patiala, Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana.

In Chandigarh, BJP national vice-president K.L. Sharma, who is virtually unknown in the constituency, was given the ticket in the place of S.P. Jain, who won the seat twice in a row. This "outsider effect" could prove detrimental for the NDA given that Chandigarh has only 5.5 lakh voters and the Congress(I) has fielded P.K. Banal, a local politician and former MP.

In contrast to the picture presented by its campaign managers at the national level, the NDA is carrying on an uphill struggle in Punjab and Chandigarh. While its leadership admits that it would be impossible to repeat the 1998 performance, it hopes that the Vajpayee factor would help it retain at least 60 per cent of the seats won last time. But to achieve even this, Modi pointed out at the cadre meeting in Amritsar, the NDA will have to make laborious efforts at the polling booth. ■

Apart from the mood against the Prakash Singh Badal Government, other factors going against the NDA include the split in the Akali Dal, which led to the creation of the All India Shiromani Akali Dal; a significant shift of the Dalit vote from the BSP to the Congress(I) and the relatively poor selection of candidates by the Akali Dal and the BJP.



KERALA

R KRISHNAKUMAR

RAMANILAYAM the Kerala Government Guest House in Thrissur has for long been witness to the triumphs and tribulations of K Karunakaran. Karunakaran is the State Congress(I)'s political puppeteer, whose interests and ambitions continue to hold sway over the fluctuating fortunes of the party and the Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) it leads.

Thrissur is Karunakaran's home ground where he honed his political cunning and religiously sought refuge from its after effects, famously at the Krishna temple in nearby Guruvayur. A 1996 picture of the former Chief Minister in the full glare of the media inside his favourite Ramanilayam VIP suite with his head bowed in shocked disbelief, as the news of his imminent defeat in the Lok Sabha elections was trickling in, is still a fresh memory in Kerala politics.

That picture and his defeat in Thrissur at the hands of V.V. Raghavan of the Communist Party of India (CPI) was a landmark in the suicidal group rivalry within the State Congress(I). But, two years later, the 1998 Lok Sabha elections saw Karunakaran score an emphatic victory against his detractors in the party who, he believed, had connived to engineer his defeat in 1996. When everyone expected him to lose a second time, Karunakaran, who contested from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency, projected himself back into political reckoning, defeating another CPI leader, K.V. Surendranath, by a margin of 15,398 votes.

On August 19, a tired-looking Karunakaran was once again on the steps of Ramanilayam, soon after filing his nomination papers at the Thrissur Collectorate, and waiting for the right "muhurtam" to drive to his newly rented residence at Chalakkudy, in the nearby Mukundapuram Lok Sabha constituency. Obviously the scars of 1996 have not healed. Mukundapuram, not Thrissur or Thiruvananthapuram, is Karunakaran's new battle-ground, where he is pitted against E.M. Sreedharan of the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist). Sreedharan is also a member of the State Planning Board and a key architect of the Left Democratic Front Government's much-acclaimed decentralisation programme, the People's Plan Campaign.

Sreedharan is the son of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and to those who seek to see the entry of Sreedharan into politics as one based on merit and that of Karunakaran's son and former Member of Parliament, K. Muraleedharan, as one forced on the Congress(I) by a doting father, Karunakaran has only a tongue-in-cheek response. "The only difference between the two is that Murali is my son and Sreedharan is EMS' son."

That difference, however, is a campaign issue throughout Kerala, especially in Mukundapuram, a known UDF bastion, where the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's candidate is from a decimated party, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRP). The LDF alleges that it is in return for this "favour" that Karunakaran chose a little-known Youth Congress(I) leader, V.S. Sivakumar, as the Congress(I) candidate in Thiruvananthapuram, where the BJP, which is yet to win even an Assembly seat in Kerala, has fielded its most important candidate, O. Rajagopal, the party's vice president and a member of the Rajya Sabha (elected from Madhya Pradesh).

The LDF candidate in Thiruvananthapuram, the CPI's Kaniyapuram Ramachandran, may eventually benefit from the Congress(I)'s choice, even if the BJP may at best gain more votes. But, typical of many Karunakaran strategies, it satisfies several conflicting interests. The BJP knows it cannot yet win a seat in Kerala, but may be able to prove that its support base is widening in the capital constituency. Karunakaran supporters will be satisfied that it was only their leader's charisma that won the Thiruvananthapuram seat for the party in 1998 and even an LDF victory in Thiruvananthapuram does mean less support for the BJP at the national level, in Mukundapuram, Karunakaran himself may gain from the fact that the BJP has fielded a weak candidate.

Yet, in general, the Karunakaran-imposed seat-sharing formula, which admirably accommodates his own need to shift from Thiruvananthapuram to Mukundapuram and ensure a seat for son Muraleedharan in Kozhikode, despite the Congress(I)'s stated policy of denying the ticket to all those who have lost two previous elections, has created an undercurrent of discontent in the State party.

But this does not reflect in the UDF election campaign, to the extent it did on previous



H. VIBHU

K. Karunakaran outside the Government guest house, Ramanilayam, in Thrissur after he filed his nomination papers.



R VIBHU

CPI(M) candidate E.M. Sreedhran campaigning in Kodungalloor in the Mukundapuram constituency.

occasions (hastened by the debilitating results of feuds in the past over such issues, long time party rival A K Antony is nowadays a picture of tolerance and benevolence when it comes to accommodating Karunakaran's needs, though much to the chagrin of his own supporters. Antony told *Frontline*: "For the first time in several years, the Congress(I) and the UDF have been able to complete the candidate selection process amicably and well ahead of the LDF and this is sure to reflect in the results."

Yet the rapprochement, if any, is only skin-deep, as Congressmen themselves admit. A former MP told *Frontline*: "I can only describe it as unjust and unfair seat allocation, when a party like the Congress(I) throws norms to the winds and allows Karunakaran to have his way. Muraleedharan has the seat he wants (Kozhikode) despite being a loser twice. The Congress candidate who won back the Kozhikode seat for the UDF in 1998 is therefore denied a seat. P J Kurien, who is allegedly involved in a scandal, gets transferred to a constituency (from Mavelikkara to Idukki) of his liking. Also because Karunakaran does not want to contest from Thiruvananthapuram a second time, a lot of successful Congress(I) candidates get shunted from their own constituencies. And the Congress(I) fields candidates with corruption charges or non-entities in constituencies where it has winning chances."

Asked why the Congress(I)'s seat sharing exercise was so uncharacteristically amicable this time, a former MP and party candidate said: "It was but a package deal. We are not in a fighting mood. Our silence (in the selection committee meetings) was a compromise."

Says Oommen Chandy, a senior Congress(I) leader and a close confidant of Antony, while on the campaign trail for Karunakaran, rival P C Chacko: "The Congress(I)'s fight is against the forces that threaten the country's secular fabric at the Centre. The party cannot but stand as one in this election."

But will it work? Quite uncharacteristically, all is not well in the LDF either. The seat-sharing exercise was a rough ride for the ruling coalition, and has made Congress(I) leaders jump to predict "the disintegration of the LDF after the elections", as Antony described it to *Frontline*. But, says senior CPI(M) leader and LDF convener V S Achuthanandan: "In the UDF, the Congress(I) had been cornering 17 of the total 20 seats for itself all along, while in the LDF the leading partner CPI(M) had so far been claiming and contesting in only nine seats. The remaining 11 seats were divided among its Front partners. But this time, because of the split in the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), which was already a small party, the group led by the ailing senior leader Baby John had threatened to defeat the nominee of the other RSP group, N K Premachandran, if he was fielded as the LDF candidate. It was as a compromise formula that the CPI(M) said it would field its own candidate in Kollam, whom both the RSP groups could

Kerala (1998)	
Seats:	20
CONG.	8
CPI(M)	6
CPI	2
IUML	2
Ind. & Oth.	2

support."

But the official RSP group, led by national president K. Pankajakshan, expressed his party's resentment at the CPI(M)'s action. He told *Frontline:* "We withdrew our claim to the Kollam seat, from where the RSP has been contesting from the beginning of Parliament elections, only under extreme protest and to see that Left unity is preserved and strengthened. We also felt we should not allow the Congress(I) to gain from our predicament. But it was injustice and betrayal to deny us a role in this election. Premachandran had won from Kollam twice and is perhaps the only candidate who can attract both political and non-political votes in Kollam. Had the RSP fielded him as an independent, there were several people within the CPI(M) itself who would have voted for him." The CPI(M) nominee for the Kollam seat is former Cashew Development Corporation chairman P. Rajendran. He faces the Congress(I)'s M. P. Gangadharan, tainted by corruption charges during his tenure as PWD Minister.

Neighbouring Alappuzha and the northern constituency of Kannur are the cradles of the communist movement in Kerala, where the CPI(M) continues to have a dynamic presence. Yet by a curious quirk of politics, both these constituencies have been electing Congress(I) candidates in the past several elections. In Alappuzha, this was largely because of the personality of the Congress(I) candidate, former Assembly Speaker and Health Minister V. M. Sudheeran, who has as impeccable a reputation as A.K. Antony. Another reason was the deep divisions in the CPI(M), following the shocking defeat of Achuthanandan from the Mararikkulam Assembly constituency in the district in 1996.

In Kannur, where the CPI(M) has an even stronger presence, Congress(I) candidate Mullappally Ramachandran won for the fifth time in 1998. The constituency has a reputation for violent clashes between the cadres of the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) and also between the CPI(M) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Mullappally's main rival for the past three elections was from the Congress(S), now part of Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). In 1998, despite his growing unpopularity in the constituency, Congress(S) leader and Health Minister A. C. Shanmukhadas had lost only by 1,180 votes, riding on a wave of CPI(M) support. For several years now, demands had been aired that the CPI(M) should field its own candidate in Kannur if the LDF is to have a winning chance. Therefore the CPI(M) was firm that the Congress(S), which lost thrice in Kannur, should move over to Moovattupuzha. It was not a welcome suggestion for the NCP, as Moovattupuzha is Kerala Congress leader K.M. Mani's Christian fortress, where only his candidate P.C. Thomas wins elections for the UDF, always with a brute majority.

The NCP protested till the very end and threatened to withdraw from the LDF. But it yielded finally, possibly because it had no other option. Party State president Ramachandran Kadannappally told *Frontline*: "We resolved not to weaken the LDF by quitting the coalition."

In Kannur, the CPI(M) has fielded the president of the State unit of the Student's Federation of India, A. P. Abdullakkutty, against Mullappally and A. K. Antony has already set the trend for a virulent campaign by declaring that the Congress(I)'s fight in this election is as much a struggle against Hindutva as it is a battle against "the brand of political fascism being experimented by the CPI(M)". He has also demanded the deployment of more Central security forces in Kannur, expressing apprehensions about possible foul play and violence.

Till 1996, had a tradition of favouring the UDF in Parliament elections, even on occasions when it elected the LDF to power in the State. Of the 20 Lok Sabha seats, three are decided entirely on the basis of religion – Manjeri and Ponnani in Muslim-dominated Malappuram district favouring the Muslim League and Moovattupuzha favouring the Kerala Congress (Mani), both constituents of the UDF. In 1991 the UDF won 15 seats, but in 1996 it could manage only 10. In 1998 the UDF got 11 seats but its victory margin in five constituencies – Adoor, Mavelikkara, Idukki, Mukundapuram and Kannur – was extremely thin.

This time around, as the campaign began for the single-phase polling on September 11, the contest appears to be extremely close in at least nine constituencies. Manjeri, Ponnani and Moovattupuzha are sure to go the UDF way again. Of the remaining eight constituencies, the LDF has a definite advantage in five (Thiruvananthapuram, Chirayinkeezhu, Palakkad, Vadakara and Kasaragod) and the UDF in three.

WHAT would be the clincher for either Front? If there is one such factor, in all the constituencies which this correspondent visited, it appears to be the effectiveness of the election machinery of the two Fronts to convince the substantial minority population about their claims of being the most effective safeguard against the BJP. All over the State, CPI(M) and Congress(I) leaders are left to explain how they are really fighting the BJP, even though they are fighting each other in the State.

All the major political organisations which claim to represent Muslim and Christian sentiments have rallied behind the UDF. The Muslim League, despite its frequent appreciative glances towards the CPI(M), has decided to support the Congress(I), at least till this election is over. Both the Indian National League (INL) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), formed on an anti-Congress(I), anti-Muslim League plank, have unilaterally declared support to the UDF. But there is a growing section among the large Muslim population in north Kerala constituencies which doubts the Congress claims of being their only saviour.

Among the Christian voters concentrated in the central Kerala constituencies, there are signs of a similar thinking slowly emerging. Significantly, for the first time, Catholic priests came under the banner of a Visaala Catholic Conference, to demand that the Congress(I) which banked on 80 per cent of the votes from the community, should provide more seats for Catholics, or else, face the consequences.

The tacit understanding that the Congress(I) is alleged to have with the BJP in many constituencies, especially Thiruvananthapuram and Mukundapuram, is likely to boomerang on it wherever it plays on minority sentiments *vis-a-vis* the BJP. Says Achuthanandan: "Sooner rather than later the realisation is bound to come that while Congress(I) candidates win elections, in many places with the support also of the BJP, and go to Parliament, it is the CPI(M) cadres that come to the rescue of the minorities in the State as elsewhere, whenever Hindutva forces tend to overplay their zealotry."

The Vadakara experiment of 1991, when the Congress(I), the Muslim League and the BJP joined hands to support an eminent lawyer M. Ratna Singh against the LDF candidate K. P. Unnikrishnan, predicted a 50,000 plus victory, and yet lost the election by 17,489 votes, is being kept alive in public memory by a hyperactive CPI(M) election machinery. ■



HARYANA

T K RAJALAKSHMI

DESPITE having only 10 Lok Sabha seats, Haryana a predominantly Jat State, has always attracted the attention of the Indian polity one way or the other As with other northern States politics in Haryana, where polling is scheduled to be held on September 5, is distinctly feudal, and is, to a large extent dominated by caste equations and money and muscle power In addition, the State has a tradition of backing one of three families at the political level – those of Devi Lal Bansi Lal and Bhajan Lal Lok Dal leader s son Om Prakash Chautala is the Chief Minister Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) leader Bansi Lal who has in recent months been reduced to a non entity in national politics is working towards ensuring the political survival of his son Surinder Singh in the September elections former Chief Minister Bhajan Lal of the Congress (I) nurtures an ambition to recapture the post (Two of Bhajan Lal's sons, members of the State Assembly, are likely to be his political heirs)

Since 1977 politics in Haryana has been characterised by caste polarisation between the Jats and the non-Jats, the former represented by Devi Lal and his progeny and the latter by Bhajan Lal, a Bishnoi Unlike the Jats in Rajasthan those in Haryana are not traditional Congress(I) supporters, they have always veered between the Lok Dal and the Congress(I)

The toppling of the Bansi Lal government twice – once by its coalition partner the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and later by the Congress(I) which after bailing out the Government, did a complete *volte face* in less than a month s time – could have an impact on the fortunes of all the contestants The actions of the two national parties – the BJP and the Congress(I) – paved the way for Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader Om Prakash Chautala, and the split in the HVP staking a successful claim to form the government (Recently, the breakaway faction of the HVP merged with the INLD)

However whether these events will have a tangible impact on Chautala s fortunes is not clear The battle for the 10 seats will primarily be between the Congress(I), which has the support of the secular parties, and the INLD-BJP combine The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) will contest three seats and may succeed in retaining its lone Ambala seat The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is contesting only from Bhiwani The party fielded candidates from Hissar in the last two elections but failed to win

In the previous Lok Sabha elections, the INLD which had an electoral alliance with the BSP, won four seats – Kurukshetra, Sonepat, Hissar and the reserved seat of Sirsa This time around, the INLD has struck an electoral alliance with the BJP The INLD-BJP alliance can be traced back to the four votes the INLD contributed in favour of the BJP during the vote on the confidence motion in Parliament in April this year The INLD and the BJP have put up five candidates each

The Congress(I) won three seats last time – in Rohtak Devi Lal was trounced for the third time by Bhupinder Singh Hooda the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chief, in Karnal, Bhajan Lal won and in Mahendargarh, Rao Inderjit Singh emerged the winner This time the Congress(I) is contesting all the 10 seats

Observers believe that with the virtual decimation of the HVP Bansi Lal is concentrating on building the political future of his son and will therefore focus on only one seat The BSP has entered into a pact with the HVP, this will however be confined to extending its support in Bhiwani The BSP may also extend support to the Congress(I) in areas where the INLD-BJP alliance has a strong presence

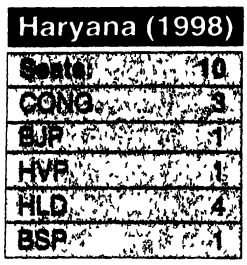


RAJEE Bha...

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala (left) and National Lok Dal candidate Sushil Kumar Indora (centre) at a rally in the Fatehabad constituency.

DIRECT contests will be witnessed in Rohtak, Hissar and Mahendargarh between the Congress(I) and the INLD-BJP combine Bhiwani will witness a keen contest with four main contestants in the fray The HVP has renominated Bansi Lal's son Surinder Singh Om Prakash Chautala's son Ajay Chautala, Dharamvir Singh, a former Congress(I) legislator, and

the CPI(M)'s Prabhat Singh are the other three contestants Dharamvir Singh, who defeated Bansi Lal in the 1987 Assembly elections, is perceived to be close to Bhajan Lal.



In the previous elections, it was widely rumoured that Bhajan Lal, who has a base in at least two of Bhiwani's Assembly segments, contributed to the votes of Ajay Chautala, the INLD candidate. Surinder Singh won by a very narrow margin due to the covert support extended by the Congress(I) to Ajay Chautala. This time around, despite the Congress(I) appearing to be a serious contender, the anti-incumbency sentiment against Surinder Singh, combined with the dwindling fortunes of his father Bansi Lal, may favour Ajay Chautala. During a brief conversation with this correspondent in Bhiwani, Om Prakash Chautala said that the INLD was very much a part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and that all the 10 seats in the State would go the BJP-INLD combine.

The CPI(M), which has put up a feisty trade union leader, hopes to garner the support of the landless people, the workers' unions, as well as around a lakh brick kiln workers. Bhiwani has the largest number of brick kiln workers in the State.

At Rohtak, the Congress(I) candidate is Bhupinder Singh, a member of the dissolved House. The INLD chose to field a retired Army Captain, Inder Singh, who also happens to be related to Chautala, with an eye on the votes of the Army personnel from that area. At least three INLD aspirants are believed to be unhappy with this choice. The electorate here believes that the INLD has done little for this area.

The Congress(I)'s fortunes rate comparatively better in southern Haryana. This belt is dry and small land holdings characterise its agrarian topography. One major source of employment is the armed forces. A senior Congress(I) leader from Rohtak said that non-agriculturists would also vote for the party as a fear psychosis had set in among them following Chautala's installation as Chief Minister.

In Hissar, the Congress(I) has fielded Birender Singh former Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee (HPCC) president and grandson of the legendary Sir Chotu Ram. Birender Singh faces INLD's Surinder Singh Barwala, who held the seat. Birender Singh is regarded as a strong candidate and he is expected to benefit from the anti-Barwala sentiment.

In Mahendargarh too, the INLD-BJP has, with an eye on the "Army" votes, as it were, fielded Sudha Yadav, the widow of a BSF commandant. Sudha, who will contest on the BJP ticket, takes on Rao Inderjit Singh. The BSP too has fielded a candidate from here.

Sirsa may have witnessed a tough contest if former Congress(I) MP Kumari Selja had been fielded against Sushil Kumar Indora, who was the INLD MP. Selja has been roped in for work at the Centre, and the party has opted for a weaker candidate.

According to Bhupinder Singh Hooda's father Randhir Singh, a veteran parliamentarian and Congressman, the Congress(I) can, besides retaining its three seats, win Hissar, Faridabad, Ambala and Sonepat. At Faridabad, the BJP nominee, Ram Chander Bainda faces the Congress(I)'s Zakir Hussain, son of a Rajasthan Minister. Bainda is originally from Hissar; he defeated the Congress(I) nominee in the previous elections by 15,343 votes. The Congress(I) candidate apparently lost because of the presence of a rebel candidate, mining magnate Avtar Singh Bhadana.

Faridabad has a sizable Meo Muslim population and the Congress(I) hopes to get the secular votes from here *en bloc*, especially since there is no rebel candidate in sight. In Ambala, the BSP candidate, Aman Kumar Nagra, won by a fairly narrow margin of 2,884 votes the last time around. Nagra may retain his seat since the BJP candidate is a newcomer. However, the Congress(I)'s Phool Chand Mulana, a well-known former legislator, may still stand a chance.

In Sonepat, Kishan Singh Sangwan, who contested as an INLD candidate in the previous elections, is contesting on a BJP ticket this time. This has reportedly angered INLD and BJP party workers. The Congress(I) has fielded Chiranji Lal Sharma, a senior politician and a four-time MP from Karnal.

The Congress(I) has more or less given up on Sirsa, where Sushil Kumar Indora of the INLD has a good chance of retaining his seat.

In Karnal, where Bhajan Lal meets I.D. Swami of the BJP, observers predict a tough battle for the Congress strongman. In Kurukshetra, the Congress(I) has fielded former HVP leader O.P. Jindal against INLD's Kailasho Devi, who won by the largest margin in the State last time.

The issues that are being raised by the INLD-BJP include the BJP's handling of the Kargil crisis, Atal Behari Vajpayee's performance as Prime Minister, and Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. The ground reality, according to observers, favours the BJP-INLD, although the aggressive mobilisation of Jat votes could turn away the other communities from this combine.

According to Balbir Singh Grewal, a former member of Devi Lal's government, not all Jats vote for the INLD. That is why even in Jat dominated areas, the father-son duo of Devi Lal and Om Prakash Chautala have suffered humiliating defeats. Grewal said that the BJP may have to face uncomfortable questions from the electorate as it was in an alliance with Bansi Lal's HVP for over three years. At Mahendargarh, the BJP State unit president Ram Vilas Sharma was reportedly heckled by the public when he went there with Chautala. There is no apparent wave in favour of the INLD-BJP combine.

At the local level, the populist efforts of the Chief Minister have not gone unnoticed. The renaming of Kurukshetra University as Guru Gobind Singh University with an eye on Jat-Sikh votes was one of the more blatant attempts at vote gathering. The Chief Minister has also promised to resolve the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal issue with Punjab that has been hanging fire for 18 years.

So far, the Congress(I) has not put up as aggressive a campaign as the INLD-BJP. The Congress(I)'s major vote plank is stability. Observers feel that the party is reluctant to counter the Kargil issue since it does not want to be projected as being anti-national. The CPI(M) has been vociferous on the non-performance of the BJP-led government at the Centre, besides criticising the party's manifesto.

The rural electorate may not be impressed by attacks on Sonia Gandhi's foreign origins, and are most likely to vote on the basis of the performance, profile and caste of the candidate. The urban voters could tilt towards the BJP-INLD on the Kargil issue.

The final result will depend on how well the Congress(I) and other parties campaign. The BJP-INLD combine will attempt to distract the voters from real issues such as rising unemployment, stagnant irrigation and a rising crime graph. What could eventually go against this combine is the polarisation of the Jat and non-Jat votes. ■

Ready for revenue-sharing

AFTER the Delhi High Court allowed the conditional migration of private telecom operators to a revenue-sharing regime, almost all the licensees – both basic and cellular – paid up their outstanding licence fee dues and liquidated damages by the August 15 deadline, signalling their readiness to migrate. According to the Association of Basic Telecom Operators (ABTO), its six members together paid Rs.64 crores. Of this, over Rs.53 crores constituted liquidated damages to compensate for the delays and non-fulfilment of commitments made to the government at the time of the issue of licences and the rest towards 35 per cent of licence fee outstandings until July-end. Essar, which holds the licence for the Punjab circle, did not pay its licence fee dues owing to a dispute over the claim amount, but paid Rs.8 crores towards liquidated damages.

Of the 23 cellular operators, 20 paid a total of Rs.159 crores, of which liquidated damages accounted for Rs.60 crores. Essar Aircel Digilink, Koshika Telecom and JT Mobile Evergrowth had been disconnected by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) for non-fulfilment of obligations and therefore did not receive the migration offer.

All the licensees will have to securitise their remaining licence fee dues in the form of bank guarantees by November 30.

In a three page interim order on August 11, Justice S.K. Mahajan of the Delhi High Court said that the court neither vindicated nor disapproved of the new policy. The court ruled that only those licensees who gave an undertaking to the Court on affidavit to migrate to the new regime as approved by DoT would be permitted to migrate. However, the migration would be subject to approval by the Council of Ministers of the new government or disapproval by the 13th Lok Sabha.

While both basic and cellular operators are believed to be ready with the undertakings since the court has stipulated no deadline for the submission of such undertakings, they have not yet submitted them. While the basic licensees are unanimous in their resolve to migrate to the new regime, there appears to be disagreement among the cellular operators.

Counsel for the licensees had stated in court that the undertakings would remain in operation until December 31, 1999, and this was acknowledged by the court. Therefore, the licensees claim that if the Lok Sabha does not disapprove of the policy by December 31, 1999, the new revenue-sharing regime will stay. C.V. Ramachandran of the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said: "If the Lok Sabha disapproves or the next Council of Ministers does not approve of the New Telecom Policy by December 31, by default the new regime will continue." However, he added that Parliament had the prerogative to revoke it through a resolution even later. Ramachandran told *Frontline* that apart from individual undertakings given by its members, the COAI would give a collective undertaking to the effect that the migration would be subject to disapproval by the Lok Sabha.

Meanwhile, there is mounting apprehension in DoT circles about the revenue-sharing regime (*Frontline*, August 27). Informal sources point out that it would be impossible to monitor the revenues of private licensees, especially cellular licensees. Therefore they apprehend that DoT will not be able to realise its due share of revenues. Even licensees agree that it would be impossible to instal safeguards to ensure that operators pay up their fair share, but argue that in the larger interest of increasing teledensity, such lacunae should be overlooked. In their perception, the Government's myopic approach of viewing the telecommunications industry as a source of revenue has been instrumental in driving away investments. They claim that at least three multinational companies have withdrawn from India in the last two years. According to them, unless the New Telecom Policy is implemented in full earnest, reaching the target teledensity of seven per hundred will remain a pipe dream. ■

Sudha Mahalingam

Gaisal accident inquiry

THE preliminary inquiry into the Gaisal railway tragedy of August 1 has held a succession of errors by operating staff responsible for the collision between the Awadh Assam Express and the Brahmaputra Mail that claimed over 290 lives (*Frontline*, August 27). M. Mani, the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety (CCRS), went back to the venue of the accident to complete his inquiry after the Assistant Station Master of Kishanganj, S.P. Chandra, was arrested at Katihar on August 10.

Missing since the day of the accident, Chandra has admitted to having sent the Awadh-Assam Express through on the "down line". In the normal course, a train moving in that direction would have been despatched on the "up line". Only one line was functional at Kishanganj station since track doubling work was in progress.This also meant that the fail-safe signalling system was suspended with traffic being regulated by manual controls. Apart from the signals, the "points" have to be set on the rails, allowing a train through along a continuous length of track.

It appears that on the night of the accident a goods train had preceded the Assam-Awadh Express by a few minutes. It had been allowed through on the down line, following which routine procedure demands that points on the track be switched back to the up line. Further permission to travel on the down line would be subject to the rules governing single-track operation in double-line sections – known as the "absolute block system". A train will simply not be cleared for travel between two successive stations without definitive confirmation that the line is clear of other traffic.

Chandra flagged on the Awadh-Assam Express from Kishanganj but failed to inform the railway operational staff at Gaisal that they had to confirm its arrival there before allowing any traffic in the opposite direction. He was supposedly proceeding on the basis of a rough calculation of how long it would take for the train to reach Gaisal. The CCRS has concluded that apart from Chandra's grievous error, there were departures from prescribed norms on the part of operational staff in Gaisal station too. And neither did the running crew of the two trains adhere to the rules of single-track operation in a double-track section, where strict speed limits and multiple verification of every signal are prescribed.

Mani's final conclusion is chastening. Rarely has the Indian Railways seen a systemic failure of this sort, with human agency at various levels compounding rather than correcting one another in error. Even as the Government has announced a judicial commission of inquiry headed by G.N. Ray, a former Judge of the Supreme Court, the CCRS has urged a rigorous investigation of the possibility of outside involvement, including background checks on all the personnel involved in operational duties on the fateful night. ■

Sukumar Muralidharan

Honour for M.S. Swaminathan

MUCH of Asia's growth since the 1960s is rooted in agriculture and farm research, and considerable credit for this goes to Dr. Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, the internationally acclaimed farm scientist. The scientific leader of the Green Revolution in India, Dr. Swaminathan, 74, is the only living Indian to be included in *Time* magazine's (August 23-30) list of one hundred most influential Asians of the 20th century. (*Time* carries features on Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore and briefly mentions contributions of a few other Indians – Indira Gandhi, Satyajit Ray, Vinobha Bhave, Maharaja Hari Singh, Kamal Hassan, Sonia Gandhi, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Satya Sai Baba.)



A geneticist trained in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, Dr. Swaminathan developed in the 1960s with his colleagues at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in Delhi a wheat strain that disproved the Malthusian prophecy of an imminent tragedy because of food production not keeping pace with population growth. According to *Time*, the miracle wheat seed, and similar rice strains developed at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, saved millions from famine.

After a Ph.D from Cambridge University and post-doctoral research work at Wisconsin University, Dr. Swaminathan returned to India in 1954. With a conviction that he "had to serve the nation" – a lesson perhaps learnt from his father who participated in the freedom struggle – Dr. Swaminathan worked in the laboratories of the Central Rice Research Institute, Cuttack, and the IARI for 18 years, and became Director-General of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) in 1972.

With India living ship-to-mouth on U.S. foodgrains, Dr. Swaminathan, with help from the Rockefeller Foundation, brought from Mexico a cross-bred (between Japanese and Mexican) wheat seed developed by farm scientist and Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug, and married it to an Indian wheat variety to produce a golden-coloured strain much favoured in India. This breakthrough set the pace for the Green Revolution and paved the way for the Asian farm miracle of the 1970s and the 1980s.

Besides setting up 2,000 demonstration farms, Dr.Swaminathan, who was given a free hand by Indira Gandhi to organise a new agricultural programme for India, also took up the onerous task of convincing Indian farmers, steeped in traditional methods, to use the new seeds. Once farmers were convinced, there was no looking back. Today, India produces 70 million tonnes of wheat a year compared to 12 million tonnes in the 1960s no mean achievement. In fact, Asian countries have become net exporters of foodgrains, from being net importers.

A quintessential researcher, Dr. Swaminathan, after retiring as Director-General of the IRRI, Manila, set up a pioneering farm research institute in Chennai in July 1988 that aims at "reaching the unreached". Called the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), the institute is a non-profit, non-political trust, which is committed to harnessing science and technology for environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development.

The MSSRF has been nurtured as much by Dr. Swaminathan's commitment as by prize money – from the World Food Prize (1987), the Tyler Prize (1991), the Honda Prize (1992), the UNEP-Sasakawa Environment Prize (1994) and the Blue Planet Prize (1996) – he and his Foundation have received since 1987. Even before 1987, he had donated to various international institutes all the prize money he received. For instance, he gave away the $20,000 that came with the Albert Einstein World Science Award to the University of Philippines in 1986 to set up an Environment Chair.

Dr. Swaminathan has always been ahead of his time. While it is only recently that biotechnology, ecotechnology and eco-friendly farm methods are being pursued vigorously, he has been identifying, spreading awareness of, and helping farmers adopt these methods for the past decade and a half.

About his achievements, Dr. Swaminathan said in his usual modest manner: "All that was needed for this effort was the inspiration, perspiration and luck of the numerous farm scientists and farmers whom I have worked with."

Dr. Swaminathan's contribution to Indian agriculture is something that, as *Time* quotes him, "changed our history" and will remain etched in the history of development of Asia, and indeed, of the world. ■

Asha Krishnakumar

Mounting quake toll

A LITTLE less than a week after a devastating earthquake struck Turkey on August 17, relief officials said that more than 12,000 bodies had been recovered, and a United Nations relief official estimated that the final death toll may reach 40,000. More than 33,000 people were injured, and at least 200,000 are homeless (see story on page 61). Minister of Housing Koray Aydin estimated that 60,000 buildings had been either destroyed or seriously damaged.

Soldiers were on the streets of many devastated towns, collecting refuse, keeping spectators away from dangerous sites, spraying disinfectants and spreading lime along gutters. Military trucks and jeeps moved through streets alongside power shovels, bulldozers and other heavy equipment.

Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit fired the Governors of Yalova, Kocaeli and Sakarya, three of the hardest-hit provinces. He said that they had proved unable to meet the challenges posed by the disaster, and replaced them temporarily with members of his Cabinet. Many people remained angry, however, not only at Ecevit but at the entire state apparatus. They accuse the Government of failing to grasp the magnitude of the crisis for days and then responding too slowly. ■

New York Times Service

How do you compute tax on your total income?

Part-I

By a panel of experts

There is no need for you as an individual, to take recourse to a tax consultant merely for the purpose of calculating the tax payable and filing your returns. You would do better if, instead, you utilise the consultant's expertise to obtain advice to design an investment strategy that maximises your take-home-a strategy based on your own risk taking capacity and your need for liquidity.

But, to most taxpayers, working out the amount of tax payable seems a complicated exercise requiring the attention of a chartered accountant – until you learn the simple algorithm of computing the tax payable.

So how do you go about it all by yourself? To begin with, all that you have to do is take your bank passbook and classify your incomes under the heads given below. Then, understand the provisions and follow the steps given under each head.

1. Salaries

This is the simplest to handle. The salary and taxable perquisites are chargeable to tax. Standard deduction is allowed @33.33% of the salary with a ceiling of Rs. 25,000 for those having salary upto Rs. 1 lakh, 20,000 for those with a salary between Rs. 1 lakh and 5 lakhs and nil for those with a salary higher than Rs. 5 lakhs.

Over and above this, professional tax paid, if any is deductible. This tax varies from state to state.

2. Income from House Property

The owner of a house property, inclusive of the land attached, is taxed on the 'annual value' of the property. If the assessee has only one property where he is residing, the annual value is nil. If he has taken a loan to buy this property from some permitted sources, the interest is deductible with a ceiling of Rs. 30,000 and the capital attracts rebate u/s 88. If you have more than one property, go to a consultant. Where there are additional properties or the property is let out, there is no ceiling on the interest deductible.

3. Capital Gains

Long-term capital gains are treated as a separate block and charged to tax at the flat rate of 20%, irrespective of the size of the gains. Even this cost can be saved by investing the net sale proceeds in avenues covered by Sec. 54EA with a lock-in of 3 years or the capital gains in avenues covered by Sec. 54EB with a lock-in of 7 years.

Short-term capital gains are added to the normal income.



4. Income from Other Sources

This consists of all the other investment avenues such as banks, post offices, Co-FDs, bonds of financial institutions such as ICICI, IDBI, etc.

5. Exemptions and Deductions

Dividend from shares is now exempt. So, ignore it while computing 'Gross Total Income'.

Add the incomes from the four heads above and from the total, subtract the deductions available under Sections 80L, 80D, 80G, etc., to arrive at 'Total Income'. Refer to the previous articles for details.

6. Income Tax Rates

Now, compute the tax payable by applying the following rates :

7. Tax Rebates

From the tax arrived at as per the above formula, you are allowed to subtract 20% of the contributions made by you in instruments qualified under Sec. 88 such as PPF, LIC, ULIP and NSC VIII.

For infrastructure-related instruments, a higher limit of Rs. 70,000 (in place of Rs. 60,000) is available for the qualifying investment..

Amongst the avenues under Section 88, PPF was the leader of the pack until the infrastructure-related instruments like the Tax Saving Bonds of ICICI and IDBI with lock-ins of only 3 years comes into the arena.

Then again under Section 88B, all senior citizens can claim a tax rebate up to Rs. 10,000, irrespective of the size of the income. If your 65th birthday falls within the relevant financial year, you get the title of 'senior citizen' for the year and all subsequent years.

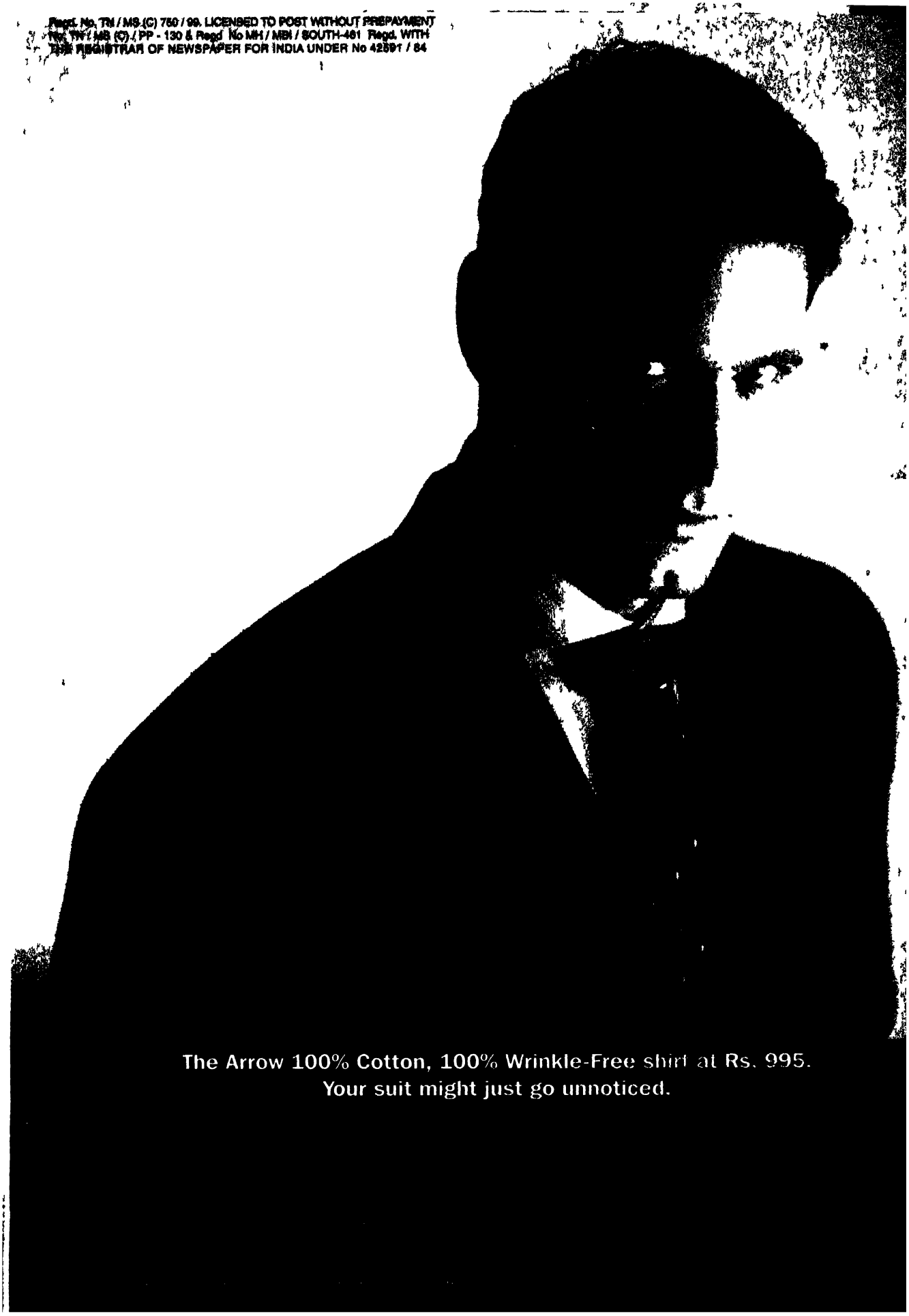
8. Agricultural Income

The general perception is that this income is tax-free. It is not. The income is required to be clubbed with others for the computation of tax purposes.

Do you find all this complicated? Well, an illustrative example next week will show you how easy it is.

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Frontline



Kargil election?

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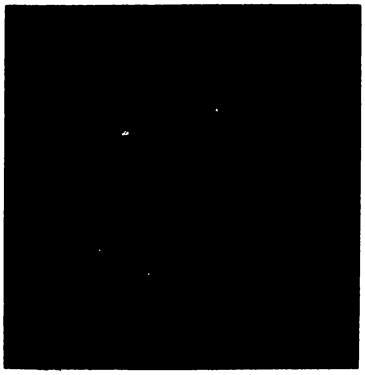
1st September - IndianOil Day

Vol. 16 ◆ No. 19 ◆ September 11- 24, 1999 ◆ ISSN 0970-1710

Frontline



There is a 'Kargil inflation' in the BJP led alliance's prospects in the ongoing national elections. Although a 'Kargil deflation' also seems logical and inevitable, it is impossible to predict the timing of its onset and its effects. 4



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On the cover: A mother casts her vote at a polling booth in Kargil on September 5.

Photograph: Rafiq Maqbool/AP

Cover design: U. Udaya Shankar

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A KARGIL ELECTION?

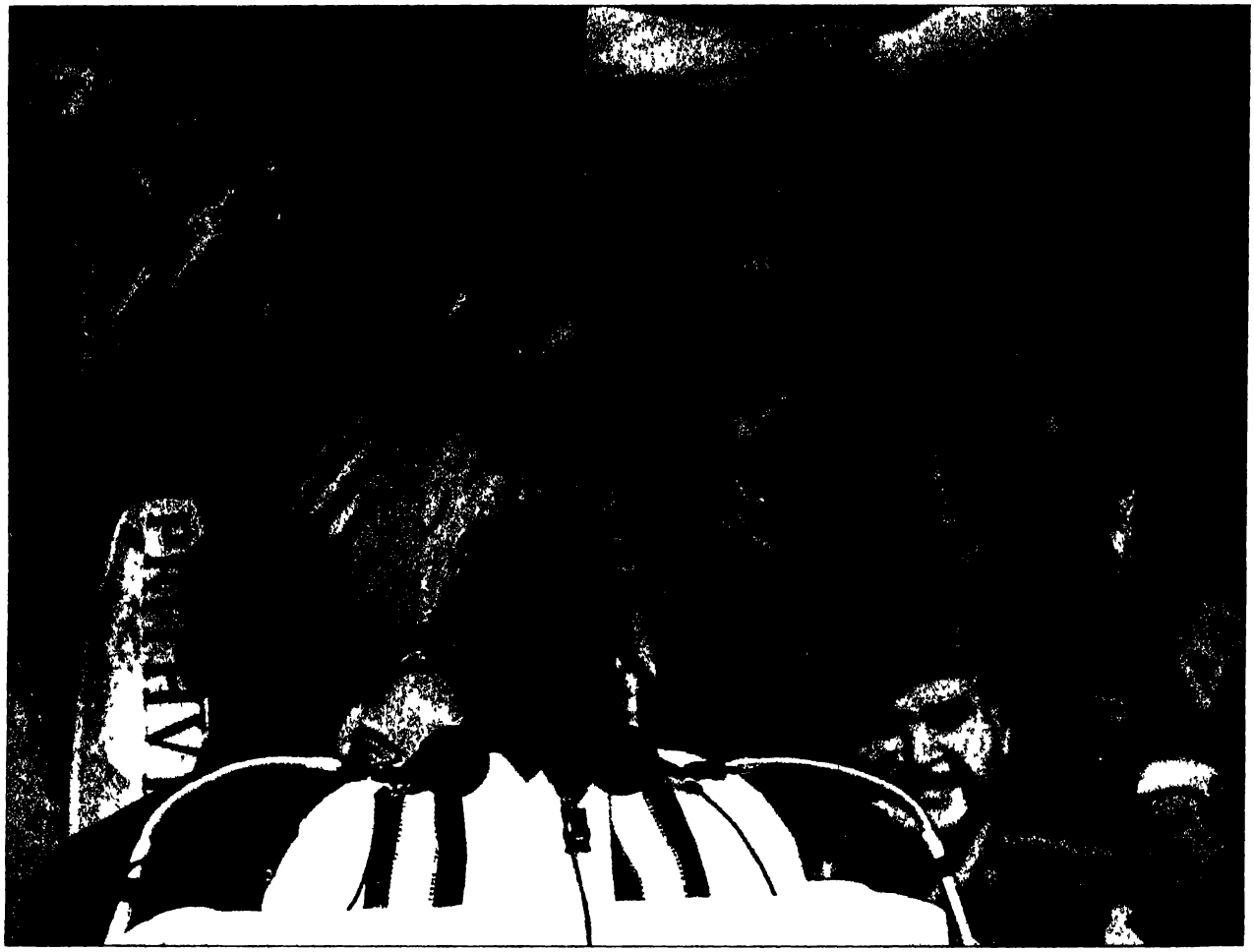
There is a 'Kargil inflation' in the BJP-led alliance's prospects in the ongoing national elections. Although a 'Kargil deflation' also seems logical and inevitable, it is impossible to predict the timing of its onset and its effects.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

IF democracy involves a continual process of learning through experience, the interregnum between the dissolution of the 13th Lok Sabha and the election of the next one has presented the country with a new spectacle – of a government devoid of a real democratic mandate winning popular endorsement through the prosecution of war. The heights of Kargil were the arena where a government's tattered image was dramatically refurbished, where a party that had little going for it except an affected sense of grievance over the premature termination of its effort at governance regained a measure of popular legitimacy.

National elections were notified literally on the day Pakistani forces began an ignominious retreat from Kargil. By then, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee seemed to have put the disorientation and uncertainty of an entire year behind him and to emerge as a national leader by popular acclaim. The euphoria of military victory had decisively snuffed out the transient promise of an election that would not be unduly influenced by extraneous factors.

The Kargil factor is today unmistakably at work across the country. At most it may be moderated or mediated by other localised factors in some areas or States to a greater or lesser degree in its effect on the



BJP leader and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee addressing an election rally in Karnal, Haryana, in August. The assorted backdrop, which features the national flag, the Prithvi missile, the three Service chiefs, and so on, was seen to reflect crude attempts to capitalise on the Kargil developments.

elections.

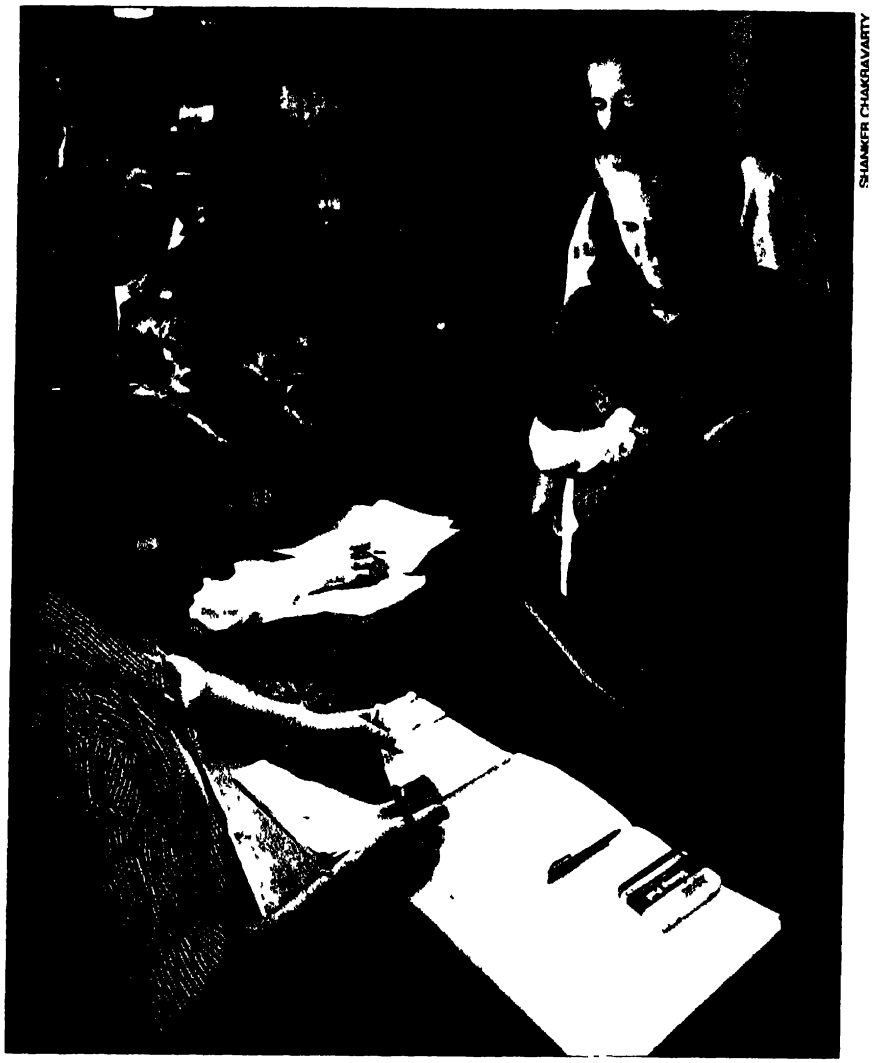
Premature declarations of electoral victory can always be hazardous when they are premised upon a phenomenon as fickle as public euphoria. The results of opinion polls, again, have often proven themselves rather remote from the actual shape of the popular will that emerges from the exercise of the franchise. There are inherent sources of error, especially in a survey of political intentions conducted over a month before they are actually sealed in the ballot boxes.

Further, ground realities as gauged by most observers do not quite square with the picture derived from opinion polls. A micro-examination by States and then further by constituencies would reveal a political picture of mixed fortunes that does not really add up to the kind of sweeping mandate forecast by the polls.

Yet for all that, there is a certain "law of large numbers" which seems to indicate that in the aggregate, opinion polls conducted with an adequate degree of attention to detail would produce results in which the errors neutralise rather than compound each other. The only problem with this generalisation in the current context is that the Kargil factor has uniformly tended to boost perceptions of the BJP-led alliance across the country. Any dilution of the influence of this factor over the month of polling would again have an uneven effect, depending on the quirks of the electoral schedule. But a general deflation in the BJP-led alliance's fortunes cannot be ruled out. What is apparent today in the opinion polls is the "Kargil inflation" in the BJP-led alliance's prospects. Although a "Kargil deflation" seems inevitable on current reckoning, it is impossible to predict the precise timing of its onset and subsequent course.

If the deflation does indeed set in, it would exert an influence in the States where polling is scheduled for the latter half of the election schedule. These include Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (September 18 and 25 and October 3), and Madhya Pradesh (September 11, 18 and 25) – three States of the Hindi belt where the BJP-led alliance has substantial stakes. Moreover, in the largest of these, Uttar Pradesh, the BJP faces the incumbency disadvantage at the State level. Having won 57 of the 85 seats at stake in U.P., the party may have nowhere to go but down.

YET it seems the undeniable reality today that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP will have



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi inside a polling booth in New Delhi on September 5 to cast her vote.



SHERWIN CRASTO/AP

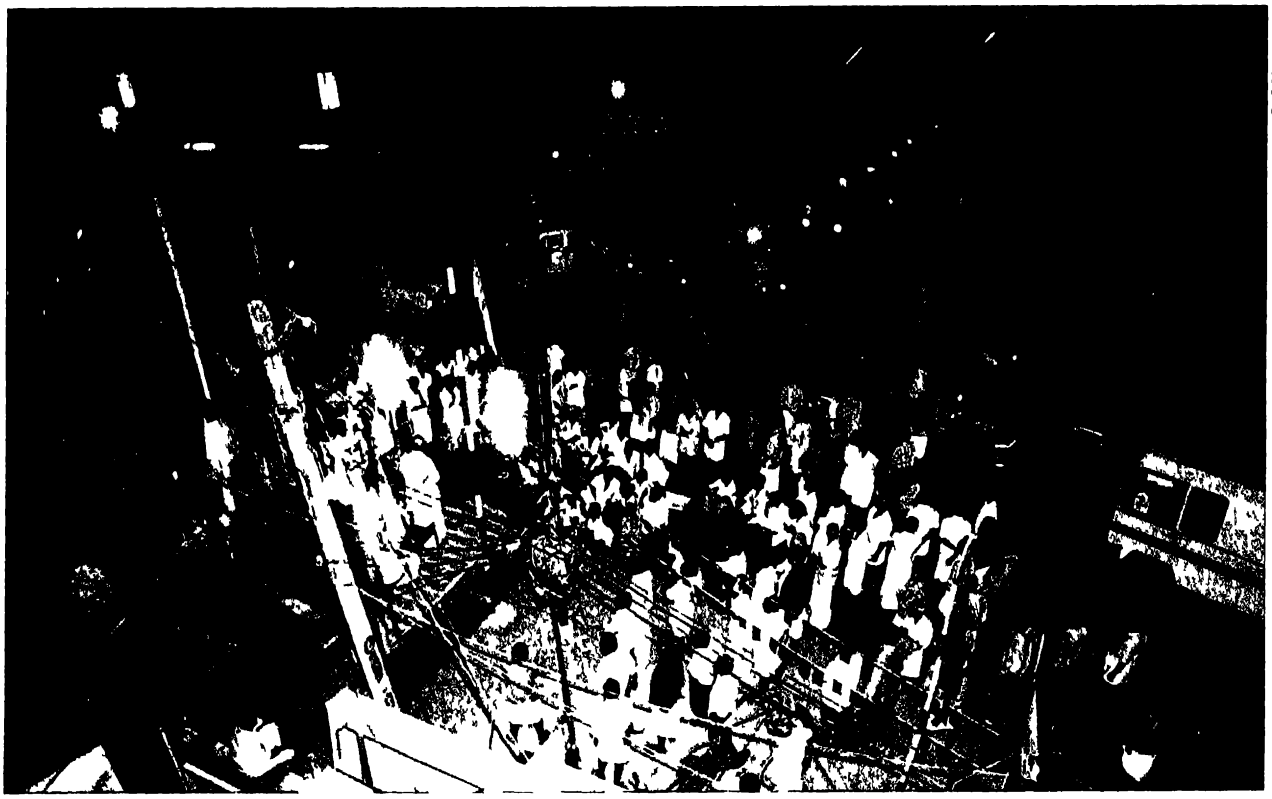
At a polling station in Dangs district, Gujarat.

V SUDERSHAN



Flanked by other leaders of the National Democratic Alliance, Atal Behari Vajpayee releases the NDA manifesto in New Delhi.

S GOPAKUMAR



In Thiruvananthapuram, a BJP hoarding celebrates "Rakshabandhan Mahotsav", a novel event in the southern State, and claims credit for the Kargil victory. An election meeting of the Left Democratic Front is in progress in the foreground.

the first claim on the formation of the next government The magnitude of its putative victory could still be debated till the actual counting ends And there could be further inconclusive discussions over how secure the parliamentary position of the NDA would be, about how vulnerable the prospective new government of Atal Behari Vajpayee would be to multiple pressure groups within its ranks Jayalalitha has opted out, but a fresh prospect of internal schisms looms in the shape of the newly consolidated "socialist bloc" led by George Fernandes

The closest analogue to the current electoral situation would be from the United Kingdom immediately after it waged a successful military campaign to regain the Falkland Islands from Argentina in 1982 Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Party Prime Minister, stood at the nadir of her public approval in early 1982 Her right-wing economic policies had plunged the U K into the depths of recession, and public disenchantment was mounting Falklands provided her with the possibility of redemption, and general elections called in its immediate wake gave her a comfortably enhanced majority Subsequent developments at the global level – notably the inauguration of a similar regime of right-wing economic policies in the





The steering committee of the United Front meets in 1997.

United States, the collapse of international commodity prices and the subjugation of Third World economies through the instrument of debt – endowed her with greater political durability

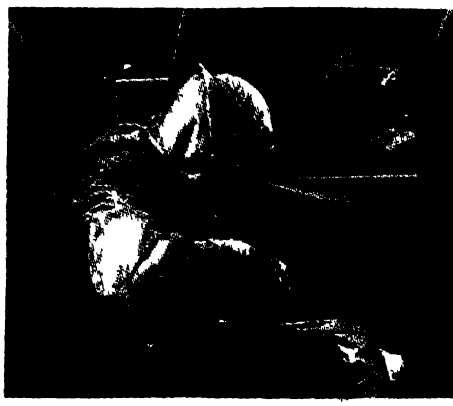
For these diverse reasons, the Falklands war is recognised today as a turning point in modern British history Yet to say that Kargil is a similarly decisive moment for India may strain credulity For one, though Vajpayee and his External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh have worked with great ardour towards evolving a special relationship with the U S , there is little evidence yet to suggest a durable shift in U S strategic perceptions in the region For another, the Indian economy confronts a multitude of vulnerabilities, which are not likely to be mitigated in the prevalent global environment Further still the Indian political scene, though seemingly settling down to a comfortable state of bipolarity, will not remain quiescent for long

THE disappearance of the Third Force, which stood at the core of two efforts at coalition government over the last decade, has seemingly simplified the electoral contest this time around Only certain elements of this once formidable force – such as Mulayam Singh Yadav s Samajwadi Party (see interview) and G K Moopanar s Tamil Maanila Congress – today insist on maintaining a degree of autonomy from the two main forces They have been joined by Sharad Pawar's breakaway faction of the Congress(I), the Nationalist Congress Party As always, Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) stays resolutely outside all groupings at the national level

Indications are that even if all these forces were to put their parliamentary resources together, they would be no more than a marginal force in the 14th Lok Sabha Their relevance would be premised on an indecisive outcome, in which case they would all be more inclined towards the Congress(I) than the BJP-led alliance In an oppositional role they could, in league with the Congress(I), exert a gravitational pull on the erstwhile participants of Third Force politics who are now reluctant allies of the BJP

AN aspect that needs to be factored into the calculation is the level of comfort that the Congress(I) would enjoy in an oppositional role For the first nine months of the Vajpayee government's tenure, the Congress(I) seemed reconciled to its status as the main Opposition party, constructively utilising the ample opportunities afforded by the BJP s maladroit style of governance to consolidate its own position The results of this approach were apparent in the outcome of the Assembly elections held in two northern States and Delhi in November 1998 An opinion poll conducted soon afterwards showed that at that juncture the Congress(I) was in a position to win a comfortable national majority if elections to Parliament were held then

But at the threshold of national revival, the Congress(I) fumbled It



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RAJEEV BHATT

An evocative funeral procession for a soldier who died in Kargil.

encouraged All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Jayalalitha to pull out of the BJP-led coalition in the evident belief that an alternative government could be formed out of the incoherent arithmetic of the 13th Lok Sabha. The Congress(I) then proceeded to undermine the remote possibility of such an alternative through an adamant insistence on single-party governance, a failure to accommodate diversity and a relapse into an attitude of dynastic absolutism.

After she cemented her authority with the Assembly elections of 1998, Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi suffered a severe setback when her rather brash claim that she would conjure up a parliamentary majority within days was proved hollow. A willingness to negotiate terms of political engagement with the numerous parties that had a direct stake in forming an alternative government may have paid off. But the Congress(I) brushed aside all such initiatives, demanding unconditional support for a single-party government.

The Left parties had proved relatively amenable to a single-party government but later sought in vain to persuade the Congress(I) to agree to some form of a power-sharing arrangement with the recalcitrants, such as Mulayam Singh Yadav. Underlying the Congress(I)'s arrogance was the belief that even in the event of fresh general elections, it could carry the momentum of November 1998 into a vastly improved performance. What it failed to factor into the calculation were a virtual revolt within its own ranks, and the outbreak of hostilities on the frontier.



VINO JOHN

At a polling booth in Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu, on September 5.

Much of the petulance the Congress(I) has shown in dealing with the Kargil situation can be directly ascribed to the dawning perception that it missed out on a historic opportunity in April. Although there has been much criticism of the failure of the government to act in time on the basis of intelligence available to it early enough and the actual conduct of the military operations in Kargil, there is little question that any government in authority would have followed very much the tack that the Vajpayee Ministry adopted once the intrusions from Pakistan were discovered. Rather than being at the receiving end of the "Kargil inflation", the Congress(I) might well have been its beneficiary.

Far from holding the initiative now, the Congress(I) has been reduced to searching for the electoral advantages that contingent local circumstances may afford. It is uneasily aware that accretions to its strength would be likely to come from the diminishing electoral base of the Third Force, rather than at the cost of its principal adversary.

A certain mood of involution is apparent in the leadership as a consequence of the multiple sources of vulnerability that the Congress(I) faces. Sonia Gandhi's candidacy, which should have been a strong assertion of leadership, was transformed under the guidance of the insecure coterie that surrounds her into a furtive effort to preempt the possibility of a

strong nominee from the adversary camp. And the elaborate norms that had been worked out by an intra-party committee on ethics were thrown overboard in the distribution of the party ticket.

The conspicuous sense of disdain that Congress(I) campaigners have since expressed for the concept of coalition politics does little to promote public confidence in the political sagacity of the party's leadership. Absent is a strategic sense, a willingness to reconstruct the social and political coalitions that underpinned the Congress(I)'s pretence of single-party governance. Far from being a monolith, in its dynamic phases the Congress(I) was always an amalgam of several political factions. Its decline began from the time it failed to adapt to changing social realities, to broaden the compass of its policies to accommodate the diversity of aspirations that had been thrown up since the 1970s.

The alternative strategy was for the Congress(I) to dig itself deeper into the borough of dynastic legitimacy. But since the time of Rajiv Gandhi, dynasty within the Congress(I) has only been as good as its functional results. Its principal merit was that behind the facade of a nationally recognised leader, it provided the space for a variety of factional bonds to be cemented. These faction leaders were in turn given their due in terms of authority and opportunities for the dispensation of patronage. But to aspire for a position of absolute authority even in a limited domain, as Sharad Pawar did in Maharashtra, was strictly impermissible. Any such effort would call forth reprisals from the supreme leader, leading to another phase of factional instability.

Where a genuine effort to evolve a collective leadership might have contained the chronic malaise of factional instability, the Congress(I) relapsed further into the caprices of dynastic and coterie politics. Today it seems to provide a superficial assurance that it will constitute one of the stable poles of Indian politics in a bipolar contest with the BJP. But just as the BJP-led alliance could fray on account of the conflict between the compulsions of pragmatism and the hardline ideological agenda of its principal constituent, the Congress(I) too could enter a phase of turbulence and possible schism soon after the election results come in. If Indian politics seems today to be settling into a bipolar framework, this can only be construed as a transient phenomenon. The variety of political forces that today contend for influence clearly cannot be accommodated within these constrictions. ■

Peaceful first phase

V. VENKATESAN

THE first phase of voting in the general elections, on September 5 in 16 States, the National Capital Territory of Delhi and five Union Territories, was largely peaceful. An average voter turnout of 55 per cent was recorded in this phase, which covered 145 Lok Sabha and 343 Assembly constituencies. Nearly 25 million voters used electronic voting machines (EVMs), which performed without any glitches. In some constituencies where EVMs were used, a higher turnout of voters was noticed.

There were at least two isolated incidents of violence. In Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh, five persons, including a polling agent of the ruling Telugu Desam Party, died. Four deaths resulted from police firing on supporters of the TDP and the Congress(I) as they threw bombs at each other in the Badvel Assembly constituency. The polling agent was killed in a bomb attack in the Kamlapuram Assembly segment.

In Amritsar, Punjab, a Congress(I) polling agent died in "clashes" between the supporters of the Congress(I) and the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal. Two minor incidents were reported from Faridkot and Ferozepur districts of the State.

Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill expressed satisfaction with the first phase of polling. The Statewise polling percentages are: Andhra Pradesh 65; Goa 45; Gujarat 40; Haryana 62; Karnataka 63 (65 in Bellary); Maharashtra 60; Punjab, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu 55; Delhi 47; Andaman and Nicobar Islands 53; Chandigarh 54; Dadra and Nagar Haveli 51; Daman 70 and Pondicherry 60.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the turnout was 15 per cent in Srinagar, one of two constituencies that went to the polls. In Ladakh, comprising Leh and Kargil districts, the turnout was 70 per cent. At least five persons were injured when the guards of a leader of the ruling National Conference opened fire at Kandoora in Badgam district, which forms part of the Srinagar constituency. Stray incidents of clashes were reported from sensitive Srinagar localities.

M.S. Gill said that political parties ought to read the signals coming from the high and the low voter turnout. Each of the two major parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress(I), has interpreted the turnout to mean an electoral victory for it. BJP general secretary K.N. Govindacharya said that his party expected to win more than 100 of the seats that went to the polls in the first phase. Govindacharya smugly declared that the BJP candidate in Bellary, Sushma Swaraj, would win by a margin of over one lakh votes against Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. BJP spokesperson Arun Jaitley viewed the huge voter turnout in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, States that have witnessed political realignments since the last elections, as a vote in favour of the BJP.

Congress(I) spokesperson Kapil Sibal, on the other hand, said that Sonia Gandhi would trounce the BJP candidate in Bellary by an "overwhelming" margin. He claimed that there was a "huge wave" in favour of the party and against the "khichri" rule of the BJP-led alliance.

The first phase was not without its aberrations: Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishnamurthy found to his dismay that his name was missing in the voters' list. He cast his vote when his name was later discovered against his previous residential address. This lapse raised questions about the effectiveness of the time-consuming exercise of electoral roll revision undertaken by the E.C.

SINCE M.S.Gill assumed office as CEC, he has been introducing the use of EVMs in a phased manner. The EVMs were tried on a limited scale in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections and then in the Assembly elections later that year. In the first phase of polling, voters of 21 constituencies, including the seven constituencies in Delhi, cast their votes through the EVMs.

The photo identity card for voters, introduced by the former CEC, T.N.Seshan, has proved of limited value. There were many instances in Delhi in which genuine voters carrying photo identity cards had to forgo their franchise, as their names did not find a place in the voters' list. ■

The unaligned players

How crucial a role will the handful of parties that are currently unaligned or conditionally aligned with either of the two major political formations come to play in forging a new balance of parliamentary arithmetic post-election? A survey of the scene.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

IN the whirl of Indian politics, alliances come in several forms and shapes. Unconditional exchange of vows pledging two parties to support and nourish each other irrespective of all else are obviously a rarity. Purely contingent agreements on sharing seats, of one party transferring its political constituency's vote for the purpose of augmenting another's elected representation in Parliament, are rather more frequent. These can come with a variety of conditions attached on the relations between the two parties after elections are concluded.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party presents a multitude of such scenarios. It includes a number of parties that are unconditionally aligned with the BJP's quest to lead the next government at the Centre. At the same time, there are a number of parties that are conditionally aligned, which would sustain their support subject to certain vital interests being addressed and met. Ranking among the foremost of the conditional allies are Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress, N. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party and Om Prakash Chautala's Indian National Lok Dal.

Chandrababu Naidu and Chautala are newly arrived in the BJP's political constellation. Both have strong – and realisable – ambitions in the regional political context. Moreover, they have the kind of support base and resources to compel the BJP to accept a subordinate role in their respective States. Mamata Banerjee too is the senior partner in the West Bengal context, though her ambitions of displacing the ruling Left Front look nowhere near fruition. And though all three are conditionally aligned with the NDA, their ability to work towards the fulfilment of State-specific interests would seem somewhat disparate.

The Biju Janata Dal and the Janata Dal(United) have similarly strong regional interests underpinning their alliance with the BJP at the national level. The J.D.(U) in Karnataka, a splinter of the party ruling the State today, seeks a junior role in a future government led by the BJP. In Bihar, where Assembly elections are due in the next few months, it will presumably like to reverse the order of precedence, gaining for itself the larger share of seats in an electoral arrangement with the BJP. The future of the J.D.(U)'s alliance with the BJP would depend upon how far these two scenarios are fulfilled. Since all the top leaders of the J.D.(U) are practised hands in the art of political schisms, this must seem one of the most vulnerable flanks in the NDA.

The BJD in Orissa is yet an untested entity, with its leader by dynastic inheritance, Navin Patnaik, being a novice in politics. Here too the test of the alliance will come in the next few months when Assembly elections are held.

The conditionally aligned parties within the BJP camp would, of course, enjoy only as much leeway as their numbers permit. The current round of elections in Bihar and Orissa would afford the test for any future agreements on seat sharing at the State level. Should discord arise at any stage, they are unlikely to switch allegiance to the opposite camp, since for most of them the Congress(I) represents a traditional adversary. Rather, the unaligned parties, although their number is shrinking, are likely to play a mediatory role in forging a new balance of parliamentary arithmetic.

NO more than four of the unaligned parties seem on current reckoning to have any chance of influencing the course of political events in the months to come. Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party is, for obvious reasons, the most weighty among these. Mulayam Singh draws his sustenance almost entirely from Uttar Pradesh, where he obtained a substantial 28 per cent of the vote share in the 1998 general elections. He is threatened now by a desertion of Muslim voters to a Congress party trying hard to reinvent itself in the State. But he is likely to dispose of the greater resources at the grassroots and capitalise on the Congress(I)'s obvious lack of credible candidates. Having begun his poll preparations early, Mulayam Singh stands a reasonable chance of retaining his strength of 20 in the Lok Sabha. That could make him the most substantial of the unaligned group.

Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party is fighting hard to harness the anti-incumbency factor in its favour. On current reckoning, the going appears tough for him. The traditional Congress(I) vote appears to have split almost evenly in Maharashtra, leaving the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance the winner by a large margin of the popular vote. But the stakes in overturning the discredited saffron alliance are strong and if Pawar is able to deploy his formidable political skills appropriately, he could benefit from a late surge.

G.K. Moopanar's Tamil Maanila Congress is fighting what appears a symbolic battle against the communalism of the BJP and the corruption of Jayalalitha. The personal prestige of some of its leaders may win it a handful of seats. But it would need a substantial bloc of unaligned parties in Parliament to team up with if it is to exert any leverage.

The Bahujan Samaj Party, led by Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, is another party that has raised the symbolic battle to the level of fine art. It commands a substantial 20 per cent share of the popular vote in Uttar Pradesh and is not a trivial player in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. But its representation in Parliament has never been proportionate to its popular vote share and it remains averse to any kind of alliance that may dilute its unique political identity.

In the most generous reckoning, the unaligned parties are unlikely to get much more than 7 per cent or so of the seats in Parliament. That would make them not quite a substantial force in the immediate post-electoral context. But as and when the potential sources of discord within the NDA begin to multiply, their role could become more significant. ■

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Battle for survival

The future of the Nationalist Congress Party hinges crucially on its electoral performance this time in Maharashtra, the home State of its leader Sharad Pawar.

LYLA BAVADAM
in Mumbai

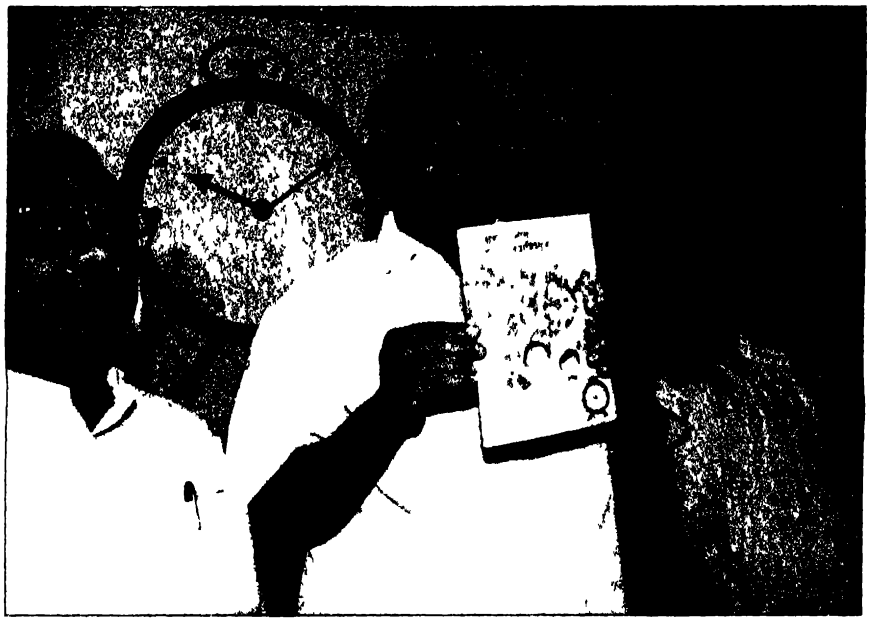
FOR the first time in democratic India, all the major political parties have begun to acknowledge the inevitability of coalition governance at the Centre. It is this factor that gives some hope to the newly formed Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The party's survival is by and large linked to its showing in Maharashtra in the Lok Sabha elections. Sharad Pawar, its leader and former Union Defence Minister is playing a high stakes political game.

Of Maharashtra's 48 Lok Sabha seats, the NCP will contest 39 and support the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) in one. It has offered eight seats to its partners in alliance collectively called the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF), who include the two factions of the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Janata Dal (U), the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and Sharad Joshi's Swatantra Bharat Party.

Pawar is a shrewd politician, but this time he faces serious disadvantages. First, he lacks the organisational infrastructure of his rivals. Second, in order to build his party he had to attract influential Congressmen, but very little time was available for him to do this – hardly two months, between the formation of the NCP and the beginning of the election campaigns. And third, compared to its opponents in the State, the NCP is strapped for cash.

Despite these shortcomings, Pawar asserts that he will win a majority of seats in the State. Relying on his 32 years' experience in public life, vast rural support base and tremendous grasp of issues pertaining to the State, Pawar hopes to capitalise on the voters' disillusionment with the four-and-a-half-year-old Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party rule, marked by scandals and corruption charges.

The saffron combine relies largely on the division of votes between the Congress(I) and the NCP. It also hopes to cash in on Prime Minsier Atal Behari Vajpayee's public meetings in the State. As a BJP source admits, "Atalji's public meetings here are very important to us."



Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar releases his party's manifesto in Mumbai on August 28. Former Lok Sabha Speaker and NCP leader P.A. Sangma is to his left.

Both the NCP and the Shiv Sena-BJP do not consider the Congress(I) a formidable opponent because of its weak local leadership. A source in the NCP said: "In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra, 44 per cent of the vote went to the Congress(I). After splitting away from the Congress, we expect to get at least 22 per cent of that share. The Shiv Sena-BJP had 42 per cent of the vote at that time. This time the NCP will take away about 15 per cent of that vote. Plus we will get 4 per cent of the vote through the RPI. Our tally thus comes to 41 per cent. The coalition government's tally drops to 35 per cent." Thus the fight in Maharashtra is between the Shiv Sena-BJP and the NCP and its allies, the NCP leader argues.

Pawar's power in the State was amply demonstrated in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections when the Congress(I) and its allies won 37 of the 48 seats, compared to the 15 seats it had won in 1996.

Pawar himself attributes the 1998 victory to "the hatred that the people had developed for the Shiv Sena and BJP" as well as to the popular acceptance of the alliance between the Congress(I), the RPI and the S.P.

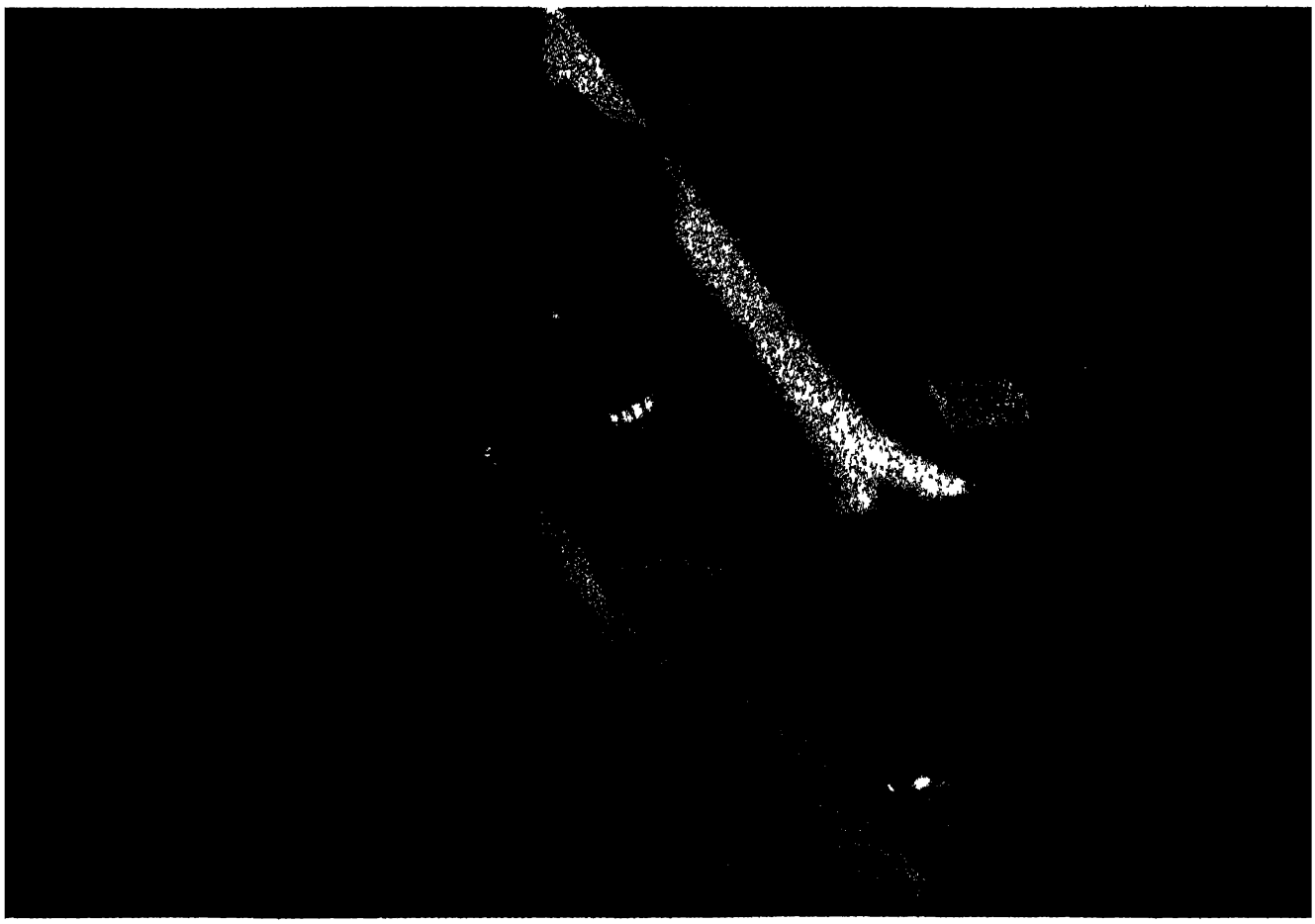
Immediately after forming the NCP, Pawar set about roping in Congress(I) members. Fifteen MPs (14 from the Congress(I) and one from the RPI) of the dissolved Lok Sabha joined Pawar right away. This gave the NCP an edge.

Maharashtra has six district regions – western Maharashtra, north Maharashtra, Marathwada, Vidarbha, Konkan and Mumbai. The highest number of Lok Sabha seats, 12, are in western Maharashtra, which has the rich and powerful sugar cooperatives that have traditionally supported the Congress. In fact, this is the only region where the NCP is engaged in a clear tug-of-war with the Congress(I). In an effort to consolidate his party's position, Pawar won over four of the 11 Congress(I) MPs from here. In the constituencies of the remaining seven, including Baramati which is Pawar's constituency, the NCP has a strong winning chance, except perhaps in Karad.

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'No support for Sonia or BJP'

In the first 12 days of his election campaign in Maharashtra, Sharad Pawar, leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), toured more than 200 villages and towns by helicopter. His speeches dealt with Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin or, as he punned in his speech, the *videshi haath* (foreign hand); the failure of the BJP-led government to detect the infiltration in Kargil early; the price rise; and the plight of farmers and Dalits under saffron rule in Maharashtra. Pawar's public meetings attracted only fair-sized crowds but this veteran of 32 years of public life remained unfazed: "It's not the size but the response that matters". Pawar spoke to **Lyla Bavadam** about the NCP's prospects:

▶ *What is your assessment of the post-election prospects of the parties other than the Congress(I) and the BJP-led alliance?*

It is too early to say. But I can say that we are not going to associate with the BJP and we are not going to support or associate with Sonia Gandhi. One has to see if there is any other alternative.

▶ *Which un-aligned parties will be important at the national level after the elections?*

Unless and until one knows about the strength, this has no meaning. For instance, in 1996 the Janata Dal had some 40 MPs. In 1998, the Janata Dal had six MPs. So the party might be important but ultimately its performance in the election is most important.

▶ *How would you rate the Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP), for instance?*

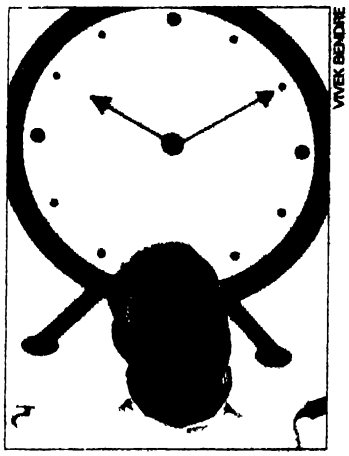
A: I don't think it will improve its position. In the last Parliament, it stood sixth or fifth in terms of numbers. It will be somewhere near that.

▶ *How will the BJP's alliance with the Telugu Desam party of N. Chandrababu Naidu work out in Andhra Pradesh?*

There are two problems that the TDP will face if it is going to associate itself with the BJP. First, the State has a substantial population of minorities, especially in Telengana. Secondly, in the election process the People's War Group plays an important role. These two sections will never support anybody who hobnobs with the BJP. So that might affect him. People say that the BJP has 16 per cent of the vote, and if that information is correct, then that 16 per cent can change the entire position.

Have you made any specific plans if the polls are indecisive? The NCP will be in great demand in a situation like that.

Let us see. Two things are clear. No Sonia. No BJP. We will be happy to sit in the Opposition.



▶ *Sonia Gandhi has often said that the interests of the country are dear to her. Will she agree not to take up the prime ministership in national interest?*

If the people are not ready to accept (her), what can she do? If other parties are not ready to support... at least Mulayam Singh and I are clear that we will not support...

▶ *Do you think the Congress(I) will be willing to sacrifice Sonia Gandhi if the NCP helps it form the government?*

The Congress will do anything. I know that a sizable section in the Congress does not want Sonia as Prime Minister.

▶ *Why did they not come with you?*

They had no courage, and secondly anyone who is interested in entering Parliament has to see how they will be able to do so. I have to accept and admit one thing. I have not created that kind of strength in a number of States as yet where I will be able to bring someone into Parliament. My organisational set-up is not yet built up. It's only a few months since the NCP was started on June 10. It has not been possible for me to build up the party in different States and that is why people stay away. If they want to contest elections, they would prefer a safer party. A number of people have expressed their views, that they are not happy with Sonia Gandhi, that they are waiting for the appropriate time...

▶ *Have any Congress members in Maharashtra indicated that they will shift to the NCP if you prove stronger?*

In Maharashtra there is a sharp division and a bitter fight.

▶ *Whom would you find acceptable in the Congress as a prime ministerial candidate?*

Why should we disclose that at this juncture? First of all, why should we accept anyone from the Congress? Why should they not accept our candidate?

▶ *You wish to be Prime Minister?*

I will not get 270 seats... Let us see what happens. If a person like Sonia Gandhi expects to be Prime Minister after 13 months of experience in public life... at least I have been getting elected continuously for 32 years.

▶ *In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra you were largely responsible for the Congress(I) doing much better than it did in 1996. Do you think you can work the same magic for the NCP?*

We will get a majority in the State... 30 to 35 seats in the Lok Sabha. There is of course the problem of money. The Shiv Sena-BJP and the Congress have access to lots of money. We have no money but we've got the people. Our workers plead with us. They say, "Saheb, just hold one sabha". The people are determined to defeat the Sena-BJP. This factor and our alliance will get us victory.

▶ *Are you isolated in politics right now? You had earlier said that everyone was gunning for you. At public meetings leaders as diverse as Pramod Mahajan, Sonia Gandhi and Bal Thackeray have had something to say about you.*

I'm not isolated. On the contrary, I seem to be in a good position if they are all talking about me.

▶ *Is the NCP isolated in terms of money power, organisational abilities?*

Monetarily, yes. We are a very young party.

▶ *Which are the large interest groups interested in supporting the NCP?*

The farming community, the middle class and Dalits.

▶ *Corporate support?*

Not so much. I have a personal relationship with many corporate houses but we've been continuously asking them to help. The 1995 elections, then 1996, then 1998, now 1999... one feels ashamed even to ask.

Have you got any assurance this time from corporate houses?

By and large, yes.

North Maharashtra has six Lok Sabha seats, of which the Congress(I) won five last time. The region has three reserved constituencies. Two Congress(I) MPs form this region joined Pawar's party. While Dhule, Nasik and Malegaon (where the Janata Dal (U) has a strong candidate) are safe constituencies for the NCP, the party will face a tough fight in Nandurbar, Jalgaon and Erandol where the fight is between the BJP and the Congress(I).

Marathwada has eight Lok Sabha seats, of which the Congress(I) won six and the BJP two in the last elections. Pawar won over the Congress(I) MPs from Hingoli and Parbhani. The NCP appears to be strong in Beed and Jalna, where the BJP member in the dissolved Lok Sabha, who has not been renominated, is believed to be working against the party candidate. The NCP appears to be weak in Nanded, Aurangabad, Latur and Osmanabad. The Latur seat has consistently gone to the Congress candidate and former Speaker of the Lok Sabha Shivraj Patil. His devoted following is referred to as MaMuLi, an acronym for "Marwaris, Muslims and Lingayats".

Marathwada is crucial to Pawar. With its large Dalit and tribal populations, the region has been a centre of social turmoil for decades. In 1996, the Congress(I) lost almost all of Marathwada but regained most of the region in 1998. The Shiv Sena, which had grabbed four seats in 1996, is unlikely to repeat that perfomance. Pawar claims that Shiv Sena "shakhas are being closed and their boys are joining the NCP. They are very disillusioned." The Renapur Assembly constituency in Beed district has evoked special interest since Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde of the BJP is in the fray here. Munde has a large following among his Vanjara tribe but alleged acts of high-handedness by the members of his family during Shiv Sena-BJP rule could work in favour of the NCP candidate, Radhakrishna Patil, who was a member of the last Lok Sabha.

On September 4, Munde's brother Pandit Anna Pandurang Munde was stabbed by a group of 50 men allegedly belonging to the Congress(I) and the NCP. His attackers alleged that Munde's brother, while campaigning, had been announcing to the crowds that the local NCP and Congress(I) candidates had withdrawn their candidature.

While touring Beed, Pawar was greeted by ecstatic party workers who assured him that Munde's chances were damaged by his brother's behaviour. Party workers said that Munde was "so worried about his chances here that he is not leaving his constituency". Munde got Vajpayee and Pramod Mahajan to address public meetings in Renapur. While Vajpayee addressed one meeting, Mahajan addressed some half a dozen. Former BJP MLA Vimal Mundada has shifted to the NCP. Mundada had for long complained of being sidelined by Munde.

Vidarbha, which has 11 Lok Sabha seats, has had a record of being politically volatile. In 1998 the Congress(I) won all the seats here; whereas its 1996 tally was just two. The 1998 victory was largely because of the alliance with the RPI. This time the RPI is fractured; two factions are with the Congress(I) and two with the NCP. Pawar has achieved some success here by winning over the Congress(I) members of the last Lok Sabha from Bhandara and Wardha. The Congress(I)'s morale, however, received a boost because of the alliance with the Prakash Ambedkar and R.S. Gavai factions of the RPI. Ambedkar's



NCP general secretary P.A. Sangma at a party convention in Guwahati.

'Every alliance will undergo changes'

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

GENERAL SECRETARY of the Nationalist Congress Party, P.A. Sangma, believes that none of the major political formations – the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Congress(I) and its allies, or the NCP and its partners – will remain intact after the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections are known.

Speaking to *Frontline* in Calcutta, Sangma predicted a hung Parliament, a situation in which the NCP would play a crucial role. He said: "Every alliance will undergo changes after the elections. In the post-election scenario, all political parties will witness a realignment at the national level. A hung Parliament will follow a fractured mandate whereby the Sharad Pawar-led NCP will play a crucial role." Sangma ruled out any alliance between the NCP and the NDA.

Sangma, a former Lok Sabha Speaker and once the most prominent Congress(I) leader from among the northeastern States, rejected the possibility of the NCP returning to the Congress(I) under Sonia Gandhi. He predicted a split in the Congress(I) after what he described would be its worst-ever drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections. This would lead to an intra-party revolt and there would be a demand for a change of leadership, he said, and added that such a change would help the Congress(I) mend fences with the NCP. The BJP and the Congress(I) were fighting the polls on non-issues, he said. "One of them is busy projecting Vajpayee and the other Sonia Gandhi."

Following Sangma's appreciation of Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee for her "cautious role *vis-a-vis* the BJP-led NDA", there was speculation in West Bengal that the NCP might join forces with her. Sangma said that Mamata had kept her options open by not joining the NDA. Sangma appears to be not averse to closer ties with the Trinamul Congress if the NCP gets an opportunity to play a crucial role after the elections. ■

group is strong in Akola, Washim and Mumbai, while Gavai is strong in Amravati. The RPI faction led by Ramdas Athavale, which is an NCP ally, has support all over Maharashtra While it is difficult to be specific about Athavale's areas of influence, the merger of the Khobragade faction with the Athavale faction has improved the prospects of Pawar's alliance in Marathwada and Vidarbha.

There has been considerable shuffling of seats between parties and candidates in Vidarbha The Congress(I) member in the dissolved Lok Sabha from Bhandara Praful Patel, contests on the NCP ticket this time from Chimur, where he is pitted against Joginder Kavade of the RPI faction that has allied itself with the Congress(I). Kavade represented Chimur in the previous Lok Sabha The Congress(I) has put up Dr. Shrikant Jhichkar against the NCP's Jagdish Nimbathe in Bhandara. The relatively unknown Nimbathe is expected to benefit from Praful Patel's campaigning In Washim, former Chief Minister Sudhakkarrao Naik, who has joined the NCP, will campaign for the NCP candidate, Javed Khan. The NCP is expected to win a big chunk of Muslim vote as well as the Banjara (Naik's community) vote. There is considerable uncertainty in the Ramtek constituency since all the candidates are new.

The NCP is strong in Yavatmal, where it has fielded former BJP MP Rajabhau Thakre Thakre lost in 1998 to the Congress(I) by less than 60,000 votes.

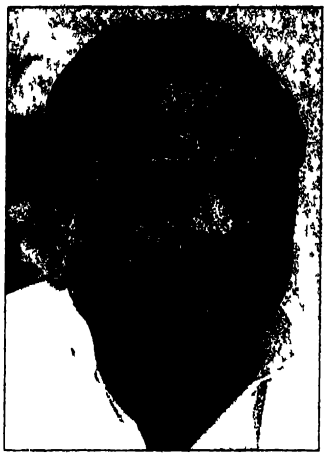
The coastal Konkan region, which has five seats, is the chink in the Congress(I) armour In 1998 the party got just one seat in the region. Pawar admits that the region has been neglected. In the Kulaba constituency, the PDF will support the Peasants and Workers Party candidate, Ramshet Thakur, who is expected to retain his seat. Janata Dal (S) stalwart Madhu Dandavate, who contests from Rajapur, the southern-most constituency in the State, faces Suresh Prabhu, Shiv Sena member in the last Lok Sabha.

Mumbai, a Shiv Sena bastion, has six seats. In 1996 the Congress(I) did not win any seats, but in 1998 it won three with the help of its allies. The NCP and its allies contest all seats in Mumbai.

Although Pawar has consistently ruled out any alliance with the BJP, it is believed that the BJP had considered a mutually beneficial alliance with the NCP in the State. Such an alliance would have benefited the BJP, which has lost considerable strength especially in Mumbai, because of the strong-arm tactics and corrupt ways of the Shiv Sena. ■

Anti-Congress, anti-BJP mood

Samajwadi Party (S.P.) president **Mulayam Singh Yadav** has been on the campaign trail for the past one and a half months, mostly in Uttar Pradesh where his party contests 83 of the 85 Lok Sabha seats. He has also made trips to Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat where the S.P. has fielded candidates. When **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** met him in Delhi for an interview, Mulayam Singh Yadav was upbeat, obviously undeterred by reports of erosion of the S.P.'s support base, especially among the minorities. Excerpts:


AKHILESH KUMAR

▶ *Whatever happened to your efforts to form a third front as an alternative to both the Congress(I) and the BJP?*

We have forged an alliance in Maharashtra with the Nationalist Congress Party, the Republican Party of India (Athawale), the Peasants and Workers Party and the Janata Dal (Secular) led by Deve Gowda. In Uttar Pradesh too the NCP and the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) led by former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar are with us. In Gujarat and Rajasthan we have an understanding with the NCP and other like-minded parties. In States where we do not have formal tie-ups because of seat allocation problems, forces opposed to the Congress(I) and the BJP are rallying around the most influential alternative in each constituency. This varies from State to State, sometimes from constituency to constituency.

▶ *But such alliances seem too weak to make any real impact on the electoral outcome.*

The fundamental problem with many of our non-Congress(I), non-BJP friends is that they have lost confidence in themselves. They have failed to read the anti-Congress(I), anti-BJP mood among dominant sections. I am sure, they will realise the situation once the election results come out.

▶ *Many of them, including your former allies such as the CPI(M), see the BJP as the main enemy now.*

That is their perception. The S.P. has its own perception of the national situation. As far as I am concerned there is no doubt that parties such as the CPI(M) have made a grievous error in assessing the situation. I am sure they will correct their mistake in course of time.

▶ *But you had said earlier that the days of 'anti-Congressism' are over. That was one of the premises on which the S.P. and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) formed the Rashtriya Loktantrik Morcha.*

At that time we wanted to oust the Vajpayee government and put an end to the Sangh Parivar's communal and fascist rule. We were ready to give the Congress(I), the largest Opposition party, an opportunity to lead this fight. However, the Congress(I) failed miserably in fulfilling this responsibility. Instead, it competed with the BJP in asserting its commitment to Hindutva. Even the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution to underline this point. After all this, Congress(I) leaders are trying to be votaries of protecting the minorities. They are trying to teach us the values of secularism. Nothing could be more ridiculous than this.

▶ *The general impression is that this time the fight is essentially between the Congress(I) and the BJP in a majority of States.*

Some sections of the media do not tire of converting India into a bipolar political society. But India is too pluralistic socially and politically to submit totally to the fascist-communal agenda of the BJP or the dynastic rule of the Congress(I). Remember the 1991 elections? Then too the Third Front was written off and said to be non-existent. But in the round of polls held before the unfortunate assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, it was the Third Front parties that claimed the majority of seats. ■

Conditional allegiance

KALYAN CHAUDHURI
in Calcutta



MAMATA BANERJEE, the founder of the Trinamul Congress, says she is happy with the performance of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government and expects it to return to power. She told *Frontline* that the Trinamul Congress wanted a "friendly" government at the Centre which would honour the Bengal Package the Vajpayee government had announced, investigate economic "irregularities" committed by the Left Front Government in West Bengal and send Central teams to oversee the law and order situation in the State. She said: "The Trinamul will forge ties with whichever party is ready to fight the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The removal of the CPI(M)-led government in West Bengal is our ultimate aim. To fulfil this objective, the Trinamul will join the government at the Centre if it is headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee."

Mamata Banerjee said that her party had declined to join the government in 1998 because it had sought the people's mandate only to provide external support to the government. In this election, she said, the party sought a mandate to join the government. Although the manifesto of the Trinamul Congress promises a stable government under Vajpayee's leadership, it does not seek to bring in legislation that will ensure a full term for a government, as suggested by other National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners.

She reiterated that the BJP was not "untouchable"; however, she pointed out that her party had not entered an alliance with it but had merely made seat adjustments. "Some say that the BJP is a communal party that demolished the Babri Masjid. When the Election Commission has recognised the party and the people have voted for it, how can it be untouchable? If the BJP is guilty of demolishing the Babri Masjid, so is the Congress, for at that time the Narasimha Rao Government was in power at the Centre. The Left parties cannot afford to call the BJP communal since in 1989 they had joined hands with it against the Congress," she said. She believes that the minorities are not worried about their security under a Vajpayee-led government because there were no communal riots during its 13-month tenure.

The manifesto of the Trinamul Congress has praised Vajpayee for the way in which he handled the BJP's alliance partners and ran the government. However, it is silent on Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, a key issue in the NDA campaign. Mamata Banerjee said: "To keep the issue out of our manifesto is our party's decision and one should not read too much into it. Our decision is final. Even in the event of a hung Parliament, Trinamul will not desert the BJP and join any other political formation that may require our support to form a government." ■

Coming closer to the BJP

DASU KESAVA RAO
in Hyderabad



THE Telugu Desam Party is going to the polls again with the Bharatiya Janata Party as an alliance partner after the gap of a decade. The two parties and the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) fought against the Congress(I) in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections and in the 1985 and 1989 Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh.

After the demolition of the Babri mosque on December 6, 1992, the TDP distanced itself from the BJP and moved closer to the Left parties. However, with the [illegible] United Front [illegible] the formation of which [illegible] Chief Minister N. [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] ment that was formed after the 1998 elections. BJP leaders acknowledge his gesture with gratitude. Critical of the TDP's stance, the Left parties parted ways with it.

The Congress(I) and the Left parties condemned the TDP's *volte-face* as opportunistic and as damaging to the secular fabric of the nation. Chandrababu Naidu, however, explained that the collapse of the United Front had narrowed his choice to either the Congress(I) or the BJP. As the TDP was fighting on an anti-Congress plank, he moved to the BJP. He believed that if the Congress(I) came to power at the Centre, it would quash the pitch for his [illegible] in Andhra Pradesh.

[illegible] TDP claimed that by [illegible] Atal Behari Vajpayee [illegible] the coordination panel [illegible] and its allies, their party had refused to dilute its commitment to secularism. For the same reason, they say, the TDP still does not want to join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), or a government it may form.

What then will be the TDP's role if the elections yield a hung Parliament? In the first place, TDP insiders discount the possibility of a hung Lok Sabha; they insist that Vajpayee will be re-elected Prime Minister with a bigger mandate. The TDP will continue to extend issue-based and conditional support to his Government without prejudice to its commitment to secularism and the welfare of minorities. According to party leaders, the close presence of a strong secular party, like the TDP would help checkmate any BJP plans to revive the Hindutva agenda.

Chandrababu Naidu and Vajpayee, who shared platforms in Hyderabad, Bhimavaram and Bellary, heaped praise on each other. ■

A strategy against communalism

The Left parties share varying perceptions about the political approach to be adopted *vis-a-vis* the Congress(I) in the current context. However, in view of the need to mobilise democratic and secular forces against the BJP and its communal agenda, they have evolved State-specific electoral tactics.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in New Delhi

THE four main Left parties – the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc – face the September-October elections on the basic premise that their representation in the 13th Lok Sabha has to be increased. This, in their view, is essential to advance "the struggle against the reactionary communal forces represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the struggle for alternative policies in government". These parties expect that elections will throw up a hung Parliament, and in such a situation having a significant strength in Parliament is crucial.

In order to enhance their parliamentary strength, the Left parties have to improve their position not only in States such as West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, where they already have a strong base and are in power, but in other areas, where they have no strong moorings of their own. It is in this context that the need to strike alliances with other secular and democratic parties has been emphasised. In the opinion of Left leaders this kind of cooperation and mobilisation of secular and democratic forces will lead to the evolution of another Third Front, which will present a path of governance that is fundamentally different from the course followed by the Congress(I) and the BJP.

However, even while sharing this general perception, the Left parties disagree on how to achieve the electoral objective. The CPI(M) and the CPI have underlined that all efforts must now be concentrated on preventing the BJP from returning to power through the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which it leads. They consider this their paramount responsibility because the Hindu Right represented by the BJP has marked tremendous growth in recent years. The CPI(M) argues that the central task having been identified, it will be detrimental to take a position of equidistance from the BJP and the Congress(I) as advocated by the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) of Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar. This line of the CPI(M) is based on a candid admission that the contours of the Third Front are yet unclear and that the proposed entity does not have the ability to take on the BJP-led alliance politically.

In view of this line, the CPI(M) has refrained from aligning itself with the S.P. or the NCP although both parties face the BJP-led alliance as their principal opponent in the areas of their strength, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively. The CPI(M) was a small but important ally of the S.P. in Uttar Pradesh until the 1998 elections, and both were members of the erstwhile United Front (U.F.).

The CPI agrees that it is counter-productive to remain equidistant from the BJP and the Congress(I), but it has a different perception of the S.P. and the NCP. The CPI leadership believes that although the S.P. and the NCP have "failed to understand the struggle against communal forces in the right perspective, these parties should not be kept away from a larger secular platform."

Interestingly, the smaller parties of the Left – the RSP and the Forward Bloc – are closer to the S.P.-NCP position. These parties have asserted that they would like to maintain a policy of equidistance from the Congress(I) and the BJP. In fact, the two parties had taken this position as early as April, when efforts were made to form an alternative government after the fall of the BJP-led government. While the CPI and the CPI(M) were ready to support a minority Congress(I) government from outside, the RSP and the Forward Bloc made it clear that they would not support such an arrangement. They wanted a Third Front government put in place with the Congress(I) supporting it from outside.



R V MOORTHY

CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Polit Bureau members S. Ramachandran Pillai and Prakash Karat.

THE differences with regard to electoral strategies have reflected in the alliances the Left parties have formed with other secular parties. Highlighting the centrality of the fight against the BJP, the CPI and the CPI(M) evolved specific tactics for States such as Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Tamil Nadu and worked out seat adjustments with the Congress(I) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

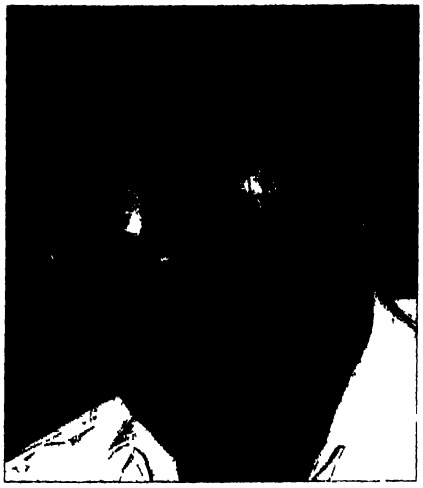
(AIADMK), among others. Although both the CPI and the CPI(M) had negotiations with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar, only the CPI(M) could clinch an accord with it.

The Left had consistently opposed all these principal non-BJP parties not only on ideological and political grounds but also on account of doubts about the political and moral integrity of their leaders. Despite this, the CPI and the CPI(M), after considerable inner-party debate, decided to align themselves with these forces on the ground that the paramount political task at hand was to halt the advancement of right-wing communal forces. The popular response to the new electoral alignments, particularly in States such as Tamil Nadu and Punjab, indicate that the decision of the CPI and CPI(M) has found considerable public acceptance.

The lack of agreement on electoral strategies prevented the Left parties from coming out with a joint manifesto. Central to this inability is the candid admission of the CPI and the CPI(M) that a Third Front, which would chart a path independent from that of the Congress(I) and the BJP, is yet to take shape. The Left parties' joint manifesto in 1998 had branded the Congress(I) a party that had degenerated both politically and organisationally and castigated it for pursuing economic policies that hurt the people's interests, betraying its secular heritage by compromising with communal forces, and promoting corruption in public life. The manifesto had said that it was this dismal record of the Congress(I) that led to its humiliating defeat in the 1996 elections. It projected the U.F. as an alternative to the "discredited" Congress(I) and as a firm secular response to the communal platform of the BJP.

According to the CPI and CPI(M) leaders, there is no entity like the U.F. to be presented before the electorate this time. During the 13 months of BJP rule the U.F. collapsed with two of its principal constituents, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) turning allies of the BJP. According to CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet, accepting the collapse of the U.F. realistically and seeking modified ways and means to defeat the communal threat is not tantamount to succumbing to the Congress(I). Surjeet said that there were no two opinions among the Left parties that "the Congress(I)'s basic policies do not provide a democratic alternative to the BJP". The CPI(M) election manifesto itself had made it clear, he pointed out.

Surjeet said that on economic policy



S MAHINSHA

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan.

the BJP and the Congress had no basic differences. Whether it was privatisation and further liberalisation, or the opening up of the insurance sector or the question of the Patents Bill, the Congress(I) had no alternative to the BJP-led government's stands on these issues. The RSP and the Forward Bloc, however, tend to believe that the U.F. or a similar Third Front can be built by the Left by joining hands with parties such as the NCP and the S.P., which pursue an anti-BJP, anti-Congress(I) line.

In fact, an intense discussion had taken place within the CPI(M) on this issue when the NCP was formed. Among the opinions expressed was the one that advocated alignment with the NCP at least in Maharashtra. This came from a section of the Kerala unit of the party. Some of the participants in the discussion even recommended the severing of ties with the Congress(I) in all parts of the country. The Kerala unit had its own compulsions for advancing this line. For, unlike in West Bengal and Tripura, the other two power bases of the party, in Kerala the party's principal opponent is the Congress(I). Secondly, the Congress (Socialist), a constituent of the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front in Kerala, had merged with the NCP. In this situation a position of equidistance from both the Congress(I) and the BJP would have helped its campaign immensely. Reports from Kerala suggest that despite the anti-BJP line prevailing over the equidistance policy, sections of the Kerala leadership state that the Congress(I) will have to support a Third Front government.

However, the manifestoes and election policy documents of the Left parties agree on most other issues. These documents assert that the Left platform represents the aspirations of all sections of the working people, of all patriotic citizens who are committed to a socially and economically just order. The parties affirm their resolve to strengthen the Left as the guardian of the interests of the working people and the promoter of self-reliant growth, employment, equal opportunities and reduction of inequalities. All four parties criticise the mindless economic liberalisation and point out that economic reforms require a different orientation. They speak in unison about the need to implement land reform and the enormous contribution made by the Left-led governments of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura in this respect.

The four parties agree that the 13-month stint of the Vajpayee Government was an unmitigated disaster for the country, which threatened the very basis of the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution. The policy statements of the parties also warn that secular and democratic values, which had become part of the common consciousness of the Indian people, would be eroded if the BJP continues in government. The parties agree that the Vajpayee Government has through the Pokhran nuclear tests as well as by generating the Kargil crisis aggravated the strains on national unity. The arbitrary dismissal of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, and the refusal to discuss the matter in the Parliament have also been highlighted by the Left parties as actions endangering national security.

The parties allege that the Government instilled fear and insecurity among the minorities by allowing the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, both members of the Sangh Parivar, to attack Christians and Muslims. The economic policy of the Government gave a bonanza to foreign capital and big business and imposed heavy burdens on the common people. By dismantling the Public Distribution System to benefit private traders, the Left parties say, the BJP has left the urban poor at the mercy of black-marketeers, hoarders and profiteers in the matter of buying essential commodities. The Vajpayee Government is also accused of being complacent and committing grave diplomatic errors following the euphoria created over the bus ride to Lahore.

The Left parties have launched a campaign on these issues. The popular response is rated as satisfactory by the leadership, both in their power bases and in areas where they are weak. In the 1998 elections the Left parties totalled 48 seats, of which 32 belonged to the CPI(M), nine to the CPI, five to the RSP and two to the Forward Bloc. By all indications, the Left is aiming at 70 to 80 seats this time. ■

Coalition constraints

With the BJP leadership sending out mixed signals on contentious issues, the NDA appears to suffer from a problem of cohesion.

V.VENKATESAN
in New Delhi

IN the election campaign, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee tried to score a point over his rival, Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi, on the matter of the dharma of coalition governance. While Sonia Gandhi clearly preferred single-party rule, Vajpayee indicated that he would form a coalition government even if the Bharatiya Janata Party got a majority on its own. His message to the electorate was that the BJP was more willing to share power with its alliance partners than the Congress(I), which would consider a coalition arrangement only if it failed to get a majority.

BJP leaders say that the era of coalitions is here and that only the BJP is honest enough to accept this reality. With the Third Front in disarray and the Congress(I) refusing to share power, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance sees itself as the only formation capable of forming the next government.

However, does the BJP mean what it professes? The NDA does not include many parties with which the BJP has seat adjustments, for instance, the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal. Although the TDP has seat adjustments with the BJP in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, it is not a party to the NDA manifesto. TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who campaigned jointly with Vajpayee and praised his leadership at public meetings, has not indicated whether the TDP's post-election ties with the BJP would extend beyond issue-based support from outside.

Vajpayee admitted that he will have to apply a "little pressure" on the TDP to join his Ministry, if the NDA returns to power. If the Congress(I) is unwilling to share power with friendly parties, the TDP is equally reluctant to be seen to share power with the BJP. After the Vajpayee Government collapsed last April, Chandrababu Naidu said that the TDP's ties with the BJP were over. Electoral compulsions forced him to renew the ties even though the BJP State unit demanded more Lok Sabha and Assembly seats than what he was willing to spare.

Even as it backed Vajpayee's leadership, the Trinamul Congress released its own manifesto. Its leader Mamata Banerjee did not challenge Sonia Gandhi's leadership qualifications; nor did she endorse the NDA's declaration that it would bring an amendment to the Constitution in order to deny high constitutional posts to naturalised citizens. In her campaign, unlike that of the other NDA partners, Sonia Gandhi's foreign origins were not mentioned.

The NDA is a loose formation. Its constituents have the option to walk out of the alliance when it suits them. The BJP, by virtue of its dominant status, can bring in any new party to the NDA without consulting other allies, a privilege that other constituents of the NDA do not have. This was obvious when the Samata Party and the Lok Shakti sought to force the entry of the Janata Dal (United) led by Sharad Yadav into the NDA. Senior BJP leaders resisted the move at the behest of its Karnataka unit, even though Vajpayee was inclined to admit the party into the NDA.

The BJP finally gave in and agreed to seat adjustments with the JD(U) in Bihar and Karnataka, even though it left open the question of admitting JD(U) leaders Sharad Yadav, J.H. Patel and Ram Vilas Paswan into the NDA. BJP leaders in Karnataka are not willing to share power with JD(U) leaders, despite the seat adjustments that are in place. When it replaced the Haryana Vikas Congress with the Indian National Lok Dal as its alliance partner in Haryana, the BJP did not find it necessary to consult its partners in the NDA.

The BJP's new ally in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), withdrew its nominees in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in favour of other NDA candidates to help the BJP form a stable government at the Centre. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) questioned the DMK's move in view of the Shiv Sena's history of "anti-Tamil jingoism" in Mumbai. However, the Shiv Sena did not show any such gesture towards the BJP. The party has fielded candidates against the BJP in States other than Maharashtra.

The BJP-Biju Janata Dal alliance in Orissa also suffers from inconsistencies. The BJP State unit is not willing to oblige the BJD's quest for dominant status in the alliance. As per the formula worked out in the 1998 elections, the BJD is contesting 12 seats and the BJP nine. The BJD has allowed nine JD(U) MLAs to enter the party without conceding their demands for the Lok Sabha ticket. The BJD did not heed the BJP's request to change candidates in two constituencies, Dhenkanal and Jajpur. The BJD was averse to George Fernandes' move to bring together the splinter groups of the Janata Dal within the NDA under the JD(U) umbrella.

In Bihar, the BJP made no major sacrifices to accommodate the JD(U). The BJP decided to contest 29 of the 54 seats, three less than what it contested in 1998 in alliance with the Samata Party. Though the JD(U) demanded 27 seats, the BJP spared only three in addition to the 22 that the Samata Party had in 1998. The Samata Party had spared two for the Janata Dal out of its quota in 1998.

Even as the other NDA partners have to live with the BJP's dominant status, it is doubtful whether the BJP has given up its stand on core issues, such as building the Ram temple at Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370, which confers special status on Jammu and Kashmir, and the enactment of a uniform civil code. Govindacharya, BJP general secretary and a key member of the party's think-tank, remarked that the party remained committed to the core issues which are missing from the NDA's manifesto.

Lok Shakti leader and Union Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has threatened to walk out of the ruling coalition if the BJP revived its stand on these core issues, which would weaken the secular fabric of the nation. ■

Slander campaign

A new style of electioneering focusses on personal vilification rather than issues.

V. VENKATESAN

Monica Lewinsky. Party of eunuchs. Nothing more than a mother of two children. Suspicious deals. Elizabeth Taylor. Can a woman accuse a man of cheating her in politics? How does a bachelor have a son-in-law?

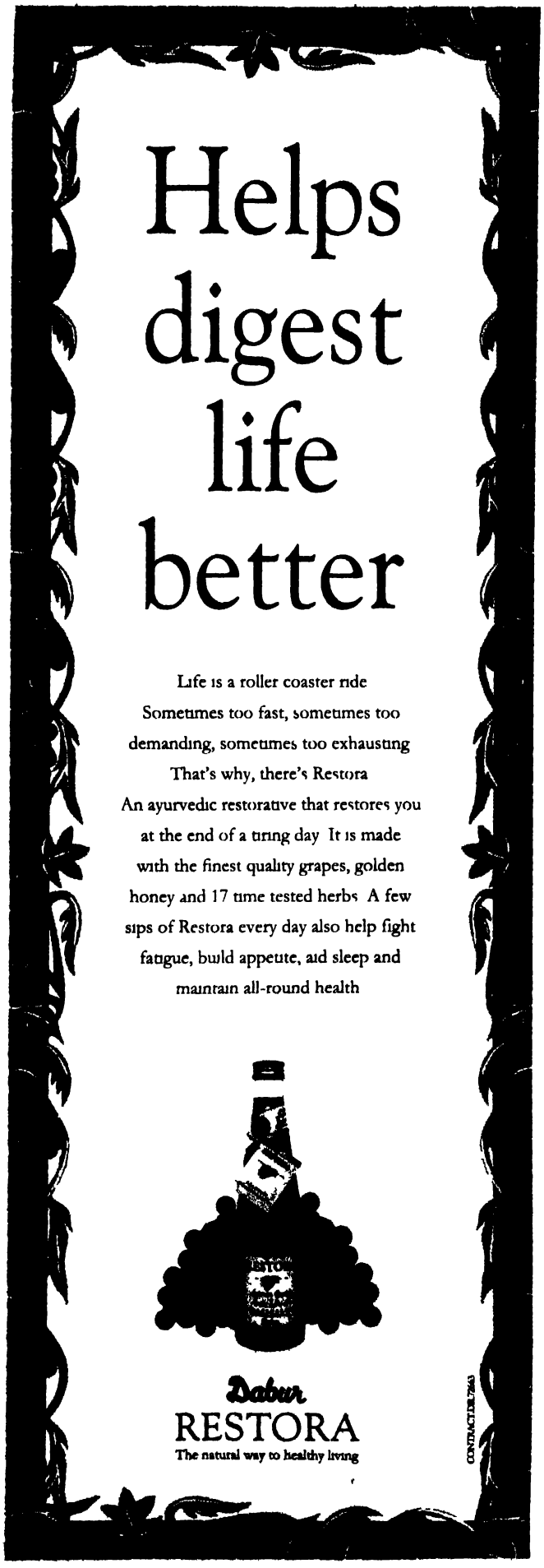
THESE are but some samples of the juicy exchanges between senior functionaries of rival national parties during the 1999 election campaign. Innuendoes and invectives are routine components of any campaign but all previous records were broken in the run-up to the 13th Lok Sabha elections. The campaigns of mutual slander unleashed by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress(I) have left a bad taste at a time when the electorate had expected a meaningful issue-based campaign.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan, who in a lighter vein sums up his name as PM and claims to be the eyes and ears of the P.M., started the verbal duel while he was campaigning in Maharashtra. He asked: "If we are so keen on having a foreigner as Prime Minister, then why can't we have Bill Clinton or Tony Blair or even Monica Lewinsky?" Although Mahajan subsequently clarified that he did not intend to equate Sonia Gandhi with Lewinsky, the Congress(I), women's groups and many commentators took umbrage at Mahajan's remarks.

Defending himself weakly, Mahajan said that he only meant that no foreigner could stake a claim to be the Prime Minister of India, but dragging the name of the former White House intern, whose affair with Clinton led to demands for his impeachment, was seen as an indiscretion. Mahajan protested against the coverage of his speech in *The Hindustan Times*. The report filed from Mumbai was fair, he said, but it was deliberately twisted when published. He flourished a copy of the letter written by the paper's Mumbai bureau chief to its Executive Editor Bharat Bhushan in New Delhi in which the former distanced himself from the contents of the published story on the controversial speech. The Congress(I) and the Left parties objected to Mahajan's act of infringing upon press freedom. Bharat Bhushan stood by the published version.

Mahajan blamed the "dirty tricks department" of the Congress(I) for planting mischievous reports in newspapers that showed him as anti-women. He offered his regrets, but insisted that he was being vilified for something he had not said.

Mahajan invited another controversy when he compared Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar to Hollywood actress Elizabeth Taylor on the grounds that Pawar changed parties as frequently as Taylor changed husbands. Despite protests from NCP quarters, Mahajan did not apologise. The BJP unit in Maharashtra said: "The remark was intended to





ANU PUSHKARNA

Pramod Mahajan and George Fernandes.

educate the masses about the reality with regard to our political leaders."

Defence Minister George Fernandes added his own gender insensitive remarks against Sonia Gandhi when he canvassed for NDA candidate Sushma Swaraj in Bellary. Fernandes accused Sonia Gandhi of contributing little to the country, except marrying Rajiv Gandhi and giving birth to two children. He defended his remark, saying he had only stated facts which Sonia Gandhi herself referred to in her speeches.

In a complaint to the Election Commission, the Congress(I) brought up the issues of the "personalised attack" and "gutter level tirade" against Sonia Gandhi by the BJP and allies. Senior leader Pranab Mukherjee and party spokesman Kapil Sibal urged Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill to issue a directive to the BJP and its allies to stop their "campaign of denigration". They said that Fernandes had mocked motherhood. In their memorandum to the E.C., they assailed Union Ministers Pramod Mahajan and George Fernandes for their "vilification" of Sonia Gandhi.

In an interview to a television channel, Gill appealed to political parties to focus on issues rather than on personalities. "If the elections were to have any real meaning, issues like better life and jobs should be discussed," he said.

Indirectly rebuking the BJP and its allies, Gill said: "If anyone in the country is going to make cheap jokes against women, what sort of a country are we; what sort of a people are we, what sort of a campaign is this?"

According to the model code of conduct during elections, criticism of parties and candidates should not touch on the opponents' private lives, unverified allegations or things unconnected with public activity. "Above all, we should not demean our ancient world-admired culture, by any kind of undesirable remarks about our opponents, least of all women," the E.C. observed.

VAJPAYEE'S first reaction to the controversy over Pramod Mahajan's remarks on Sonia Gandhi was that it was a closed chapter because Mahajan had offered an explanation. However, after the E.C.'s warning, Vajpayee expressed his distress over the transgression of the standards of decent and dignified electioneering. "I especially disapprove of any remarks about Congress president Sonia Gandhi, that are, or can be construed to be undignified," he said, adding rather belatedly that his colleagues' remarks were in bad taste.

He warned that such attacks could serve to shift the focus away from the real issues. He however affirmed that criticism of Sonia Gandhi on account of her foreign origin, political inexperience and as a representative of dynastic rule was legitimate. While educating the people about these important issues, they should desist from saying anything that was gender insensitive or lowered the standard of the campaign, he said.

Vajpayee's sermon had little impact across the political spectrum. NDA partner, DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi chose innuendo to attack his opponent, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Jayalalitha. On the campaign trail, Karunanidhi asked:

"If a woman accuses a man of betraying her, what does it mean? Is it proper for Jayalalitha to accuse Vajpayee of betrayal?" The AIADMK women's wing protested against Karunanidhi's "mischievous" misinterpretation of Jayalalitha's statement, which referred to Vajpayee's mediation on the Cauvery issue.

Calling Karunanidhi a "rotten egg", Jayalalitha said: "The foul smell is now crossing all limits and becoming really intolerable." But in taunting Jayalalitha about the "betrayal", wasn't Karunanidhi casting aspersions on Vajpayee as well, ask observers.

Congress(I) leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, in an interview to a television channel in Hyderabad, said: "A time may come when we may have to ask the Prime Minister how, without getting married, he has sons-in-law and daughters-in-law? Whose son-in-law? Who is married to whom?" Azad's comments came a day after film star and Congress(I) campaigner Rajesh Khanna told a rally in Gujarat that Vajpayee does not have children, but he has a son-in-law. There were allegations earlier regarding the Prime Minister's foster son-in-law's role in questionable deals. Kapil Sibal condemned Azad's comments and Rajesh Khanna denied his reported remark. Vajpayee expressed anguish over the incident, and said that never in his public life had opponents made personal attacks on him.

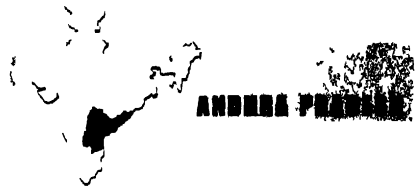
The Congress(I) also levelled allegations against Vajpayee over the import of sugar worth Rs. 900 crores from Pakistan. It said the deal benefited Pakistan's Army Welfare Trust controlled by the Inter-Service Intelligence and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's family. The Indian government denied the allegation saying there was no budgetary support for such imports. The Congress(I) spokesperson alleged that Vajpayee sacrificed the interests of the Indian Army and canegrowers to benefit Nawaz Sharif.

The BJP refuted any link between sugar imports and the Prime Minister's Office. It released the names of the owner of the Kundan Rice Mill in Delhi which imported sugar from Pakistan. BJP general secretary K.N. Govindacharya said: "Its owners are no Ottavio Quattrocchis. It is an unknown Garg family of Naya Bazar, Chandni Chowk – a private party that imports sugar." He also said that the government imposed customs duty on the sugar imports, initially at 5 per cent and subsequently at 20 per cent and 25 per cent. ■

Column by Praful Bidwai: Page 103

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

With the completion of the first phase of polling involving 145 Lok Sabha constituencies and 343 Assembly seats on September 5, the polling process goes on. A look at the line-ups, electoral mood and prospects in some of the States where further rounds of polling are to take place.



DASU KESAVA RAO

THE ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and a resurgent Congress(I) are the principal contestants in the electoral arena in Andhra Pradesh, which has a total of 2,386 candidates for 294 Assembly and 42 Lok Sabha seats It is for the second time in over 30 years that the State is witnessing simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assembly

The key players in the battle are Nara Chandrababu Naidu, who leads the Telugu Desam for the first time in an Assembly election, and Dr. Y S. Rajasekhara Reddy, the firebrand leader from Rayalaseema who infused a new life into the State Congress(I) unit, which was demoralised after the humiliating defeat in the 1994 elections when it failed even to qualify to be a recognised Opposition party. The bitter contest has changed into a no-holds-barred affair.

Fears that violence will mar the elections proved right when four persons were killed in a bomb blast in the nursing home-cum-residence of the Minister for Panchayati Raj, Dr. Kodela Siva Prasada Rao, in Narasaraopet town and land mines were unearthed in the Pattikonda constituency There were demands for the dismissal of Siva Prasada Rao and a judicial inquiry into the incident, even as the Telugu Desam blamed the Congress(I) for planting the mines. The Election Commission has rescheduled the election in Narsaraopet to October 3.

The Telugu Desam has an electoral understanding with the Bharatiya Janata Party, under which the former contests 270 Assembly seats and 34 Lok Sabha seats, leaving the rest to the BJP. The Congress(I) contests all the seats The Anna TDP of Nandamuri Harikrishna held talks with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), while the Communist Party of India held informal talks with the Congress(I) for seat-sharing. But these bore no fruit

The Anna TDP, which contests 210 Assembly seats and 21 Lok Sabha seats, has declared support to the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of Sharad Pawar in other constituencies. The NTR TDP of Lakshmi Parvathi (the widow of the founder of the TDP, N.T. Rama Rao), which was a force to reckon with in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, is a pale shadow of its former self today It has forged an alliance with the Mahajan Front and the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and contests 110 Assembly and 16 Lok Sabha seats The Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) and the Majlis Bahao Tahreek (MBT),



P.V SIVAKUMAR

Telugu Desam Party leader and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu campaigning in Moinabad mandal in Rangareddy district.



MOHD YOUSUF

Congress(I) leader Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy at an election rally in Tandur in Rangareddy district.

which represent minority interests, are dominant in Hyderabad and other Urdu-speaking areas.

The CPI and the CPI(M) have worked out an understanding. The former contests six Lok Sabha and 46 Assembly seats and the latter seven Lok Sabha and 48 Assembly seats. Both parties support independent candidates in Polavaram and Vijayawada East as they could not agree on who should contest in these constituencies.

CHANDRABABU NAIDU has transformed his Kuppam constituency, once a backward area, into a showcase of development, while Pulivendula continues to be the pocketborough of Rajasekhara Reddy's family. Rajasekhara Reddy is seeking election to the Assembly after being in the Lok Sabha for 10 years. He has swapped places with his brother Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy, now in the fray for the Cuddapah Lok Sabha seat. Chandrababu Naidu and the Y.S. brothers are both in unassailable positions.

Former Chief Minister K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy faces his traditional rival K.E. Krishnamurthy in the Kurnool Lok Sabha seat, while faction foes Bhuma Venkata Nagi Reddy (TDP) and Gangula Pratap Reddy (Congress(I)) fight it out for the Nandyal seat, which was once held by former Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. (Faction feuds between political groups or powerful families, which continue for generations and involve bloody violence, have been a major feature of life in Andhra Pradesh, particularly the Rayalaseema area.)

Two other former Chief Ministers, Nedurumalli Janardhana Reddy and Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, have shifted from their traditional constituencies – the former from Bapatla to Narasaraopet and the latter from Khammam to Secunderabad. The TDP has fielded actress T. Sharada against Rajyalakshmi, wife of Janardhana Reddy, in the Venkatagiri Assembly constituency and actress-director Vijayanirmala for the Kaikalur Assembly seat. D. Rama Naidu, who has produced 100 movies, is in the fray for the Bapatla Lok Sabha seat.

Other major contestants include former Union Ministers P. Shiv Shankar (Tenali) and P. Upendra (Vijayawada), Rayapati Sambasiva Rao (Guntur), M. Baga Reddy (Medak), Renuka Choudhury (Khammam), Bandaru Dattatreya (Secunderabad), U. Krishnam Raju (Narsapur), Ch. Vidyasagar Rao (Karimnagar), and MIM leader S.S. Owaisi (Hyderabad). Harikrishna contests from Gudivada and Lakshmi Parvathi from Sompeta and Eluru.

BOTH the Congress(I) and the Telugu Desam went through a tortuous process of candidate selection, which lasted several weeks. The high command made a short-list from the list drawn by the pradesh election committee even as unsuccessful aspirants and senior party leaders complained against the style of functioning of the State unit president. Both parties failed to meet the expectations of women and the weaker sections in the matter of nomination. The TDP dropped 69 sitting MLAs and fielded several new faces.

Many ticket-seekers belonging to both the TDP and the Congress(I) defected to other parties, frustrated by the selection process. Unsuccessful aspirants for the TDP ticket accused Chandrababu Naidu of letting down people who served the party sincerely since its inception and experimenting with rank outsiders, some of whom had not even applied for the ticket. Chandrababu Naidu may have his own reasons for fielding the former Central Bureau of Investigation Director K. Vijayarama Rao against Congress(I) Legislature party leader P. Janardhana Reddy in Khairtabad, but party workers feel that it was an unwise move. The leadership had a tough time pacifying sitting members and senior leaders who failed to get the nomination. While some of them were expelled from the party, there are nearly 10 rebels still in the fray.

The Congress(I) was also plagued by the problems of rebels and resignations. The Pradesh Congress president was accused by partymen of handing out a raw deal to women and the weaker sections and safeguarding the interests of only one caste.

The Congress(I) and the TDP each rewarded 10 defectors with the ticket. Janata Dal stalwart S. Jaipal Reddy crossed over to the Congress(I) and was instantly given the ticket for Miryalguda, while CPI stalwart Ch. Rajeswara Rao severed his 57-year-old association with the party to join the TDP and get the nomination for the Sircilla Assembly seat, which he held. Renuka Choudhury was yet another latecomer to get the Congress ticket. Two Left party MLAs, Kunja Biksham and Vooke Abbayya, also joined the TDP.

THE airdash to Hyderabad on August 17 by Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi electrified the scene and put both the Telugu Desam and the BJP on ten-

terhooks. Reports that Sonia Gandhi might file her nomination for the Cuddapah Lok Sabha constituency sent Chandrababu Naidu making frantic efforts to get actress and BJP supporter Vijayashanthi rush to Cuddapah and file her nomination. The drama ended with Sonia opting for Bellary in Karnataka.

The Congress(I) campaign is mostly handled by the PCC president, who is touring the constituencies; most other senior leaders are confined to their own segments. Sonia Gandhi attracted large crowds during her meetings in Mahbubnagar, Chittoor, Cuddapah and Nellore. Chandrababu Naidu hops around in his helicopter, attending meetings in various constituencies. A number of cine personalities are campaigning for TDP nominees. Both parties use cassettes and video films for telecast in private channels.

The focus of the Congress(I) campaign is on the "misrule and corruption" of the TDP and the target is Chandrababu Naidu, who has taken the people for a 'hi-tech ride"'. Chandrababu Naidu is accused of corruption, pampering the rich, bleeding the poor and surviving just on publicity and make-believe. His Government is faulted for bowing to the dictates of the World Bank and for undermining the local bodies by creating parallel set-ups such as water users' associations, watershed committees and vana samrakshana samitis through which development works are taken up.

The Telugu Desam, on the other hand, has gone all-out with the positive message of its "excellent record" in the past four years. It cites its innovative initiatives in the use of information technology and in areas such as irrigation, women and youth empowerment, agricultural development and power generation. Chandrababu Naidu and other leaders hold the Congress(I) responsible for the Election Commission order suspending the 'Deepam' scheme (under which cooking gas connections were given to poor women in rural areas). They have asked the voters to confront Congress(I) leaders to demand an explanation.

Even as Chandrababu Naidu asks people to "vote for my nominees on the basis of my performance", his party has missed no opportunity to project Rajasekhara Reddy as a faction leader and as the architect of the "bomb culture" in the State.

There is no perceptible wave in favour of any party, but both Chandrababu Naidu and Rajasekhara Reddy claim that their party will sweep the polls.

A feature of the Congress(I) manifesto is the party's resolve to make the State 'Aadarsandhra Pradesh', as a counterpoint to the Chief Minister's dream of 'Swarnandhra Pradesh'. The highlights are the promise of free power and the waiver of power bill arrears for farmers, power for four lakh pumpsets in 100 days, cooking gas connections for the rural poor, payment of Rs.2,500 a year to unemployed youth, allotment of telephone booths for one lakh women and supply of "white cards" to all eligible families. The Janmabhoomi programme will be replaced by Gram Swaraj, another programme of rural development, it says. The manifesto also plans to revive the Legislative Council, abolished in the mid-1980s by a TDP Government.

Rajasekhara Reddy appealed to the farmers not to pay their electricity bills because the Congress(I), if elected, would waive arrears and give them free power. This drew protests from the Telugu Desam as the call amounted to inciting the people against the Government.

Giving free power to farmers and energising four lakh pumpsets in 30 days is nothing short of promising the moon, because it will require 1500 MW of additional capacity and Rs.10,000 crores. The Congress(I) feels that this can be achieved by bringing down transmission losses and pilferage.

The TDP has said that the Congress(I), which ridiculed some of its programmes, had no qualms in incorporating them in a different form in its own manifesto – such as Deepam, Janmabhoomi, housing and poverty eradication. The TDP manifesto promises a special poverty eradication mission in order to bring 45 lakh families above the poverty line; clean, efficient, transparent and responsive governance; an addition of 10,000 MW to the power generation capacity; one million more hectares of land under irrigation; safe water, house sites, houses and roads for villagers; and a nutrition programme for three million schoolchildren. Among the political reforms contemplated is an amendment to bar foreigners from contesting for high constitutional offices of the country.

THE bomb blast in Narasaraopet had a negative fall-out for the ruling party because it went off in the premises of a Minister and the ruling party candidate and four people, including an independent candidate, were killed. The incident caused a serious erosion in the credibility of the Telugu Desam's espousal of free and fair polls. It also took the sting out of its attack on Rajasekhara Reddy's bomb politics.

Lok Satta, a non-political organisation striving for electoral reforms and decriminalisation of politics, released a list of 46 candidates who, according to information furnished to it, have a criminal background. The TDP tops the list with 20, followed by Congress(I)'s 12. It also organised a public debate featuring K. Rosaiah of the Congress(I) and Revenue Minister and TDP politburo member T. Devender Goud, who faced questions from panelists and the audience on a number of issues.

The CPI(M) released the list of its nominees with their economic background and properties held by them. Most of the candidates are full-time party workers, teachers' representatives and small farmers. While seven candidates did not own a house, seven others had a house but no land. They demanded that the Congress(I), the TDP and the BJP emulate their example. ■



PARVATHI MENON

THE campaign for the first phase of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections held on September 5 was a remarkably low-intensity one in Karnataka. This was despite the dramatic political realignments that preceded the elections – the split in the Janata Dal with a faction led by Chief Minister J.H. Patel lending support to the BJP alliance; the merger of the Lok Shakti, the Samata Party and the Sharad Yadav faction of the Janata Dal as the Janata Dal(U); the simultaneous birth of the Janata Dal (Secular) led by former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, and so on. But little of this political turmoil was reflected in the campaign.

Seventy-two candidates are contesting for the 15 Lok Sabha seats and 711 for the 115 Assembly seats. If the spirit and colour of electioneering was missing, also lacking was a meaningful projection at the constituency level of issues that are the subject of heated inter-party public debate in other forums. The focus of each cam-

The battle for Bellary

PARVATHI MENON

A MEASURE of cynicism underlies the Congress(I)'s choice of Bellary as the constituency it hopes will assure Sonia Gandhi of a place in Parliament. While for the Congress(I), the straight run of victories over the last 12 Lok Sabha elections makes this a "safe" seat, it is clear to anyone who has visited Bellary or read about it, that the 'safety' factor is born of the extreme backwardness of the district, which 50 years of Congress representation in Parliament has done little to ameliorate.

This district has some of the lowest human development indicators in the State and the country. Its Human Development Index is 0.429, the fourth lowest of the districts in the State (Kodagu has the highest, 0.615). Bellary has a literacy rate of 32.2 for women and 59.1 for men. At 60.32, the district's life expectancy at birth for men and women is the lowest of all the districts in the State. The infant mortality rate in Bellary is 92 per 1,000 live births, the second highest in the State after Bijapur. It has the lowest health index (a measurement of health status and longevity) in the State. Thirty per cent of children in the schoolgoing age in Bellary district are out of school. Untouchability remains entrenched here. The "two-tumbler practice" is common in the villages of Bellary. And so on.

The whys and hows of the constituency's underdevelopment were not issues addressed in any substantive fashion by either of the two candidates – Sonia Gandhi, the Congress(I) president, or Sushma Swaraj, the BJP's spirited and strident candidate. Both promised benefits to the constituency, but only if elected. Sushma promised to "adopt" Bellary and nurture it as a "mother cares for her child". The Congress(I) promised that it would make an Amethi out of Bellary. But even these promises were mere footnotes in the speeches of the two candidates. Sonia Gandhi's speeches were in large part devoted to the "sacrifices" of her family, and her determination, if elected, to help stem the rot in India's body politic brought on by the BJP's misgovernance.

Sushma Swaraj, in her vigorous campaign that swept through the small towns and taluk headquarters of Bellary district, shrilly hammered in the peg on which her campaign hung, the "videshi-swadeshi" argument. Presenting the exclusivist theory that a certain category of citizens (in this case those who are foreign-born) must be statutorily denied certain rights (in this case the right to stand for the highest elected office), this gifted orator would urge her admiring audiences, in Sanskritised Kannada learnt on her campaign trail, to "honour the Indian daughter-in-law and reject the foreign daughter-in-law" *(swadeshi beti ko puraskar, videshi bahu ko thiraskar)."* Intended or not, Sushma's campaign wardrobe – the inevitably gaudy sari, glass bangles, flowers in her hair, and her usual large red bindi – came across as a not-very-subtle put-down of the widowed 'bahu' by the married 'beti'.

"Many constitutions of the world - even the American Constitution - have a provisions that disallow foreign-born citizens from standing for high office," Swaraj told *Frontline* as her cavalcade sped through the Kudligi Assembly constituency. She launched into a small speech on various constitutions which contain such a provision. "Our Constitution-makers did not include this provision because they did not foresee a political party going so insolvent that it must import a leader for Prime Minister," she said. A mention of the British Constitution, which allows foreign-born citizens to contest elections, and on which the Indian Constitution is modelled, brought forth an angry outburst quite inconsistent with the position she had just been arguing. "I don't want to be compared with those people who made us slaves for 250 years. My blood boils when a person like Sonia Gandhi aspires for the top post," she bristles.

In Swaraj's speeches the fine line between 'foreign-born' and 'foreign' disappears, and Sonia Gandhi becomes the reviled "videshi" whose political ambitions represent a threat to the country. The videshi-swadeshi argument does not appear to have rubbed off on a great many people. A good many of the people spoken to at random – in villages along the highways, in election meetings – said that they did not consider Sonia a foreigner. More than one person drew the analogy between Sonia's entry by marriage into India, and the experience in their society where daughters who are given in marriage outside their village do not lose their rights.

N. Tippana of the Janata Dal (United), who lost the election in Bellary in 1998 contesting as a candidate of the Lok Shakti, accompanied Sushma on her election campaign. "The strength of her campaign is entirely due to the following that Ramakrishna Hegde has in this constituency," he told *Frontline*. "Those who arrange her campaign meetings and have been working for her are from the Janata Dal (United)," he said. It was

paign was by and large on the individual candidate rather than her or his party or political persuasion. Bellary was of course the exception. The constituency came under intense media scrutiny, and here both the party agenda as well as the merits of the contesting individuals were purposefully highlighted.

The mess that the BJP-Janata Dal(U) alliance has landed itself in would explain why candidates of the BJP and the JD(U) chose not to foreground the politics of the alliance in their campaign. Overshadowing their campaign was the uneasy and often hostile relationship amongst the partners of the alliance. This mutual hostility exists from the level of grassroots-level workers to the leaders of the parties; and ranges from disagreements over seat-sharing in select constituencies to claims on the post of Chief Minister should the alliance get a majority. The BJP-JD(U) alliance, forged against the will of the State BJP unit, has broken down in around 50 constituencies. According to the seat-sharing arrangement arrived at on August 20, a day before the last date for the withdrawal of nominations for the first phase of polling, the BJP was to contest 18 and 129 out of the 28 Lok Sabha and 224 Assembly seats and the JD(U) 10 and 95 respectively. By the time the arrangement was announced, both parties had distributed 'B' forms for almost all the seats. Those who were asked to withdraw were unwilling to do so. Even as late as August 28 (the last date for withdrawal of nominations for the second phase of polling on



K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi with her daughter Priyanka at an election meeting in Sanaur near Bellary.



K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

BJP leader Sushma Swaraj addressing a gathering in Kottur village near Bellary.

reported that 6, 000 workers from the affiliates of the Sangh Parivar – the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal – had come into the constituency to "oversee" the polling.

THE Congress(I) campaign had far less of the BJP's sound-and-fury. K.C. Kondaiah, the sitting Congress MP from Bellary, appeared not in the least perturbed by the crowds Sushma was attracting, nor by the very flattering media coverage that she was getting. "We have a different style of campaigning," he said. "Our MLAs and party workers are going door to door. In this constituency more than 70 per cent are from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, minorities and backward castes. They have always voted for us and will continue to do so."

After filing her nomination, Sonia Gandhi came to the constituency on August 27 when she addressed meetings in four Assembly segments. In Sandur, the second stop on her itinerary, her public meeting was the occasion for a public holiday for people who had been brought from distant villages. Crowds danced, sang (and drank) their way to the venue and waited patiently till her helicopter appeared, a distant speck in the sky, and sank noisily into their midst. They sat patiently through her woodenly delivered speech, and cheered for Sonia, but more especially for her charismatic-looking daughter, Priyanka.

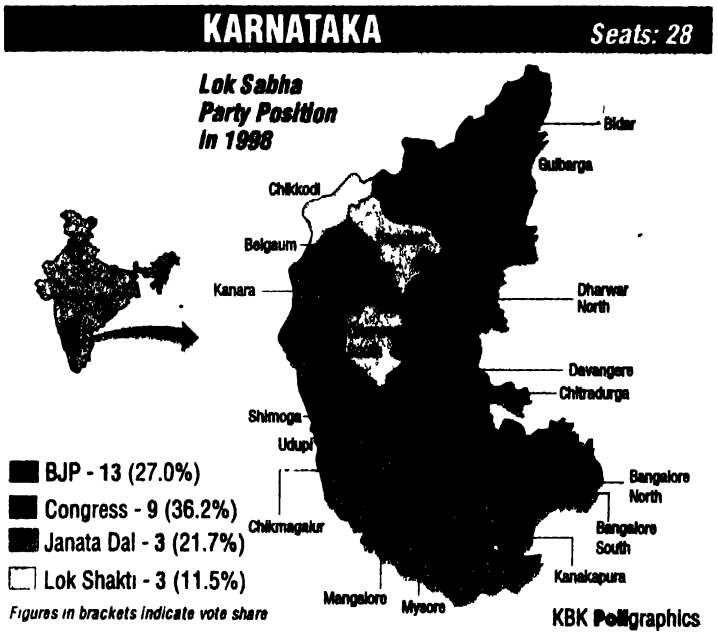
The response to their last campaign visit, on September 1, was an amazing endorsement of the mass appeal of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Bellary city was turned inside out. Cheering and waving, its citizens lined the streets, stood on rooftops and trees, and reached out of windows, as the cavalcade passed. As in the earlier public meetings, much of the cheering was for Priyanka. The enormous public response took everyone – party workers, mediapersons, the police and the Special Protection Group – by surprise. "I have covered many election campaigns, but have seen nothing like this before," a senior journalist commented. The next day, Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka drove through some of the Assembly constituencies of Bellary, receiving the same enthusiastic and warm public response. ■

September 11 was August 27), the agreement on seat-sharing was being flouted at the ground level, with the BJP and the JD(U) facing each other in no less than 46 constituencies. While the BJP claimed that JD(U) candidates were contesting in 27 of the 129 constituencies allotted to them, the JD(U) said that the BJP had put up candidates in 15 of the 95 seats earmarked for it. This does not include the innumerable constituencies where those candidates who were asked to vacate their seats opted to contest as independents.

Bellary was allotted to the JD(U) in the seat-sharing agreement. When the BJP decided to field Sushma Swaraj from the constituency, the JD(U) asked for four more Assembly constituencies. In Bellary, Sushma Swaraj's campaign is dependent on the JD(U) network. In at least one of the eight Assembly constituencies, Harapanahalli, BJP candidate Narayan Das is facing a rebel JD(U) candidate. All three BJP Assembly candidates in Bellary are recent entrants from the Congress(I), and BJP loyalists are not happy with the nominations. The JD(U) is also facing internal dissent. An important party leader, Bhavi Bettappa, who is a close confidant of M.P. Prakash, a senior Minister in J.H. Patel's government, recently resigned from the JD(U) in protest against the party asking him to withdraw his nomination in favour of a BJP candidate after he had filed his papers from the Kudligi Assembly constituency in Bellary. If these are the undercurrents in the alliance in a constituency like

Bellary where a critical contest is on, the situation in other constituencies is worse.

J.H. Patel, for example, faces a 'rebel' BJP candidate, Vadnal Rajanna, in his Assembly constituency of Chennagiri in Shimoga. The BJP unit here is believed to be working overtime to ensure the defeat of J.H. Patel, and although Vadnal has for the record been "expelled" by the BJP, it is understood that he has the tacit support of even the BJP leadership. In Gulbarga, of the eight Assembly segments three were allotted to the BJP. Yet the BJP and the JD(U) face each other in three constituencies – Gulbarga City, Shahabad (Reserved) and Afsalpur. Lok Shakti president Ramakrishna Hegde and BJP State president B.S. Yediyurappa were engaged in a war of words over the rival candidates in Gulbarga and Raichur City Assembly segment, each refusing to withdraw their candidates. C. Byre Gowda, former Agriculture Minister in the J.H. Patel Ministry, now in the JD(U), accused the BJP of the "absence of a gentlemanly approach". He said that in 30 to 40 constituencies the BJP has extended tacit support to independent candidates (meaning rebel candidates of the BJP).



In the Koratagere and Madhugiri Assembly seats of the Chickaballapur Lok Sabha seat, candidates of the JD(U) and BJP are fighting each other. In Koratagere, Kannada film-star Jayanthi is the JD(U) candidate. She has accused the BJP of spreading the lie that she had withdrawn in favour of the official BJP candidate. In the Chikmagalur Lok Sabha constituency area, BJP and JD(U) candidates face each other in two Assembly constituencies; there are similar problems in Assembly constituencies in Raichur, Ramnagaram, Tumkur and several other constituencies. In the Kolar Lok Sabha constituency, the confusion over who the official candidate is has still not been sorted out. Mangamma Muniswamy is the BJP candidate while the JD(U) announced the candidature of Balaji Channaiah. When asked to withdraw from the contest, Channaiah resigned from the primary membership of the party but remains in the contest fighting on the JD(U)'s 'arrow' symbol. BJP workers in the district were reportedly so upset that they threatened to campaign for independent candidates in all the Assembly segments of the district.

Even in those constituencies where the alliance is projecting a single candidate, campaigning is by and large under the parent party's banner. BJP workers in particular are loath to campaign for any symbol other than the lotus. New symbols have caused a degree of confusion. The JD(U) symbol is the arrow. While a Lok Sabha candidate may be from the JD(U), the Assembly segments under it are divided amongst those contesting on the lotus and arrow symbols, and it is feared that this may cause confusion in voters' minds.

If such is the mistrust within the alliance on the ground, the lines of communication amongst the leaders of the alliance have all but snapped. When Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee addressed a meeting in Bangalore on September 1, BJP leaders on the podium studiously avoided any reference to their ally J.H. Patel, who was on the dais and who later gave a speech. The main concern of the BJP State leaders is that the post of Chief Minister must go to the party, and they lose no opportunity to stake their claim publicly. The JD(U) leaders, on the other hand, have made no statements in support of this claim. In fact, sources in the Lok Shakti unofficially indicated that the large numbers of 'rebel' JD(U) candidates would add to the bargaining power of the party at the time of choosing a leader (should the alliance come to power).

Although some poll surveys have predicted major gains for the BJP-JD(U) alliance, the picture that emerged at the end of the first phase of campaigning pointed to the possibility of a more fragmented verdict, at least in terms of the percentage of vote share. Each constituency has a minimum of three 'official' candidates from the Congress(I), the JD(S) and the BJP-JD(U) alliance. In addition to this are the 'unofficial' or 'rebel' candidates (the Congress too has its share of rebel candidates in almost 20 Assembly constituencies). In a four-cornered contest in the first-past-the-post system, in theory a candidate needs to get just around 27 per cent of the vote share to win. Karnataka has tended to show different patterns of voting in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. However, the last time that Assembly and parliamentary elections were held simultaneously was in 1989. That year, although the State voted against the all-India trend, in both elections it voted overwhelmingly for the same party – which happened to be the Congress(I). ■

NAGALAND

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

FOUR of the seven northeastern States – Nagaland, Meghalaya Manipur and Mizoram – are going to the polls on September 25 with a major issue in common, one concerning their territorial integrity. Six Lok Sabha seats are at stake in these four States – Nagaland (one), Meghalaya (two), Manipur (two) and Mizoram (one).

Unlike in the 1998 elections, the underground insurgent groups including the Khaplang and the Isaac-Muivah factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) have not this time openly called for boycott of polls in Nagaland and in the predominantly Naga areas in Manipur. But they have asked the people to think twice before participating in the elections which, they said, would never bring about a solution to the 50-year-old Naga problem. The Naga Hoho, an apex body of a number of non-gov-

ernmental organisations (NGOs) and social action groups which play a key role in removing the rivalry between the Khaplang faction and the Isaac-Muivah faction of the NSCN, has also decided "not to encourage people to participate in the elections". Last time the Naga Hoho asked the people to boycott the polls.

In 1998, when Assembly elections were held in Nagaland simultaneously with the Lok Sabha polls, the ruling Congress(I) won all the 60 Assembly seats and the lone parliamentary seat unopposed as the two major Opposition parties, the National Democratic Movement (NDM) and the Nagaland People's Council (NPC), kept off in response to the boycott call of the underground organisations. But this time they have decided to contest the poll "to bring to an end the one-party rule and expose the Congress(I)'s misrule in the State".

The race for the Nagaland seat is mainly between K. Asungha Sangtam of the Congress(I) and Shurhozelie of the Opposition combine comprising the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar, the NDM led by former Nagaland Chief Minister Hokishe Sema and the NPC led by Shurhozelie. The formation of the NCP in Nagaland was recently announced by P.A. Sangma, once an undisputed leader of the Congress(I) in the northeastern States. Shurhozelie has resigned as president of the NPC to contest as an independent. Also in the field are the BJP's N. Bhesto, who is the president of the State unit of the party formed recently, and the Lok Shakti's Akhei Achumi, who heads the party's State unit. Observers find the Congress(I) better placed. The BJP, according to observers, may cut into the Congress(I) votes in the urban areas of Dimapur populated by non-tribal people and the Opposition combine's votes among the tribal people in the hilly regions.

Announcing the candidature of Sangtam, Chief Minister S.C. Jamir said that the people suffered owing to the instability of the BJP-led 18-party coalition government at the Centre and cautioned that if the 22-party National Democratic Alliance led by the BJP was elected, it would only lead to another mid-term poll.

The Roman Catholic Church in Nagaland, which has formidable influence over tribal Nagas, has decided not to support any political party in the elections, sources in the Bishop's house at Dimapur said. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) general secretary, Zhabu Terhuja, said that the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), reflecting the official stand of the Protestant churches in the country, had urged its congregation through a circular to vote for a secular and democratic party and asked the churches to play a "prophetic role". However, the NBCC would not tilt towards any party.

MEGHALAYA

THE Tura constituency in the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya is set to witness a battle royal between Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) general secretary Purno A. Sangma and Atul C. Marak of the Congress(I). Sangma has won the seat six times in a row on the Congress ticket.

In the straight contest, while Sangma has to prove that he is the "uncrowned monarch of the Garos", the Congress(I) has to redeem its oft-repeated claim that "Garo Hills is a Congress(I) stronghold with or without Purno Sangma". Since 1977, barring a two-year period during which he was the Chief Minister, Sangma has been winning the Tura seat with ever-increasing margins on the Congress(I)'s "hand" symbol. This is the first time that he is contesting on a symbol (clock) other than "hand". "The people have become so used to voting for 'hand' that many of them might just continue with it, even if they have Sangma in mind," a senior Congress(I) functionary said.

The Meghalaya Parliamentary Forum (MPF), comprising the Congress(I) and the United Democratic Party (UDP), which has been running the State government for nearly a year, is breaking up, with the UDP setting up a candidate, S.D. Khongwir, against the Congress(I)'s P.R. Kyndiah in Shillong.

Although the UDP leadership is determined to keep the alliance going "at least till the elections are over", the grassroots workers including MLAs from Jaintia Hills have been extremely vocal in lodging their protest and want the alliance to break before the polls. Asked how they planned to campaign against the candidate of the Congress(I), which is their main ally in the government, senior UDP leader and Home Minister, S. Lyngdoh, said that they would not campaign against the Congress(I), but against its candidate, who has failed to project the State's problems in Parliament.

Relations between the UDP and the Congress(I) are bound to get strained even before the elections as the UDP is likely to support the NCP in Tura. In return, the UDP will seek the NCP's support for its candidate in the Shillong Lok Sabha constituency. It is a piquant situation with the UDP sharing power with the Congress(I) on the one hand and fighting it, on the other.

MANIPUR

ALL the major political parties in Manipur have severed their ties with their alliance partners and have fielded candidates of their own for the two Lok Sabha seats in the State. Failure of all efforts to bring together the forces against the NDA has led to multi-cornered contests in both constituencies. The NDA in the State comprises the ruling Manipur State Congress (MSC), a breakaway group of the Congress(I), the Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) and the BJP, while the Opposition Secular Democratic Front (SDF) includes the Manipur People's Party (MPP), the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the Janata Dal (Secular).

The Congress(I) was initially a constituent of the SDF, but pulled out at the seat-sharing stage as it demanded both seats for itself. The SDF and the Congress(I) announced candidates for the Inner and Outer Manipur (Reserved) constituencies. The Congress(I) has fielded in Inner Manipur Nimaichang Lawang, who unsuccessfully contested the last elections and R.K. Theko for Outer Manipur. Kh Mani Singh of the MPP is the SDF nominee for Inner Manipur and the CPI's Th Gangte for Outer Manipur.

The NDA partners also are not united. The BJP declared its support to former MP Thounaojam Chaoba of the Manipur State Congress (MSC), its ally in Inner Manipur, but wanted to contest the Outer Manipur seat. The MSC, however, fielded its candidate (Soso Lorha) in Outer Manipur. The State BJP president, Haobam Bhuban, said that the MSC's "betrayal" led them to field former MP Kim Gangte in Outer Manipur. The MSC describes its fight with the BJP as a "friendly" one.

MIZORAM

IN Mizoram, the most peaceful State in the northeastern region, the contest for the lone Lok Sabha seat is between the Mizo National Front-Mizo People's

Conference combine and the Congress(I)-Mizo National Front (Nationalist) alliance. The MNF-MPC has fielded a common candidate, Vanlalzawma, against the candidate of the Congress(I) and the MNF(N), Rokamlova. There is a third candidate in the fray, H. Vanchhawng of the BJP, which has hardly any base in this tiny hill State.

The MNF-MPC combine defeated the Congress(I) in the November 1998 elections and brought to an end the decade-long Congress(I) rule under Chief Minister Lalthanhawla. The alliance won more than three-fourths of the 40 Assembly seats.

The Congress(I)-MNF (Nationalist) combine invited all like-minded parties to support its candidate. The MNF (Nationalist) was formed in 1977 by Lalduhawama following his differences with Zoramthanga, the present MNF Chief Minister, and his defeat in the organisational elections. ■



PRAVEEN SWAMI

IN a corner of downtown Srinagar, National Conference flags, bright red and bearing the sign of the plough, share space with a green neon billboard advertising religious leader and secessionist politician Umar Farooq. This merging of icons, representative of a larger tacit alliance that is in place, is just one of the many ironies that this bitterly fought Lok Sabha elections have thrown up in Jammu and Kashmir. The democratic process that began in 1996 has set off a genuine competition for political space and legitimacy, forcing the strangest of alliances among mainstream parties and those hostile to them. But this important gain does little to conceal the fact that these elections, like those of 1996 and 1998, are being held in the middle of a festering low-level war.

Umar Abdullah's campaign for the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat illustrates just why the N.C. is in a state of panic perhaps unprecedented in the party's history. Party faithful travelling in large numbers along with the Chief Minister's son's campaign convoy constitute a major part of the crowd at village meetings. Residents of the constituency make no secret of their frustration with poor governance, a moribund economy, worsening violence, and for that matter the N.C's alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party in New Delhi. Umar Abdullah's dynastic credentials appear to be wearing thin.

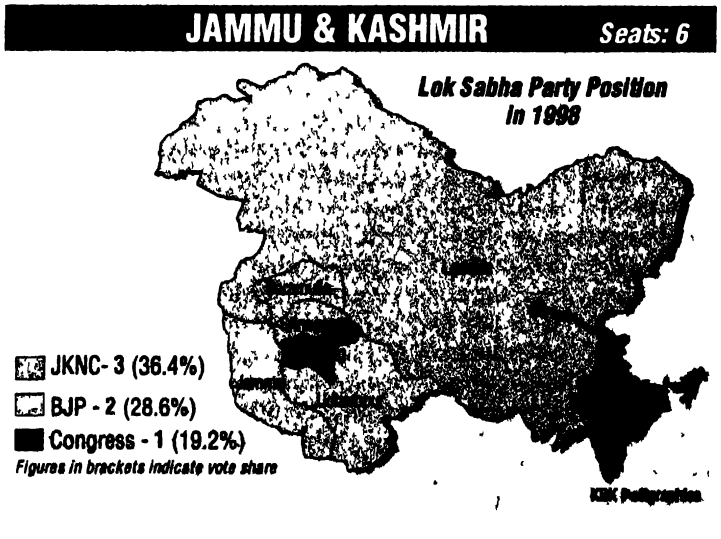
Mehbooba Mufti, who resigned her Bijbehara Assembly seat and her position as Congress Legislature Party chief to found the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in July, ought to be on a roll given her rival's apparent lack of popularity. But former Union Minister and Anantnag MP Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's daughter has her share of problems. Plans to recast the PDP as a reincarnation of the Muslim United Front (MUF), the broad coalition of anti-N.C. forces which fought the 1987 Assembly elections, have not quite worked. The MUF, whose leading candidates included Jamaat-e-Islami leader and Hurriyat Conference chief Syed Ali Shah Geelani and now-Hizbul Mujahideen "supreme commander" Mohammad Yusuf Shah, rejected democratic politics after alleged N.C. poll fraud in 1987.

The PDP simply has not been able to join up with the allies it had hoped for. Despite the crowds Mehbooba Mufti attracts, she is certain to lose votes in Shia Muslim-dominated pockets like Budgam to her powerful Congress(I) rival, religious leader Aga Sayyed Mehdi, incidentally the brother of Hurriyat Conferenc leader Aga Sayyed Hassan. Given the fac that the N.C. is likely to hold on to strong holds around Ganderbal and Kangan Mehbooba would have hoped for taci Hurriyat Conference support in urbar Srinagar, of the kind that helped he father take the Anantnag seat in 1998. Bu that support has not materialised, fo interesting reasons.

Mufti's central poll platform, direc negotiation with insurgent groups and what she describes as "all alienated sections of the Kashmiri people", directly hits the Hurriyat Conference, eroding its constituency. The N.C. has moved rapidly to exploit this fissure, allowing the Hurriyat to conduct its anti-campaign poll until the end of August. Such anti-election campaigns met with arrests in 1996 and 1998, on the grounds that the Hurriyat Conference's links with terrorist groups ensured that the calls for a poll boycott were coercive in character. This time around the N.C. allowed Hurriyat Conference leaders to move freely through the Valley, thus ensuring low turnouts which would erode the PDP's prospects.

Hurriyat Conference leaders were finally arrested on August 26 and 27, leading to sporadic street battles in Srinagar. Interestingly, Union Home Ministry officials told *Frontline* that the State government had refused to respond to earlier formal requests to arrest Hurriyat leaders. The arrests finally came about as a result of mounting disquiet in New Delhi over the prospect of a major law and order problem. But from the PDP's point of view the arrests could have come far too late to prevent low turnouts in urban Srinagar and in towns such as Baramulla, Sopore and Anantnag.

PDP candidates outside Srinagar are also facing problems. In Baramulla, efforts failed to persuade rebel N.C. leader Saifuddin Soz not to contest. Soz could attract enough anti-N.C votes to create problems for the PDP candidate, New Delhi-based lawyer Muzaffar Baig. Here the Congress(I) supports Soz's candidature, and party leaders such as Taj Mohiuddin with significant pockets of support from Gujjars, could cut into votes the PDP might





PRAVEEN SWAMI

People's Democratic Party candidate Mehbooba Mufti at an election meeting; (left) a section of the crowd at the meeting. (Below) CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami.

have hoped to attract in areas such as Langate and the Baramulla Kandi belt. Baig's prospects have also been hurt by the fact that the principal campaign organiser of his vibrant but unsuccessful 1998 challenge, Abdul Rashid Shaheen, is now his N.C. rival.

In Anantnag, the Lok Sabha seat Mufti Mohammad Sayeed won in 1998 to signal the rise of anti-N.C. forces in the Valley, similar complex equations render the outcome difficult to predict. In Sayeed's favour this time is the fact that the N.C. had great difficulty finding a credible candidate; several top leaders refused to take on the PDP supremo. N.C. leader and State Revenue Minister Ali Mohammad Naik's influence is restricted to two Assembly segments, Pulwama and Tral. The Congress(I) candidate, Peerzada Sayeed, also does not appear to have a broad support base, although observers believe that he could still attract votes from those alienated by the PDP leader's chronic party-hopping.

But Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's real problem is a surprise contender – Communist Party of India(Marxist) leader and Kulgam MLA Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami. The vigour of Tarigami's campaign has amazed most observers, and intelligence sources believe that he will command a formidable number of votes in at least three segments other than his parent constituency – those of Wachi, Noorabad and Shopian. Those votes will cut into the prospects of both the N.C., which backed Tarigami in the 1996 Assembly elections, and of the PDP. The success of the campaign, conducted in an area traditionally considered to be among the most socially and religiously conservative in Jammu and Kashmir, show that Tarigami's individual hard work has paid off and that the room for progressive politics has remained untapped.



S. SUBRAMANIAN

OUTSIDE Kashmir, the contest is playing itself out on depressingly communal lines. In Ladakh, consisting of the twin entities of largely Buddhist Leh and Muslim Kargil, parties have focussed their efforts on deepening communal divisions. The battle centres on the Congress(I)'s Leh-based Thupstan Tsewang, and the N.C's Ghulam Hassan Khan. The N.C. had won in 1998 with 59.3 per cent of the vote to the Congress(I)'s 30.28 per cent, but block Buddhist voting in Leh could alter the result this time. Chronic electricity and water shortages in Leh, caused by the breakdown of the Stakna hydroelectric project (the State government claims there are no funds to repair it), have fuelled anti-N.C. sentiment here, sadly exacerbating anti-Muslim sentiment.

In the two Jammu region constituencies of Udhampur and Jammu, similar communal issues have come to the fore. Both Udhampur's BJP candidate and sitting MP Chaman Lal Gupta, and his Jammu counterpart Vaid Vishnu Dutt, have however suffered from their alliance with the N.C. The Congress(I) has been quick to exploit Hindu resentment against the N.C., pointing to the fact that the BJP-led government fell the day Soz rebelled against it. The N.C. has sought to move on in the midst of this fray, but both its candidates, Jagjivan Lal in Udhampur and R.S. Chib in Jammu, have a history of shifting loyalties, which has done little to endear them to the party's local cadres.

PERHAPS the worst problem in this election will be security. Security personnel have been doing their best to keep the peace. On August 26, top terrorists Sajjad 'Grenade' Magray, Shabbir Bhaduri and Parvez Ahmad, responsible for the murder of 12 migrant brick-kiln workers at Anantnag in June, were shot dead at Gopalpora village along with two unidentified Pakistani terrorists by a joint team of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, the Border Security Force and the Rashtriya Rifles. Two others involved in the massacre, Mohammad Hussain Dar and Mohammad Mubarik Koka, were killed on August 15. The massacre had spread a wave of terror through rural

Anantnag, with obvious election-time implications.

But such successes are increasingly rare, and officials are worried about the presence of large groups of terrorists throughout the State. "Let's put it this way," says Anantnag Senior Superintendent of Police Farooq Khan. "I'm keeping my fingers crossed." In 1998, 354 additional companies of troops had been deployed to keep the peace. This time just eight companies have been made available, although the Army's counter-insurgency deployments have been sharply reduced after the Kargil War. But there have been few protests from the State government. This thinned security comes at a time of escalating violence, a fact that has prompted cynics to suggest that the N.C. might not be entirely unhappy to have as few people vote as possible. ■



V. VENKATESAN

AS the people of Raghogarh, in the Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency, gathered to take a close look at the screen-incarnation of Krishna, they were hardly amused. Wearing the traditional turban and shawl, Nitish Bharadwaj, who played the role of Krishna in the tele-serials *Mahabharat* and *Krishna*, sought his second stint in the Lok Sabha, in the name of dharma.

"When I got the party ticket first to contest from Jamshedpur in 1996, Atalji, who calls me Bhagwan, asked me to fight the Kamsa in Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav," Bharadwaj said, eliciting a few claps from the committed BJP workers. The bulk of the crowd remained mute.

The reason for the tepid response was not far to seek. Bharadwaj was the BJP's answer to the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, who hails from Raghogarh. Here, Digvijay Singh is literally contesting by proxy, as his younger brother Lakshman Singh seeks re-election to the Lok Sabha.

Bharadwaj makes the most of Lakshman Singh's lacklustre performance as member of Parliament. "I know him as a good colleague during my two-year term as MP. I have hardly seen him speak in Parliament, or take any interest in the proceedings", he told the audience, to whom the Rajasaheb, as Digvijay Singh is affectionately known, matters more than his younger brother. It is said that Lakshman Singh hardly keeps contact with his electorate, and does not recognise even the local party workers. He is also accused of being arrogant. In contrast, Digvijay Singh remembers the names of most party workers and prominent citizens, and makes it a point to oblige them whenever they seek some help.

The charge of being an outsider to Rajgarh haunts Bharadwaj. "Why take a risk by voting a Mumbaiwallah, and earn the anger of Rajasaheb?" said a local resident. Even the BJP workers find the going tough. Pramod Valmik, a BJP worker, said soon after the public meeting:"Even if 25 persons in this gathering vote for him, what is the use? Here, people prefer the local candidate."

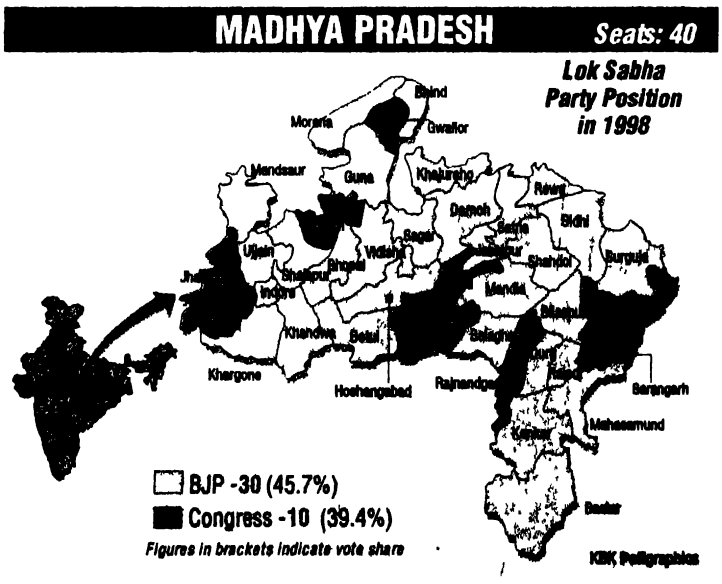
Bharadwaj declared that he would leave the country if the Congress(I) was returned to power. He did not contest the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, purportedly because of his professional commitments as an actor. He claims he is now in the field at the behest of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. The tepid response of the Raghogarh electorate perplexed him. He told the audience that he would interpret it as their determination to vote for him on September 11, when Rajgarh and 13 other constituencies in the State go to the polls.

Bharadwaj dismissed the Congress(I)'s claim to offer a stable government and questioned Sonia Gandhi's prime ministerial ambitions. But to the Rajgarh voters, the question of Sonia Gandhi's citizenship hardly matters; the Congress(I) posters here carry mostly Digvijay Singh's picture, Lakshman Singh figuring only in a few.

Indeed, the Malwa region, which had been the BJP's forte in the earlier Lok Sabha elections, presents a mixed picture today, with the Congress(I) set to make strategic gains. In Bhopal, Union Minister Uma Bharati also suffers the tag of outsider. Reluctant to contest from her earlier seat, Khajuraho, where her fortunes had taken a nosedive, Bharati demanded from the party's top leadership an urban constituency, in view of her ill-health. After naming former Chief Minister Kailash Joshi as the candidate from Bhopal, the BJP's central leadership buckled under Bharati's pressure. Joshi's supporters took umbrage at the leadership's decision to replace him and burnt Bharati's effigies. Joshi's son Deepak Joshi was slated to join the Congress(I), but the party's spokesperson, Prabhat Jha, denied it.

Sensing the mood, Bharati is on the defensive. In her public meetings, she dismisses the "outsider" tag, saying if Sonia Gandhi, who was born in Italy, has the right to contest from Bellary, why can't she shift from Khajuraho to Bhopal, both in the same State. Her rabid views on Hindutva and her role in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement have given her a firebrand image. She says she is not *"Danga* Bharati" (riot Bharati) as made out by her rivals. She tries to convince the voters that her concept of Hindutva involves equal respect for all religions, even while preserving her religious identity.

Uma Bharati draws huge crowds, not necessarily because of her charisma. People who love to hate her, also come to listen to her. Says Jaspal Singh, an employee of BHEL in Bhopal, who came to listen to her:"I will vote for the Congress(I) candidate, Suresh Pachouri, because



the BJP has failed to fulfil its promises." According to him, the BJP MLA, Babulal Gaur, promised to demand abolition of professional tax, but did nothing. Bharati promises to bring Narmada water to Bhopal, but sections of her audience find it hardly convincing. A few young voters, however, were taken by Bharati's rhetoric. They felt that the Congress(I) won three of the four Assembly seats in Bhopal last year because of the onion shortage. This time, the issues were different and people wanted Vajpayee to continue as Prime Minister, they said.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh with his brother and Congress(I) candidate in Rajgarh, Laxman Singh.



Nitish Bharadwaj, the BJP's candidate in Rajgarh.

The mood is upbeat in Suresh Pachouri's camp. Pachouri, who hails from Bhopal, is also the leader of the Congress(I)'s All-India Seva Dal, and is credited with nurturing the constituency over the years. He is assured of the minority vote, which is unlikely to go to the Muslim candidate, Aslam Sher Khan. After a brief stint in the BJP, the former Olympian and a Minister in the Narasimha Rao Government, is now the National Congress Party (NCP) candidate. Says Aftab Ahmed Khan, of Barah Mahal, Mohalpura, who was present at Suresh Pachouri's home: "Even Aslam's family members are not likely to vote for him." Pachouri is also sure to get the votes of the upper castes, who dislike Bharati's backward caste tag. Observers cite the "mammoth" rally in Bhopal on August 28, in support of Pachouri when he filed his nomination, as proof of his likely victory.

The BJP is trying to paper over the apparent divisions in the party triggered by Uma Bharati's candidature. The party spokesperson, Prabha Jha, said: "Joshi was against the decision-making process in the party, which first announced his name for the Bhopal seat, and not the decision as such." If S.C. Verma could win the Bhopal seat successively, despite being an outsider, why can't Uma Bharati, he asked. Verma refused to contest this time, apparently because of frustration of not being made a Minister. Verma's reason was that the BJP-led Ministry did not honour his promise of declaring the entire Bhopal, which saw the gas tragedy in 1984, as gas-affected.

The BJP secured 30 out of 40 Lok Sabha seats in M.P. in the 1998 elections, primarily because the Congress(I) was not united. Leaders such as Arjun Singh and Madhavrao Scindia, who had left the Congress on the eve of the 1996 elections, had just returned to the party, after Sonia Gandhi took over the reins. After he led the Congress(I) to a remarkable return to power against all odds in the 1998 Assembly elections, Digvijay Singh is now the unquestioned leader and had his say in the selection of candidates. With his rival Arjun Singh keeping away from the State politics (Arjun Singh is not contesting the elections, after two successive defeats), Digvijay Singh is relatively free from factional threats. Hence, his campaign strategy, which helped him in the Assembly elections, is expected to help the Congress(I) secure the majority of the Lok Sabha seats as well.

Madhavrao Scindia, Congress Working Committee member and AICC general secretary, has moved from Gwalior, where he has won several times, to Guna, where he made his debut. Scindia has conceded that his victory margin in Gwalior has been declining, and with his mother, Vijayraje Scindia opting out of electoral contest because of ill-health, Guna (which she held) was his natural choice. Scindia is expected to win easily, with the BJP fielding a weak candidate.

Indore, another BJP citadel in the earlier Lok Sabha elections, is going the Congress(I) way. Former MP Sumitra Mahajan initially declined the party ticket sensing factionalism in the local unit, which drastically reduced the BJP's tally in the Assembly elections to three out of the eight Assembly segments. Although she bowed to the party's diktat, she has refrained from making huge expenditure on her campaign.

While the city is flooded with Congress(I) candidate Mahesh Joshi's posters, cut-outs and the party's flags and banners, the BJP's campaign is subdued. Its strategists lay emphasis on door-to-door canvassing rather than incurring huge expenditure on publicity. Sumitra Mahajan and her supporters claim that she had deliberately done this to save money that could be offered to the victims of the Kargil war. "Rs.1 lakh has already been given to the widow of a Kargil hero from Indore, and we intend to contribute more after the elections", she told *Frontline*. Asked why the BJP is not following her example elsewhere, she said it was her decision and not the party's. In her roadside meetings, Mahajan makes free use of the victory in the Kargil war to promote her electoral prospects. She

accuses the Congress(I) of not willing to celebrate this victory

The Union Minister for Labour, Satyanarain Jatia appears to be a sure winner in Ujjain reserved for Scheduled Castes Although the Congress(I) won the majority of the Assembly seats here in the 1998 elections Jatia appears to have made a remarkable recovery People speak highly of his role in the disbursement of Rs 15 crores from the Provident Fund to 6,400 employees of Vinod Mill now closed He has also arranged payment of Rs 8 10 crores towards their rehabilitation His role is also acknowledged in the payment of Provident Fund amount to the employees of Indore Textile Mill A Congress(I) worker admitted that it was not easy for the party candidate and Scindia loyalist Tulsi Silawat to win the seat The BJP s chances in the other two reserved seats Dhar (S T) and Shajapur-Dewas (S C) – the Congress(I) State unit president, Radhakish in Malaviya is contesting from here – however, do not appear to be bright ■



RAJASTHAN

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

MODERNITY and progress are obvious aliens in the Mewat region which straddles the trijunction of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh Stagnancy and squalor are the most evident realities here

The village square fills up rapidly as senior Congressman K Natwar Singh drives into Gulpara in the Bharatpur Lok Sabha constituency of Rajasthan Women are conspicuous by their absence as the dominant Meo community turns up in strength to receive 'Kunwar saheb – a title that Natwar Singh enjoys by virtue of his status as an adoptive member of the dynasty that once ruled Bharatpur But as he speaks in support of the candidature of his son, Natwar Singh is unsparing in his criticism of the feudal dynasty

In seven of 12 elections, he points out, Bharatpur returned candidates from the palace to Parliament In the other five Lok Sabhas, it was represented by senior members of the Congress The sordid condition of civic amenities in the region is a direct consequence of the benign neglect it suffered while the presumptive rulers sought unsuccessfully to don the garb of elected representatives The choice then was clear for the constituency – Jagat Singh of the Congress for progress

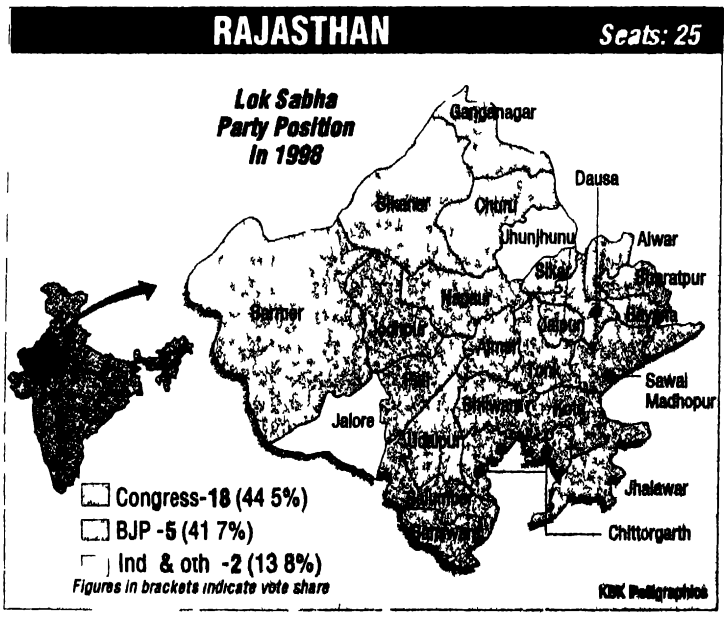
The once powerful feudal dynasties in Rajasthan have of late encountered a significant waning of political influence From consistent opposition to the Congress, the royal remnants who continue to dispose of substantial personal fortunes have moved towards a phase of partial reconciliation And where the Congress has been reluctant to take them on board, the BJP has been eager to seek their favour

Royalty has spread its favours evenly among the two main contenders in the neighbouring constituencies of Bharatpur and Alwar In Bharatpur, Vishwendra Singh who stands in the direct line of descent of the last recognised maharaja, carries the mantle for the BJP In Alwar, the Congress has fielded Mahendra Kumari, widow of the man who killed himself in 1977 while under pressure from Indira Gandhi s Emergency regime to cede control of his vast feudal patrimony to the government

Claims of feudal allegiance apart, neither candidate seems to carry very much credibility, for reasons linked to their own eccentric political wanderings over the years Vishwendra Singh won from Bharatpur as a Janata Dal candidate in 1989, but quit the party and resigned his Lok Sabha seat in 1990 to register his opposition to the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations on reservations for other backward classes (OBCs) Today the Jat community that he nominally belongs to is in ferment over the denial of OBC status to it The BJP has embraced the cause of the Jats in the evident hope of winning over a traditional Congress constituency But the scion of the Bharatpur palace finds himself in a rather unviable position on this account He also has to contend with uneasy memories of a defeat in the Assembly elections of 1998 from the Kumher segment of Bharatpur

Mahendra Kumari, who won Alwar for the BJP in 1991, now seeks the seat as a Congress candidate Herself from the former ruling dynasty of Bundi, she confronts a formidable caste consolidation of Ahir voters that her BJP adversary Jaswant Yadav is marshalling And the recent history of the Alwar feudal dynasty s tortured relationship with the Congress makes her change of heart less than authentic in the popular perception

Widowhood and Congress perfidy were prominent motifs in Mahendra Kumari's campaign for the Lok Sabha in 1991 She won in a landslide but could not quite effect the transition from ruler by dynastic investiture to elected representative She was denied the BJP ticket in 1996 on account of her undistinguished five-year record but came back fighting as an independent candidate in 1998, losing by the narrowest of margins to the Congress' Ghasi Ram Yadav



As Mahendra Kumari was till recently with the BJP, her adversary Jaswant Yadav was likewise prominent in local Congress councils He only shifted loyalties to the BJP when denied the Congress ticket in 1996, and lost narrowly on account of a substantial defection of Ahir voters to a competing candidate on the Janata Dal ticket He finished third in 1998 since a large part of the BJP's traditional constituency migrated towards Mahendra Kumari's independent candidacy and the Congress nominee was an Ahir of greater stature.

Jaswant Yadav evident-

ly believes that the Vajpayee wave will this time around overwhelm the aversion that the BJP's core constituencies in Alwar have had towards an Ahir candidate. Should this indeed happen, then the consolidation of community votes should propel him to victory in his third attempt at the Lok Sabha.

For the Congress, the calculation is that the Brahmin community in Alwar – estimated to be as numerous as the Ahir – will stick to custom and oppose Jaswant Yadav. Add on the entirety of Mahendra Kumari's Rajput community and the larger part of the Meo voters and she should sail through, claim local Congress functionaries. The implicit calculation here is that the hardening of caste consciousness within the Ahir community will impel a consolidation of all others under the Congress banner.



R V MOORTHY

Senior Congress(I) leader Natwar Singh with son Jagat Singh, who is the Congress(I) candidate in Bharatpur.

Caste demography still remains an uncertain guarantee of success, forcing both parties to bring to the foreground the issues they perceive as the larger ones. BJP supporters insist that Atal Behari Vajpayee's leadership is the sole issue before the electorate. In private, they concede that their candidate's loyalty is rather uncertain and would only be cemented by a convincing national mandate in favour of the BJP. Jaswant Yadav himself makes much of the foreign origins of the Congress president and questions his opponent's new-found allegiance to that party.

Mahendra Kumari, for her part, is forced into certain curious inversions by her candidacy on behalf of the Congress. All her efforts on behalf of the constituency during her previous tenure in Parliament, she says, were thwarted by the State government of the time. In contrast, she hardly encountered any serious obstacles at the central level. The irony of the claim is that the State government then was under the control of Mahendra Kumari's own party while the central administration was under the Congress. Rapid switches of political allegiance evidently also call for the extensive reinterpretation of recently transpired events.

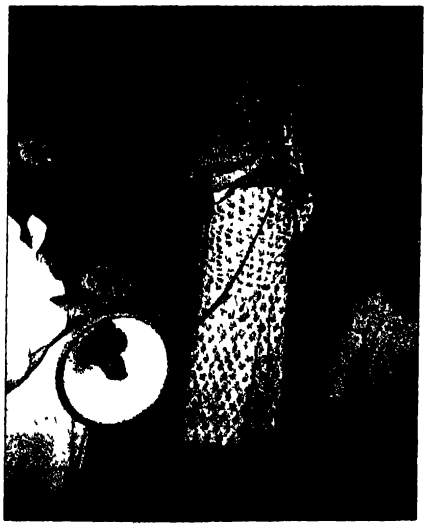
Jagat Singh, the 30-year-old son of Natwar Singh, former Union Minister, faces a somewhat less acute problem of credibility in neighbouring Bharatpur. Natwar Singh insists at numerous campaign halts on behalf of his son that he was among the first to raise the issue of OBC-status for the Jat community. The measure was blocked not so much by the Congress government in Jaipur as by the BJP-led government at the Centre. Vajpayee's recent Sikar declaration endorsing the Jat demand fails to carry credibility, argues Natwar Singh. Indeed, when a delegation of 19 MPs recently met him to plead the Jats' case, Vajpayee made his opposition more than evident.

Yet Natwar Singh's advocacy of the Jat cause confronts certain other problems of a fundamental kind. The National Commission on Backward Classes has recommended that Jats in Rajasthan be accorded OBC status since they meet all the required criteria, except in Bharatpur and Dholpur districts, where they were the ruling community. This would make for a rather unwieldy and potentially discriminatory system of affirmative action, which the Jats of Bharatpur are intent on opposing.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot insists that the matter should go through extensive scrutiny by the Rajasthan State Commission on Backward Classes. As the State's first Chief Minister from an OBC background, Gehlot is keen to ensure that existing beneficiaries are not compelled to share the limited advantages of affirmative action with the substantial Jat community. His political blueprint allows for a limited desertion of Jat votes, which in his calculation would be more than offset by a consolidation of OBCs under the Congress banner.

As far as the more basic problem of electoral coalition-building is concerned, the Congress candidate from Bharatpur faces the prospect of a split in the Meo vote. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the BJP's old war horse, has ensured the candidacy of a Meo, Nasru Khan, on the Bahujan Samaj Party ticket. Nasru Khan won from Lacchmangarh – a segment of the Bharatpur Lok Sabha constituency – in the 1993 Assembly elections as a Janata Dal candidate. He subsequently switched loyalties to the BJP and won himself a ministerial berth in Shekhawat's Cabinet.

Nasru Khan's entry is not good news for the Congress. Meo Muslims account for some 150,000 votes in Bharatpur and the Congress depends crucially on their endorsement. The party draws some solace from the fact that Chaudhary Tayyab Hussain, the acknowledged feudal patriarch of all Meo clans, has committed himself to an active campaign role in Bharatpur – a commitment further cemented by Natwar Singh's energetic advocacy of his son Zakir Hussain's candidacy on the Congress ticket from Faridabad in Haryana. The parents have, in a sense, bonded together in a shared quest for their sons' political well-being.



R V MOORTHY

Mahendra Kumari, Congress(I) candidate in Alwar.

THE constituency of Jhalawar, which is a geographical protuberance tucked into the erstwhile principality of Gwalior in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, offers another glimpse of the many facets of royalty in politics. Vasundhara Raje Scindia, the BJP candidate, goes into battle with a double advantage – direct descent from the Gwalior feudal lineage and marriage into the Dholpur palace. When the Congress ticket for Jhalawar was given to Abrar Ahmed, there were murmurs that sibling influences were at work to ensure a weak candidate who would not stand much chance against a four-time winner. But Abrar Ahmed is by all accounts putting up a spirited fight. And the seat that had seemed to be a certain one for the BJP now does not quite appear to be so.

In a half-century of independence, the

feudal political idiom of subject and sovereign has gradually yielded place to the modern notion of a citizen's civic relationship to the representative state. This transition remains incomplete at best in most of the country, though nowhere more so than in Rajasthan. This in turn makes for a self-perpetuating process of economic and social backwardness. The conditions that prevail in the Mewat region, virtually contiguous with the national capital, are a continuing reminder of the grim human consequences of feudal remnants in representative politics. ■



T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

WHETHER it is the Coimbatore, Rasipuram, Nilgiris or Salem constituency, it is development issues and local problems such as the closure of cotton mills, spinning mills and engineering units that have occupied centre stage in the election campaign in Tamil Nadu. This is especially striking in Coimbatore, the textile city, which saw anti-Muslim violence in November 1997 and retaliatory bomb blasts by Al-Umma, a Muslim terrorist organisation, on February 14, 1998. The blasts led to a sharp decline in the economic well-being of Coimbatore. R. Nallakannu, Communist Party of India (CPI) candidate, C.P. Radhakrishnan, Bharatiya Janata Party nominee who is seeking re-election, and S.R. Balasubramaniam of the Tamil Maanila Congress, each says that if elected his mission will be to "restore the glory of Coimbatore as South India's Manchester".

The issues that dominate the campaign in Coimbatore are the closure of mills and engineering industries and the slump in the jewellery, scrap iron, wet-grinder and pumpset trade. The slump has followed the blasts and the restrictions imposed by the police.

Coimbatore was one of the three Lok Sabha seats the BJP won for the first time in Tamil Nadu. The other two were Tiruchi and the Nilgiris. While Radhakrishnan is backed by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Tamilaga Rajiv Congress (TRC), Nallakannu has the support of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Congress(I), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Indian National League (INL) and the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK). With the TMC are two Dalit organisations, Puthiya Tamilagam (P.T.) and the Dalit Panthers; the Indian Union Muslim League; and the Janata Dal (Secular).

IT is around 8-45 a.m. at Nanjundapuram in Coimbatore. This is a typical working class locality, with rows of tile-roofed houses. Most of the residents are laid-off employees of cotton mills and spinning mills. Ahead of Nallakannu comes a car from which a Congressman announces: "Nallakannu was jailed for seven years in the Nellai conspiracy case. He is a freedom-fighter who declined to accept the freedom-fighter's pension. He is a friend of the proletariat. He is a trade unionist. He is a man of integrity."

As his jeep weaves through the lanes and halts, a crowd gathers. In his speech, Nallakannu skilfully weaves national issues with local problems. "In the 15 months that the BJP-led government has been in power, cotton mills, spinning mills and engineering industries in Coimbatore have closed down. There is a cash crunch. There are no remunerative prices for agricultural produce. Trade links between Coimbatore and Kerala have snapped because of police harassment. The BJP has been trying to divide people into Hindus, Muslims and Christians. But we are all Indians and we need a secular Government at the Centre."

Nallakannu points to the nearby coconut groves where the trees have wilted because of blight. The Tamil Nadu Government had taken no action to halt the spread of the disease, he alleges. If elected, he will work for the formation of a separate directorate for coconut as in Kerala, Nallakannu says. Every 200 metres or so, Nallakannu stops to deliver similar speeches.

Not dissimilar in style is Radhakrishnan's campaign, but the issues he takes up are different. As the bearded, 42-year-old Radhakrishnan waves out, he establishes an instant rapport with people. His jeep halts at Arivoli Nagar, Senathichettipalayam, about 14 km from Tirupur, the hosiery town.

A crowd of women, children and men gathers. Radhakrishnan tells them: "We need a strong Bharat and India should march forward into the 21st century under the leadership of Vajpayee. The last three elections have entailed an expenditure of Rs.3,300 crores for the Government. You should put an end to this confusion. The Pandiar-Punnampuzha scheme and the Avinasi-Athikadavu scheme to bring you drinking water and irrigation facilities will remain a pipedream if there is no stable government at the Centre. Vajpayee called four Chief Ministers to Delhi and solved the Cauvery water issue in 48 hours. So please vote for lotus."

Elsewhere, Radhakrishnan points out that it was he who got spinning mills exempted from excise duty which P. Chidambaram, as Union Finance Minister, had earlier denied. His another "achievement" was the inclusion of spinning mills in the scheme for modernisation of the textile industry. He also takes credit for the introduction of train and air links between Coimbatore and New Delhi.

There is a riot of colours all over Tiruppur town and nearby Palladam. K. Subbarayan of the CPI is the legislator from Tirupur, which has hundreds of hosiery units. It is not surprising, therefore, that the CPI has mounted a high-intensity campaign here.

Travelling in an open jeep, TMC candidate Balsubramaniam stops every few hundred-metres at Five-Corner junction, Town Hall, Oppanakara Street and so on, in the heart of Coimbatore city. His speeches are crisp. "I will be in the field whatever be your problem. I came here on foot during the communal riots. I will reply to your letters. Only communal amity will make trade and commerce prosper in Coimbatore," he emphasises repeatedly. He alleges that it is the BJP that "ruined" Coimbatore and it was AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha who was responsible for the advent of the BJP in the city. The DMK, which earlier opposed the BJP, has now turned its ally, he says, and makes a request: " Please, therefore, vote for the cycle symbol."

Kottaimedu, the nursery of Al-Umma, is densely populated with Muslims. Resentment runs high here because the police checkposts are back and the police sieve vehicles that enter the area. P.A. Badurudeem, Kottaimedu branch secretary of the CPI, describes the checkposts as "the arrest of public at large." A. Sulaiman and A. Mohammed, both CPI members, assert: "All (Muslim) votes here will go to Nallakannu."

The BJP has not made Islamic fundamentalism its main poll plank now as it did in 1998. This is not surprising because it is

now in the company of the DMK, which was earlier perceived as soft towards Al-Umma and the TMMK. If there is any reference to to Islamic fundamentalism, it is limited to accusing the TMMK of being the front organisation of Al-Umma and charging the AIADMK, the CPI(M) and the CPI with supporting it.

In Salem, with no communal hangover of Coimbatore, there is a carnival atmosphere. The contest is a high-profile one, between TRC founder and Union Petroleum Minister Vazhappadi K. Ramamurthy and former State Minister T.M. Selvaganapathy of the AIADMK. Another important candidate is the TMC's R. Devadoss.

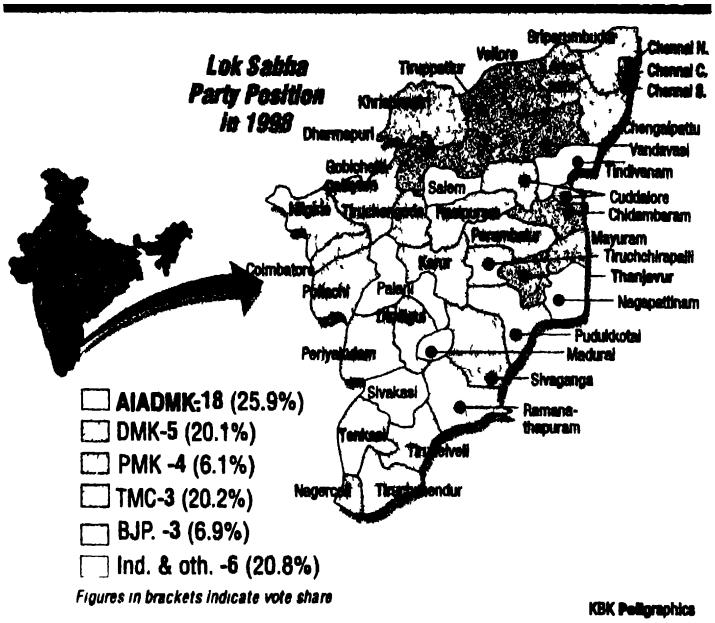
Ramamurthy's main election office in Salem is a beehive of activity with DMK, MDMK, PMK and TRC cadres working in tandem.

But Selvaganapathy is not one who would shy away from a fight. There is good coordination among AIADMK, Congress(I), CPI(M) and CPI cadres. Jayalalitha addressed an election meeting at Bose Maidan, Salem, on August 29 and the big crowd has enthused Selvaganapathy.

If there is an air of confidence about Ramamurthy's campaign, it is in no small measure owing to the more than 1.5 lakh cooking gas connections given to people in his constituency. Ramamurthy is unfazed about Jayalalitha raking up the issue of cooking gas connections. "I know how many AIADMK MPs got thousands of gas connections from me," he says, and he names them too. He adds, "I am prepared to give the details. I gave them connections even after my party's alliance with the AIADMK broke."

If Ramamurthy is confident in Salem, the AIADMK seems to be on a strong wicket in neighbouring Rasipuram, reserved constituency where the main contestants are Dr.V. Saroja (AIADMK), who seeks re-election, C. Udaya Arasu (PMK) and Dr. C. Natesan (TMC).

As one drives from Salem to Rasipuram, there is palpable disillusionment in the villages with the parties ruling at the Centre and in the State because of the unemployment in the powerloom sectors, the hardship of tapioca growers with the slump in the sago industry, and the crisis in the vehicle body-building industry at Namakkal, the hub of the lorry trade. Women voters seem to be solidly with Jayalalitha here and elsewhere.



Alavaipatti has about 5,000 powerlooms. According to Krishnan, a jobless weaver, the looms have been idle for the past six months. Weavers used to get Rs.8 for weaving a metre but with export orders drying up, this has come down to Rs.4. Many weavers have begun to work as agricultural labourers, Krishnan says.

In the Rasipuram town, AIADMK cadres have gathered in strength for Jayalalitha's meeting, which will start around 3-30 p.m. At the venue, adjacent to the bus treminus, scores of highpowered lamps are on at 3 p.m. in the bright sun. Several vendors sell stickers and badges with pictures of Jayalalitha and AIADMK founder and former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran. A vendor volunteers a piece of information: "AIADMK cadres do not buy badges or stickers with a picture of only Jayalalitha. They prefer badges with pictures of both MGR and Jayalalitha."

JAYALALITHA arrives at 6-50 p.m. and straightway reads her prepared speech, which she has already read at any number of meetings. Midway through the speech, she breaks into a song, and poses a series of rhetorical questions to Vajpayee. There is applause, and she asks the crowd, "Will you put these questions to Vajpayee?" The crowd roars, "We will, we will." A little later she sings another ditty, and there is applause again.

She denies that the AIADMK was responsible for forcing the elections on the country. She takes a potshot at the Congress(I) and the CPI(M), without naming them, for missing the opportunity she gave them to form a government after the fall of the Vajpayee Government. "I did not ask for any share in power... So the AIADMK is not responsible for the elections." Towards the end she comes to local problems.

Even on August 29, the campaign is low-key in the Pollachi constituency, which goes to the polls on September 11. No important local issue is discussed. Krishnan, an autorickshaw driver, says, "The AIADMK booked my auto for ten days for campaigning but has not paid me so far because the local unit has not received the cash." In this reserved constituency, C. Krishnan (MDMK) is locked in a fight with M. Thiyagarajan (AIADMK). Janata Dal (Secular) and Puthya Tamilagam are also in the fray as well.

V.P. Chandrasekar, former AIADMK MLA from Pollachi, says that people are not familiar with the "top" symbol of the MDMK and so the AIADMK candidate will win easily. He claims that the DMK thrust the seat on the MDMK because the AIADMK was strong here.

R.T. Mariappan, the MDMK's Coimbatore district secretary, who is in charge of Krishnan's campaign, is confident of victory because of the "working strength" of the MDMK's allies. Of the six MLAs in the constituency, five are from the DMK and one from the TMC. Besides, DMK men head local panchayat unions, town panchayats and cooperative banks. The MDMK was also strong in the constituency. According to Mariappan, the BJP holds a fascination for the youth.

In the Nilgiris constituency, there is good coordination between the Congress(I) and the AIADMK. Here R. Prabhu of the Congress(I) is fighting Master M. Mathan of the BJP, the representative in the dissolved Lok Sabha, and C. Chinnarfaj of Puthiya Tamilagam. As at Pollachi, the Congress(I), the AIADMK and its allies focus on the need for a stable government at the Centre which, they say, can be provided only by the Congress(I). Another important issue is the plight of handloom weavers at places such as Samychettypalayam. ■

Of promises and policies

The election manifestoes of the National Democratic Alliance and the Congress(I) are marked by a consensus on economic policy while the Left presents a distinctive agenda.

VENKATESH ATHREYA

IN the rough-and-tumble of hectic election campaigns, attention to serious issues often takes a backseat. Yet, it is important that such issues come to the fore in public discussions. The election manifestoes of political parties, even allowing for the inherent incentive for such documents to be self-serving, represent a partial attempt to meet this need. At any rate, they do provide material for meaningful public discussion. In this context, it would be interesting to examine what the manifestoes of the three leading formations – the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Congress(I) and the Left parties – have to say.

The most striking visual feature of the NDA manifesto is the pervasive presence of Atal Behari Vajpayee. A little less than ten pages of text in print are accompanied by nine full page photographs featuring Vajpayee, not counting the ninth text page, half of which is occupied by a picture of Vajpayee addressing a meeting. Interestingly, the text of the manifesto does not mention the leading party of the NDA, the Bharatiya Janata Party, even once. It does refer to Vajpayee more than once, describing him, among other things, as "...a statesman who is accepted by all sections of the country" but makes no reference to his role as a leader of the BJP.

In terms of content, there are no big surprises. The manifesto predictably blames the Opposition parties, described as a "...negative coalition led by the Congress," for forcing fresh elections and claims credit for the clearing of Pakistani intruders from Kargil.

On economic policy, the NDA manifesto pledges to continue the reforms, control fiscal and revenue deficits and carry out "...comprehensive reforms of the public sector undertakings, including restructuring, rehabilitation and divestment". While stating that NDA's main thrust will be to eradicate unemployment, the manifesto does not put forward a credible strategy towards this end. On foreign direct investment (FDI), the manifesto claims that "...the country cannot do without FDI because besides capital stock it brings with it technology, new market practices and *most importantly employment* (emphasis added)." The manifesto seeks to reform the public distribution system (PDS) "...to serve the poorest of the poor", the implicit implication being the exclusion of many currently benefiting from PDS.

Although the manifesto claims "consensus on a common cause and a common set of principles..." among its partners, the nuances in some of its formulations are suggestive of a certain tilt. Thus, it talks of: special efforts to be made in animal husbandry, "...particularly in respect of cow and its progeny"; "the establishment of a credible nuclear deterrence"; "genuine secularism" and "...the concept of secularism consistent with the Indian tradition..." However, by and large, the NDA manifesto is consistent with the BJP's tactical decision to put its key Hindutva agenda on the backburner at least until after the elections.

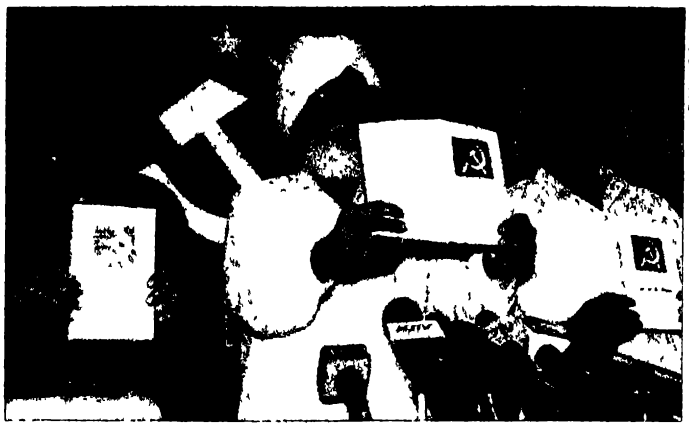
An interesting aspect of the NDA man-



V SUDERSHAN

At the release of the National Democratic Alliance's manifesto in New Delhi, BJP leaders A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, Samata Party leader George Fernandes and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam president M. Karunanidhi.

ifesto is its stand on Centre-State relations. It states: "We are convinced that there is a clear case for devolution of more financial and administrative powers and functions to the States." This is one democratic concession that the BJP has had to make to its regional allies. Cleverly, however, this concession is accompanied by an assertion that the NDA will "...take measures for ensuring a fixed term (five years) for all elected bodies including legislatures." This is a patently undemocratic stand.



R V MOORTHY

CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet releases the party's election manifesto. With him, Polit Bureau members Sitaram Yechury and S. Ramachandran Pillai.

THE Congress(I) manifesto is the longest and most elaborate. Shorn of verbiage, though, the manifesto is all-too-familiar. The neoliberal paradigm and the new economic policies unleashed by the Congress(I) in 1991 are defended. While the manifesto concedes that self-reliance has served India well, it seeks to give it what it calls "... a contemporary meaning" and what follows is an exercise in evasion. Self-reliance is, by simple assertion, made synonymous with eradication of poverty and unemployment through faster growth in agriculture and industry.

Like the NDA, the Congress(I) also calls for $10 billion of FDI a year. Despite a plethora of incentives, the total FDI from 1991-92 to 1998-99 is only around $10 billion or an average of $1.25 billion a year. The neoliberal paradigm that underlies both the NDA and Congress(I) manifestoes fails to recognise that FDI gravitates to an economy growing rapidly rather than to one that expects it to fuel such growth in the first instance.

The manifesto repeats the familiar and arbitrary figure of 4 per cent (or less) as the target for combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the States. It states both that "tax reforms will be continued", and that "the tax-GDP ratio must be brought up to at least 18 per cent over the next five years". The contradiction between these two statements will be obvious if one recalls that the Congress-initiated tax reforms (pursued by the United Front and the BJP governments) have led to a significant decline in the tax-GDP ratio over the 1990s.

The Congress(I) manifesto repeats its claim to have ushered in genuine decentralisation in this country through constitutional initiatives, though this is far from accurate, and its own practice has been highly centralist and often in utter disregard of the rights of State governments. The manifesto continues the Congress(I) policy of playing off panchayati raj against the autonomy of States by declaring: "All Central funds for poverty alleviation and rural development will be credited directly to the funds of elected panchayati raj institutions." The Congress(I)'s concern for panchayati raj is somewhat difficult to square with its own record in respect of holding elections to local bodies in the States where it had been in power, but perhaps the Madhya Pradesh experiment may have convinced sections of the Congress(I) leadership of the political benefits of commitment to a degree of democratic local governance.

The Congress(I) manifesto strains one's credulity when it states: "The Congress will continue to lay great stress on land reforms..." In a reference that must have caused the Congress(I) considerable agony, the manifesto actually talks of "...registration of all tenancies through Operation Barga type campaigns..." (Operation Barga was the West Bengal Government's pioneering programme for the registration of share-croppers.)

In what seems to be a case of promising everybody everything, the Congress(I) manifesto states: "The terms of trade will always be kept in favour of agriculture." In an interesting and rather far-reaching proposal, it says: "Organisations that supply inputs to farmers will be converted into farmer managed and controlled organisations." What this implies is not made clear, but the proposal would not at all be easy to implement.

One area where the manifesto comes close to making a progressive commitment pertains to education. It states: "Over a period of time, we must move towards making primary and secondary education compulsory as well." However, it stops well short of making a time-bound commitment to honour, at least belatedly, the promise of free and compulsory education for all children in the 6-14 age group.

In an evident attempt to rewrite history, the Congress(I) which instigated, along with the Sangh Parivar, violent opposition to V.P. Singh's attempts to implement the Mandal Commission report, now declares in its manifesto: "It was the Congress that built the consensus over the Mandal Commission report."

While the NDA and Congress(I) manifestoes thus have little to set them apart with respect to economic policies, the Congress(I) makes a rather more categorical statement on secularism. It states that "...secularism can only mean... the clear separation of politics from... religion. Religion is a private matter for individuals. Politics is all about activities in the public arena." And further: "Religion cannot be used as an instrument of mobilisation... The Congress vehemently rejects the use of religion for political ends." One can only hope that the Congress(I) will, unlike in the past, be consistent in its stand on secularism.

Finally, it must be noted that the Congress(I) is dismissive of regional parties ("Regional parties are born and fade away") and poses before the people the choice between "... a coalition that has failed miserably and a cohesive Congress alternative." This last assertion has since been somewhat tampered by a more sober assessment of political ground realities.

THE election manifesto of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is in two parts. The first part provides a detailed critique of 13 months of the BJP-led coalition rule, rejects the notion that the Congress(I) can be an alternative to the BJP, draws attention to the record of the Left, and finally calls upon the electorate to defeat the BJP and its allies, strengthen the CPI(M) and the Left and support the Left, democratic and secular forces. The second part puts forward the CPI(M)'s positive programme of action.

The CPI manifesto is similar in structure to that of the CPI(M). Both the Left parties draw attention to what they regard as the major failures of the BJP-led

Greater concern for children

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

ARE political parties becoming more sensitive to issues concerning children? The manifestoes of parties in the fray suggest that they are.

According to the Delhi-based Child Labour Action Network (CLAN), which studied the election manifestoes of eight parties *vis-a-vis* issues relating to children, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress(I), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) have promised measures to abolish child labour. In the 1996 elections, according to the study, only two parties had referred to the issue, that too vaguely.

The TMC is for the "abolition of child labour". The NCP supports abolition of child labour and the introduction of compulsory primary education.

The CPI(M) promises "abolition of child labour and enforcing rights of children subjected to such exploitation." The BJP merely says that it will "take measures to eliminate child labour", without explaining how it will go about it.

The Congress(I) outlines some strategies to tackle the child labour problem. These include creation of special educational facilities in child-labour-endemic areas, strengthening of the mid-day meal and poverty alleviation programmes, and strict implementation of the legal provisions against the practice of child labour.

Primary education figures in almost all manifestoes this time; only three dealth with this subject in the 1996 elections. The manifestoes demonstrate an increasing awareness of the problems caused by low literacy levels and high drop-out rates.

The Congress(I) manifesto stresses that "girls and women belonging to the Dalit, Adivasi and other backward class and minority communities (should) have access to the best education and health facility by the end of the next decade." It states that "a time-bound programme for universalising access to elementary education for all children up to 14 by 2003 will be implemented and resources found for making this happen."

The Congress(I) has reiterated its commitment to increase the expenditure on education at least up to 6 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). It has also promised that 50 per cent of the expenditure on education will be earmarked for elementary education.

The CPI(M) manifesto guarantees free and universal education for all children up to 14. According to CLAN chairperson Joseph Gathia, the CPI(M) is the only party among the eight parties, whose manifestoes were studied, to have said that the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill, which has lapsed, must be revived in order to make education a basic right of children up to the age of 14. ■

Government:

★ failure to protect religious minorities from attacks by various constituents of the 'Sangh Parivar'.

★ nuclear adventurism, now tending to capitulationism on such issues as the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), attitude to the aggressive actions of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in various parts of the world and so on.

★ sell-out to the transnational corporations and an even more vigorous pursuit of neoliberal economic policies including a wholesale attack on the public sector.

★ authoritarian actions, including the ultimately unsuccessful invoking of Article 356.

★ compromising national security, by its complacent attitude post-Pokhran and "Lahore" euphoria.

★ record of corruption, capped by the telecom scam.

The manifestoes of the Left parties reject the Congress(I) as the alternative. The CPI(M) makes the point that the Congress(I) "...still advocates the economic policies initiated in 1991, which are against the interests of the toiling people of the country" and that "on questions of economic policies the BJP and the Congress have no basic differences." Even on the issue of secularism, the Congress "...is bereft of the political and ideological will to rally all the secular and democratic forces to fight the menace of communalism."

In sharp contrast to the NDA and the Congress(I), the Left parties put forward an economic agenda that rejects neo-liberalism and calls for:

★ radical land reforms

★ increased public investment in infrastructure and agriculture

★ review of telecom and power policies

★ protection for domestic industry

★ defence of the public sector

★ renegotiating the World Trade Organisation (WTO) terms, forging common cause with other countries of the South

★ broadening the direct tax base, with higher tax rates on affluent sections

★ opposition to opening up the financial sector

★ review of patent laws

★ strong public distribution system

★ job security and working class rights

In a similar vein, the Left parties support a number of democratic demands pertaining to women, youth, Dalits and Adivasis and other socially and economically vulnerable sections.

The Left manifestoes call for strengthening India's secular foundations, promotion of federalism for national unity including the replacement of Article 356 by a suitable, democratic alternative; an independent, non-aligned and anti-imperialist foreign policy; reversing nuclear weaponisation and not signing the CTBT; universalisation of child care services and abolition of child labour; compulsory primary education, guaranteed free and universal education for all children up to the age of 14 years; an environment policy to serve the needs of rapid and sustainable development; the promotion of scientific and technological self-reliance; and progressive electoral and judicial reforms.

While the Left Parties have presented a distinctive secular and progressive agenda before the people, in sharp contrast to those of the Congress(I) and the NDA, given their limited media access, it is unlikely that their programmes and policies will reach as wide a segment of the electorate as those of the Congress(I) and the NDA.

The Left manifestoes address the needs of the bottom 90 per cent of the population and not of the articulate and powerful top 10 per cent and they deserve to reach the people much more widely. The fact that they do not is yet another reminder of the relevance of the Chomsky-Herman concept of "manufactured consent". ■

How do you compute tax on your total income?

Part II

By a Panel of Experts



In our last article 'How do you compute tax on your Total Income – Part I' we discussed about the various aspects to be borne in mind for tax computation on total income Today, we shall go through an example for the same, which will clarify all the minor details one must keep in mind for computing tax payable on total income

Statement of Income	**Rs.**	**Rs.**
Salary	2,40 000	
Taxable Value of Perks	30,800	
	2 70 800	
less Standard Deduction (Refer to ceiling as mentioned earlier)	20 000	
Professional Tax	1,800	2,49 000
House Property		
Self Occupied (Annual value is nil) NIL		
Property Given on Rent	50 000	
	50,000	
Less Interest on Loan (taken for purchase of house)	20,000	30,000
Capital Gains		
Short Term		11,000
Long Term 25,000 (considered separately)		
Other Sources (u/s 80L)		
Interest on Bank Deposits	10,490	
Interest on ICICI bonds	7,510	
	18 000	
Dividend on US64	2,000	
	20,000	
Less Deduction u/s 80L		
US64	2,000	
Others, limited to	12,000	6,000
Other Sources (not u/s 80L)		
Interest on Co-FDs		23,000
Total Gross Income		3,19,000

Tax Thereon				
First Rs 50,000			NIL	
Next Rs 10,000 @10%			1,000	
Next Rs 90,000 @20%			18,000	
Next Rs 1 69,000 @30%			50,700	
			69,700	
Agricultural income				
Non-agricultural Income			3,19,000	
Add Agricultural Income			1,80,000	
TOTAL INCOME		4,99,000		
Tax Thereon (on Rs 4 99 000)			1,23,700	
Agricultural Income	1 80 000			
Add Basic Exemption	50,000			
	2,30 000			
Less Tax on Rs 2 30,000			43,000	
Net Tax (1 23,700 43 000)				80,700
Long-Term Capital Gains				
Total Sale Proceeds		1,50,000		
Less Indexed Cost		90 000		
Total Capital Gains			60 000	
Contribution to Sec 54FA		80,000		
Contribution to Sec 54EB		20 000		
Exemption u/s 54EA (60000/150000)x80000 =		32,000		
Exemption u/s 54EB		18 000	50,000	
Net Capital Gains (60 000 50 000)		10 000		
Tax on 10,000 @ 20%				2,000
Total Tax				82,700
Tax Rebates				
LIC Premium		35 000		
Co PF		20 000		
Housing Loan Repayment 14 000 Limited to		10,000		
PPF		15 000		
		80 000		
Limited to	60,000			
ICICI Infrastructure Bonds	5 000	65,000		
Rebate on 65,000 @20% u/s 88				13,000
Rebate u/s 88B				10,000
Net Tax Payable				59,700
Other Information				
Gift to son	30 000			
Dividend on Shares	22 000			
Interest on PPF	17,000			

We sincerely hope that after reading our previous and current article you will be able to compute your tax liability on your own

ICICI
Banking Services • Bonds • Depository Services • Car Loans
O&M Financial/Frontline

The machines arrive

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

ELECTRONIC voting machines (EVMs) are being used in 46 constituencies in the country in the ongoing elections, covering six crore voters. Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill hopes that based on the lessons of the current exercise, EVMs would be used in all the 543 Lok Sabha constituencies in later elections. EVMs were used in 16 constituencies in the elections to the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi Assemblies in November 1998 and the Goa Assembly in June this year.

Electronic voting machines are manufactured in India by the public sector Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL). An EVM consists of two interlinked units: the ballot unit, which is for the voter's use, and the control unit, which is under the charge of the presiding officer. The ballot unit, where the vote is "cast", is a simple device. It displays the list of candidates with the names of their political parties and symbols. A voter has only to press the button next to the name of the candidate of his choice. A short beep and a flash of a lamp show that the vote has been registered. A ballot unit can show the names of 16 candidates. An EVM can display the names of a maximum of 64 candidates in an election, by connecting four ballot units.

The control unit consists of a display and a set of button switches. Polling begins when the presiding officer presses the "ballot" button. After the voter has pressed the button against the name of the candidate of his or her choice, the presiding officer has to press the "ballot" switch again to enable the next voter to cast his or her vote. A master ballot paper can be used for every thousand voters.

To prevent bogus voting or booth-capturing, there is a "close" button. If the presiding officer, fearing booth-capturing or violence, presses this button, polling will stop, that is, the button that the voter uses will not function.

At the end of the polling, the presiding officer snaps the green paper seal and presses the "result" button. The seal will have to be signed by the candidates' agents before polling begins. When the presiding officer cuts the seal and presses the "result" button, the votes polled by each candidate will be displayed on the screen in the control unit.

Electronic voting machines have several advantages. They are easily operated on batteries. There is, therefore, no need for electrical wiring and plugs. There can be no bogus voting. Nor can invalid votes be cast because if a voter presses two or more buttons simultaneously, the first one pressed – a microsecond earlier than the second – will be the vote cast. The use of EVMs also lead to huge savings, for very little paper is used; no ink is needed; there is no need to fabricate metal boxes; and transportation is easy.

The Election Commission's belated decision last year and this year increasingly to go in for EVMs cannot undo the huge waste it was responsible for in the past eight years. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India for the year ended March 1997 has roundly blamed the Election Commission for "rushing to procure 1.50 lakh" EVMs valued at Rs.73.50 crores and keeping them idle.

Electronic voting machines were used for the first time in the country in 1982 in 11 Assembly constituencies – one each in Kerala, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, and two in Tripura and three in Delhi. A defeated candidate from Parur constituency in Kerala went to court. In its ruling in 1984, the Supreme Court disapproved the use of the machine-voting because, among other things, there had been no amendment of the law relating to mode of voting in the Representation of the People Act. Finally, Section 61-A of the Representation of the People Act was introducted with effect from March 15, 1989. It read, "...the giving and recording of votes by voting machines, in such manner as may be prescribed, may be adopted in such constituency or constituencies as the Election Commission may, having regard to the circumstances of each case, specify."

Following this, the Election Commission ordered the manufacture of 1,50,000 EVMs from BEL and the ECIL. Even as their manufacture was under way, the proposal to use them was dropped in November 1989 in spite of the announcement of elections.

The decision to use EVMs in the elections to the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi Assemblies last year was taken in December 1997 at a conference on electoral reforms in New Delhi. At the conference, national and regional parties consented to the use of EVMs, especially in urban constituencies.

The Government, with the aid of various agencies, has launched a major drive to familiarise voters with the system. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, a Coimbatore-based social welfare organisation, the Academy for Sociological Projects (ASPECTS) had worked in tandem with the administration to educate voters on the use of EVMs. An ASPECTS team comprising its chairman, S.R. Krishnamoorthy, and K. Shanthi [illegible] had led the effort. The Administration had conducted mock polls to gauge the reaction of the voters to the system. ASPECTS [illegible]



K. JAYANTHAN

A woman trying out an electronic voting machine [illegible]

Warnings in vain

Revelations about warnings provided by Brigadier Surinder Singh on rising border tensions ahead of the Kargil intrusion raise new questions about the designs of a political and army establishment which was desperate first to conceal the scale of the intrusion and then to project rapid military gains.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Srinagar

The GOC directs that all Bdes (brigades) will capture / procure suitable animals / birds peculiar to their sect(or) and hand them over to 3 Inf(antry) Div(ision) Sig(nals) Regt (Regiment) by 31 Mar(ch) 1998. However in case of animals / birds under hibernation, the sizes of cages which may be required should be intimated to 3 Infl Div Sig Regt for their fabrication action at the earliest... concerted efforts will be put by all concerned.

– from letter 6361/STN/21 dated March 2, 1998, signed by Colonel S.P. Tanwar for Lieutenant-General V.N. Budhwar, General Officer Commanding, 3 Infantry Division, Leh.

IN the spring of 1998, even as Pakistan was preparing the contours of its Kargil offensive, matters of war would seem to have receded from the consciousness of the Indian Army's 3 Infantry Division based at Leh. Lieutenant-General V.N. Budhwar, General Officer Commanding, was busily engaged in a Frederick of Bavaria-style enterprise of setting up a zoo for the tiny town, a charming project albeit one of somewhat dubious legality. Even when massive artillery exchanges broke out around Kargil in the wake of the May 1998 nuclear tests at Pokhran, the zoo project remained central to the 3 Infantry Division's activities. Even as their Brigade Headquarters was under sustained fire, officers in Kargil received a second urgent order, marked 6361/9/ZOO/Q1, on June 8 from Lieutenant-Colonel V.K. Singh with the instruction that the search for suitable wildlife specimens be speeded up.

By a curious coincidence, Brigadier Surinder Singh took command of the 121 Infantry Brigade at Kargil the same day this second zoo missive was issued. But the no-nonsense Brigadier, decorated for gallantry and valour as Captain, Major and Colonel and responsible for the capture of the key 5,108-metre mountain dominating the Kaksar area in 1980, realised that the Army ought to have things other than zoo-building on its mind. *Frontline*'s continuing investigation into the failures that enabled Pakistan's summer intrusion in the Kargil sector has thrown up new evidence that Brigadier Surinder Singh had repeatedly warned of rising tension on the border, but his warnings were ignored. Strangely, the Brigadier's reward has been a military inquiry that violates elementary principles of natural justice.



PANKAJ RISHI KUMAR

Brigadier Surinder Singh.

Chief of the Army Staff General V.P. Malik was, *Frontline*'s investigation has found, among the first to be informed of Brigadier Surinder Singh's concerns. In August 1998, as General Malik prepared to visit Kargil, the 121 Brigade was asked to put up a note to 3 Division Headquarters stating just what they intended to tell the Chief of Staff. This procedure is meant to ensure that in this case Lieutenant-General Budhwar would be aware of the issues that Brigadier Surinder Singh intended to bring up with General Malik. The 121 Brigade's note, marked "BRIEF: COAS" and numbered 124/GSD/VIS, was sent out on August 21, 1998. A report in *Outlook* magazine wrongly called it a letter to the Chief of the Army Staff, and this led to official denials on September 2 that General Malik had ever received such a letter. The denial is in a narrow sense therefore correct, but since the Army admits that General Malik was indeed briefed in accordance with its contents on August 29, 1998, the fact remains that he was aware of the Brigadier's note.

Paragraph 5(a) of the August 21 note made clear Brigadier Surinder Singh's perception that Pakistan would seek to escalate violence in Jammu and Kashmir after the Pokhran-II tests. It also pointed to the upcoming summits of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Non-Aligned Movement. It proceeded to suggest that major efforts would be made to push insurgents across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kargil. The reasons for this belief were outlined in Paragraph 8, beginning with the heading 'Enhanced Threat Perceptions'. Paragraph 8(a) recorded that the 24 Sindh Regiment, a reserve unit at Gilgit,

had been moved up to Pakistan's forward headquarters at Olthingthang. One battalion had also moved from Sialkot to Skardu, although its precise location was not known at that time. Twenty-five heavy and five medium guns had been sent to the sector, the note said, along with M-198 155-millimetre howitzers and M-11 missiles.

Pointing in paragraph 15 to "infilt(ration) routes available through (the) Mushkoh Valley from Doda side to Panikhar, Yaldor and through nullahs", the briefing note proceeded to demand new equipment. Brigadier Surinder Singh asked for "one air OP (observation) fl(igh)t for observation, control of artillery fire and evacuating casualties to be at Kargil" on a full-time basis. One Remote Pilotless Vehicle (RPV), part of India's fleet of four such Israeli-manufactured aircraft, along with seven gun and mortar locating radar, air photographs and satellite images, and an electronic warfare detachment were also requested. For reasons it best understands, the Army, in defiance of independent defence experts' evaluations, insists in its denial that RPVs and weapon locating radars "do not form part of the Army's inventory". "If Brigadier Surinder Singh had asked for equipment the Army did not have," one official pointed out, "he would have faced charges of insanity, not incompetence. It is extremely unlikely that a senior officer with decades of experience would have asked for things we don't have."

No action was taken on this request, and lack of sustained air surveillance was subsequently cited as a major reason for Pakistan's intrusion having passed undetected.

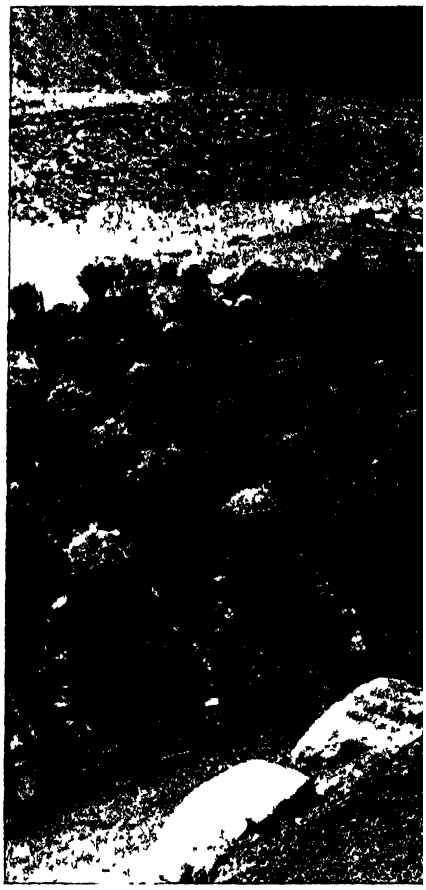
By September 1998, Brigadier Surinder Singh's apprehensions had sharpened. Letter 132/GSI/Pak/China, sent to 3 Infantry Division's headquarters on September 1 by Major H.C. Dwivedi, outlined insurgent movements on the Pakistan side of the LoC. "Int(elligence) sources have revealed that 500 Afghani militants have been conc(entrating) at Gurikot (map reference) NG 7959 for induction to (our) own side," it read. The likely routes of infiltration, the letter continued with a precision that is in retrospect chilling, were the Kil nullah, Safaid nullah and Kaobal Gali into the Mushkoh Valley and on to Pindras and Drass. A copy of an Intelligence and Field Security Unit letter, number 1/1 016 dated August 30, 1998, was attached to Major Dwivedi's letter (bearing out earlier reports in *Frontline* on the availability of such information with Military Intelligence). "Pakistan," the letter concluded, "is likely to intensify art(iller)y duels and train L(o)C firing to ensure (their) induction."

COULD Brigadier Surinder Singh's warnings have prevented the Pakistani incursion? Several senior officials have sought to underplay the significance of the Brigadier's letters, arguing that his reports pointed only to infiltration, not a full-scale attack. This position is, however, frivolous. As Brigadier Surinder Singh pointed out in a writ petition filed in August 1999 before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, "the conceptual thrust in regard to the enemy tilted towards selective infiltration, not an invasion". Nonetheless, had his warnings been heeded, Pakistan's aggression would most probably have been detected early, and Indian soldiers would have been better prepared to deal with the early incursions. However, Brigadier Surinder Singh was widely termed alarmist by his seniors, and his warnings became a recurring topic of cocktail party humour.

Air surveillance was clearly one key element needed to engage with the emerging threat perception. In January 1999, reliable sources told *Frontline*, the 121 Brigade desperately asked for an escalation of winter air surveillance, requesting that at least one helicopter be stationed in Kargil on a full-time basis. Intelligence reports were cited in support of a request to upgrade the Mushkoh Valley's priority for surveillance. It was also suggested that at least one surveillance sortie be carried out each week over Mushkoh Valley, the Mumar Shung and the Tololing nullah.

But these requests were turned down, and knowledgeable sources say that in the end barely four flights were carried out through the winter over the entire Kargil sector. Requests for additional troops, including a company to play a specialised anti-infiltration role east of Batalik, particularly Yaldor, were also rejected. Troops from the 9 Mahar Regiment were pulled out, leaving the Batalik area open to any enemy offensive.

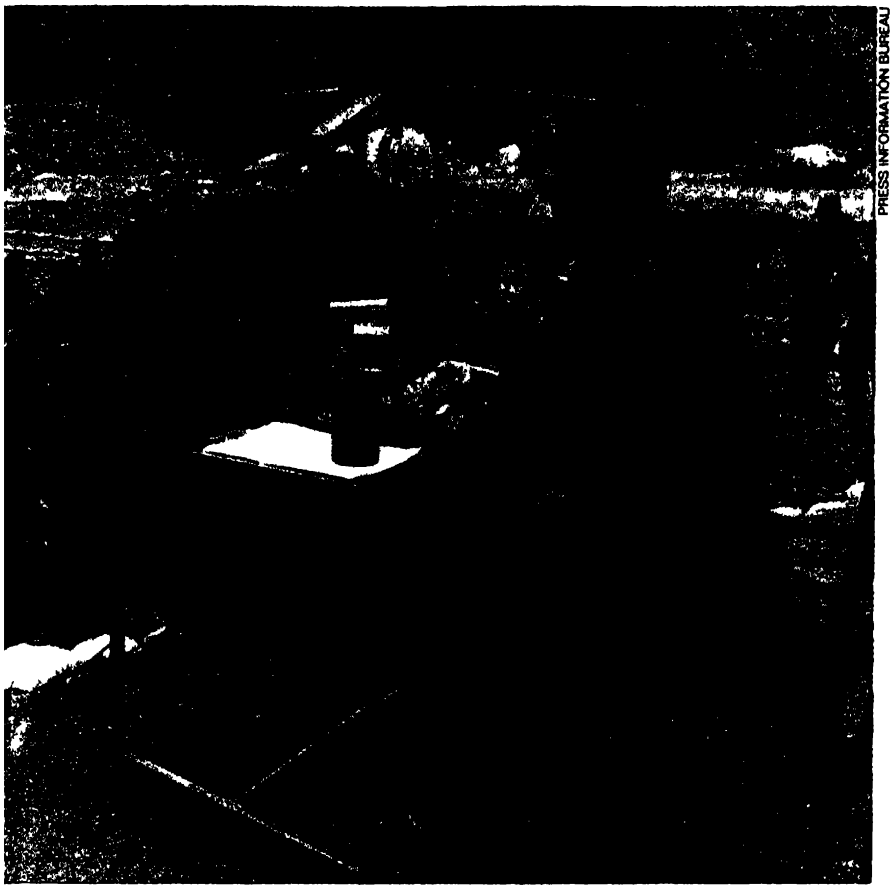
THE stage was now set for war. After the first fire contact with Pakistan irregulars and troops on May 6 in the Batalik area, Brigadier Surinder Singh's first instinct was to launch a cautious response, focussing on cutting the infiltrators' supply lines rather than launching full-scale, near-suicidal assaults up the



General V.P. Malik, Chief of the Army Staff, addressing troops at Batalik during a visit to the Kargil sector in July.

mountains. The military strategy was sound, but it was evidently irreconcilable with the designs of a political and army establishment desperate first to conceal the scale of the intrusion and then to project rapid military gains. Friction grew between Brigadier Surinder Singh and Lieutenant-General Budhwar, who chose to attend a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-sponsored Sindhu Darshan festival in Leh this summer as he had done last summer. Brigadier Surinder Singh's removal from office was now becoming imminent, with senior officers charging that his conduct of the campaign was incompetent.

Facts suggest that competence was not in fact the issue at stake. Indeed, early on in the campaign, Brigadier Surinder Singh was assigned charge of operations in Drass although that area had been placed under the command of 70 Infantry Brigade on April 24, 1999. After combat broke out in Drass, Brigadier Surinder Singh was ordered to take charge of the operations conducted by the Deputy Commander of 70 Brigade. His strategy to contain Pakistan positions at points



PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

4,080 m and 4,590 m and the highest 5,140-m summit on the Tololing ridge was to push troops around them and consolidate to their north. Similar manoeuvres were used to effect containment around Tiger Hill, and points 4,195 m and 4,410 m. Such containment enabled troops to choke Pakistani positions, and it was recognised that the rapid physical eviction demanded by New Delhi would cause an unacceptable level of casualties.

But a desperate Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in New Delhi was simply unable to wait for a sound operational strategy to play itself out. On June 6, Brigadier Surinder Singh was abruptly told to report in Srinagar, where he was to be attached to 15 Corps Headquarters. Four days later the order was cancelled in the face of the Brigadier's protests, but it was revived on June 21. He was informed that his transfer was prompted by concern for an injury he had sustained in his left ear, an injury that the officer himself had not complained about. Brigadier Surinder Singh made repeated attempts to contact General Malik at this stage, and was finally informed that he would be granted an interview on June 28. In the event, the Chief of the Army Staff failed to keep the appointment. After waiting for six days in Delhi, on June 28 Brigadier Surinder Singh submitted a letter, marked 29734/SS/CONFD listing his grievances, along with a file containing documents. A receipt for these documents was issued by General Malik's staff upon the Brigadier insisting on it.

Back in Srinagar, the Brigadier learned on July 2 that he was to be posted as the Andhra Sub-Area Commander based in Secunderabad. Before his luggage had arrived in Secunderabad, fresh orders came on July 17 shifting him to Ranchi. This transfer is alleged to have been prompted by fears that the Brigadier planned to open an investigation into the denotification of a large tract of Army land in Secunderabad, parts of which several senior officers subsequently purchased. Whatever the truth, a frustrated Brigadier Surinder Singh now applied for a month's leave, which was granted on July 21. Part of the leave period was later terminated, and he was told to proceed to Ranchi by August 22. This posting too was withdrawn. Now the Brigadier was ordered to report back to the 3 Infantry Division in Leh. When he asked why this was being done, he was reported to have received only vague verbal assurances that he was required to assist in an enquiry.

Pushed to the wall by these quick-fire transfers, Brigadier Surinder Singh moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The petition makes clear his belief that he was being punished for doing his job well, but none of the confidential correspondence on security issues is appended to the legal document. "On account of the truthful stand taken by him in various communications addressed to Chief of Army Staff," the petition stated, "the authorities are feeling scared and are wanting to somehow deal with the petitioner in an unfair, inequitable and unjust manner." The petition also stated: "The petitioner also perceives serious threat to his life, and his life is in danger." Brigadier Surinder Singh's counsel, military law expert R.S. Randhawa, later withdrew the petition, but has been granted liberty to approach the High Court in the event of the Brigadier facing any persecution in Leh.

That is more than a little likely. The Leh inquiry into the leakage of official documents to the media has been constituted by the 3 Infantry Division's Budhwar, an officer about whom Brigadier Surinder Singh has complained in writing and who is at the centre of the Kargil controversy. Led by Deputy General Officer Commanding Ashok Duggal, Budhwar's immediate subordinate, and made up of Brigadiers C.M. Nayar and Devinder Singh, the inquiry will have little credibility since its members will in effect be judging their own cause Indeed, Brigadier Surinder Singh's logical demand that others with access to the documents the Army claims he has leaked also be examined – individuals including the Army chief and his staff – has so far met with no response. "The whole inquiry is a travesty of every principle of the law and the basic principles of natural justice," says Randhawa. "It is a vindictive attempt to persecute Brigadier Singh, and it has no legal legitimacy."

The witch-hunt launched against Brigadier Surinder Singh illustrates official responses to investigative disclosures on the political and defence establishment's handling of the Kargil war. Instead of welcoming scrutiny which would lead to a meaningful examination of just what went wrong and why, there has been a flat denial of the truth. The objective of inquiry ought to be to ensure that Kargil-type debacles do not recur. Instead, protecting top officers and their political patrons has, it would seem, become the defence establishment's principal concern. ■

India, Israel and Arab fears

Arab countries express their unhappiness over alleged military and nuclear cooperation between India and Israel.

JOHN CHERIAN

FOR the first time, the Arab League has alleged "military and nuclear cooperation" between Israel and India and warned against its consequences for the Arab world. In a statement issued on August 24, the League's deputy secretary-general, Mohammed Zakaria Ishmail, said that the organisation had evidence to prove it. He, however, refused to reveal it.

Ever since reports appeared about Israel's sale to India of an advanced electronic warfare system, suspicions have been further aroused in the Arab world about the extent of Indo-Israeli cooperation. The United States is also unhappy with Israel's sale of high-tech military equipment to India. It is possible that some details of the alleged nexus between India and Israel in the nuclear field have been supplied by U.S.

New Delhi was prompt to issue a denial. "We would like to emphasise that while we have good relations with Israel, there is no nuclear cooperation between the two countries," said an External Affairs Ministry spokesman. He emphasised that India's support to the Arab and Palestinian causes "continues unchanged". An External Affairs Ministry official said: "India's relationship with the Arab world is based on close people-to-people contacts and cooperation in the political and economic fields."

Although Arab diplomats in New Delhi are sceptical about the Indo-Israeli nuclear links, they are suspicious of the emerging security and military relationship. They do not appear to be convinced by the terse denials of the External Affairs Ministry every time the issue is raised. Arab diplomats complain that officials of the Ministry refuse to shed any light on the nature of the security relationship.

Suspicions about the growing links were reinforced after India's nuclear tests of May 1998. According to Indian officials, "motivated propaganda" was generated soon after the tests suggesting that India and Israel had worked closely in developing India's nuclear weapons capability. It was even suggested in some quarters that of the five tests conducted by India, two were done on behalf of Israel.

The sudden visit of the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra, to Israel in the first week of September – a week after the Arab League's strong criticism of Indo-Israeli security links and a few days before polling was to start for the general elections in India – further fuelled suspicions in the Arab world. Mishra, who is also the National Security Adviser, was accompanied by the Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Nareshwar Dayal. The Foreign Office, however, insisted that Mishra's trip was part of the frequent diplomatic exchanges between the two countries.

Besides, the visit took place at a time when the Israelis and the Palestinians were engaged in protracted negotiations (story on page 51). The new Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, has so far exhibited the same hawkish propensities of his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, and appears to be trying his best to stall the Wye River accord. Indian officials, however, say that Barak is keen on further strengthening ties with India.



ANU PUSHKARNA

Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister.

Before joining the government, Mishra was one of the leading proponents of closer security and defence cooperation between India and Israel. The Kargil conflict gave the caretaker government an excuse to go in for a full-fledged defence relationship with Israel. Arab governments are wondering why the Indian government is so keen to buy high-technology equipment, surveillance systems and force multipliers from Israel, when they can be acquired from other countries such as Russia, France and the U.S. at more competitive rates.

The day before it conducted its own nuclear test, Pakistan had alleged that India intended to destroy Pakistan's nuclear facilities with the help of Israeli aircraft. There were reports in the Western media that Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) chief A.P.J. Abdul Kalam had visited Israel thrice. While Indian officials insist that Kalam visited Israel only once, Arab diplomats maintain that he visited Israel twice – in 1996 and 1997. Indian officials say that such "baseless" allegations about Indo-Israeli cooperation are probably Pakistan-inspired. Reports about Kalam's alleged visits to Israel first surfaced in *The Times*, London.

Several of the newspaper reports that appeared in the West, stressing on Indo-Israeli nuclear cooperation, were written by Indian security analysts. Brahma Chellaney, who is now on the National Security Advisory Board, wrote an article in *The Washington Times*, a few weeks after the Pokhran-II tests, giving certain details about Indo-Israeli cooperation. Chellaney, in fact, argued for an open strategic alliance between India and Israel on the lines of the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership. He went on to specify certain Indo-Israeli joint projects in the area

	STUDENT NAME	PLACE	RANK
1	AMIT NEGI	DEHRADUN	2
2	ANIL KUMAR YADAV	BALAGHAT	5
3	KUNAL KUMAR	ROORKEE	6
4	SRIKAR M S	BANGALORE	7
5	VANDANA R	BANGALORE	11
6	PUNEET YADAV	AGRA	15
7	SHESHADRI V	BANGALORE	16
8	PUSHPENDRA RAJPUT	BIJNOR	19
9	RAHUL SHRIVASTAVA	ROURKELA	24
10	SYED ALI MURTAZA RIZVI	LUCKNOW	25
11	PAWAN KUMAR SHARMA	DELHI	30
12	LOPAMUDRA MOHANTY	CUTTACK	41
13	BIDHU SHEKHAR	DELHI	49
14	VEENA RAJ	KOLLAM	50
15	TIJU T	ALWAYE	59
16	ASHIMA NEB	NOIDA	67
17	MEERA SRIVASTAVA	LUCKNOW	71
18	SIBASH KABIRAJ	RANCHI	84
19	SUDHIR KUMAR	GHAZIABAD	89
20	SATYAPRIYA RAMAKRISHNA	HYDERABAD	98
21	SHOBHIT JAIN	INDORE	100
22	ROHIT GARG	LUCKNOW	114
23	KUMAR SUPRAVIN	CHENNAI	117
24	NAZLI JAHRI	ALIGARH	135
25	SYED MOHD ANDALEEB RAZI	RAEBARELI	150
26	ANURADHA SINGH	GURGAON	152
27	DHRUBAJYOTI SENGUPTA	HOWRAH	163
28	MONICA SINGH	PATNA	175
29	AMARPREET DUGGAL	AMBALA	179
30	JUSTIN MOHAN J	TRICHY	183
31	FREDERICK ROY KHARKONGOR	SHILLONG	186
32	NEELAKANTA REDDY C	SECUNDERABAD	208
33	SHEENA SANDHU	DELHI	211
34	VIKRAM S KULKARNI	BELGAUM	219
35	NITIN KUMAR YADAV	HYDERABAD	220
36	VENKATESH T N	CHENNAI	227
37	VINAY HANDE	BANGALORE	233
38	YASHASVI YADAV	LUCKNOW	237
39	WABANG JAMIR	DIMAPUR	250
40	ANURAG CHATRATH	DELHI	261
41	VINOD BHATIA	LUDHIANA	262
42	RAJENDRA PRATAP SINGH	GHAZIABAD	271
43	ASHUTOSH AGNIHOTRI	KANPUR	277
44	MADHUP VYAS	DELHI	280
45	MOLLY BOSE	JABALPUR	282
46	MANISHA BANSAL	BATHINDA	283
47	KUSHAL VASHIST	PALAMPUR	284
48	NIDHI MANI TRIPATHI	GORAKHPUR	287
49	PRACHI MISRA	DELHI	302
50	SONALI RAMESH PANKSHE	PUNE	304
51	PANKAJ K UKE	AHMEDABAD	359
52	DEEPAK M DAMOR	VADODARA	361
53	TANMAYA BEHERA	BHUBANESHWAR	363
54	VIJI M R	TRIVANDRUM	366
55	NIPUNA A CHAUHAN	AHMEDABAD	376
56	JAYASHREE S BHOJ	DELHI	385
57	BASANT SWARUP	KANPUR	401
58	TEMJENWAPANG AO	DELHI	452
59	FOLAN JOHN	DELHI	466

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of defence research, including missile guidance technology and electronic warfare and intelligence technology. Quoting from Indian publications, he said that covert cooperation had existed between India and Israel in the nuclear and missile fields for two decades.

In July, on a visit to Israel, Jasjit Singh, the Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses was quoted in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* as saying that India and Israel had a joint role in fighting "Islamic terrorism".

The Arab nations suggest that in order to allay their fears and suspicions, the first thing India needs to do is to lift the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the dealings between New Delhi and Tel Aviv.

Important Arab countries are worried about the growing defence links between New Delhi and Tel Aviv. One Arab diplomat said that Israel was trying to make an all-out bid to get lucrative defence projects by playing on India's security concerns and threat perceptions. Diplomats of these countries say that Israel's proposals about fencing India's borders with Pakistan in Kashmir and Punjab, besides other anti-terrorist measures, are only a ploy to sell arms. According to informed sources, avionics for India's airborne surveillance platform has been ordered from Israel.This will be integrated into a Russian aircraft.

Indian officials, however, assert that India's defence ties with Israel are limited to procurement. A senior Foreign Ministry official said: "We buy everything off the shelf. India does not contribute to the military capability of Israel by way of supply of defence software or hardware or joint production of hardware. There has been no cooperation whatsoever in the field of nuclear and missile technologies." A few years ago, there were reports that India and Israel were planning to manufacture jointly the Kfir jet fighters and the Arrow missiles. According to Arab sources, the high costs involved, coupled with U.S. pressure on Israel, prevented this project from taking off.

Jane's Defense Weekly reported last year that India and Israel were cooperating in the area of military intelligence and that Israeli spy satellites were providing India with information relating to Pakistan. In return, the report said, India allowed Israeli military intelligence experts "to undertake missions on Indian territory". Indian officials said that these allegations were baseless. They pointed out that India had its own indigenous satellite fabrication and launch vehicle programme and that its remote-sensing capabilities were among the most advanced in the world.

Indian officials also dismissed as "completely baseless" suggestions that India had permitted Israeli intelligence agents to work on Indian territory. India and Israel jointly set up a research fund in 1995, with each side contributing a $1.5 million each. Indian officials insist that the project had nothing to do with defence research, and that the funds have since dried up. Many people in the Arab world are, however, not fully convinced. One Arab official alleged that it was the American embargo on Israeli arms sales to India that had stopped the sale of pilotless reconnaissance planes to India.

Arab diplomats are of the opinion that the defence links between the two countries have a security and strategic dimension encompassing the entire region and could have an adverse impact on future relations between India and the Arab world. A diplomat said: "If sometime in the future, Israel, Turkey and India make a security pact, it would be a dangerous scenario for the Arab world. In the 1960s, the alliance between Iran, Ethiopia and Turkey was a great threat to the region".

Indian officials, on the other hand, say that there is no question of a strategic alliance between India and Israel and they have characterised the Arab League's accusations as "totally false and misleading". They point out that Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mousa had said that there was no cooperation between India and Israel. A senior official said that there was no commonality between the strategic perceptions of the two countries, and that India had always rejected military alliances and did not believe in setting up alliances or partnerships that may threaten or cause concern to other countries. He said that India's security and economic interests were tied with the countries of the Gulf. India receives $5 billion as remittances from Indians in the Gulf.

Some Indian officials have hinted that Egypt is, for its own reasons playing an important behind-the-scenes role in the whole issue. "Egypt wants to be the sole interlocutor on behalf of the Arabs as it thinks it is the big power in the region. It is also trying to play to the Islamic gallery", said an official. Another diplomat pointed out that the secretary-general of the Arab League, Abdul Maguid, is a former Foreign Minister of Egypt, but the deputy secretary-general, Mohamed Zakaria Ishmail, who prepared the report on Indo-Israeli nuclear cooperation, is a Syrian.

For their part, Arab diplomats claim that the people of their countries would be angered by persisting allegations about an Indo-Israeli defence cooperation. They feel that such cooperation, by implication, is against Arab interests. They say that nobody can object to India doing business with Israel but that it is a different matter when it comes to trading in military hardware. The general feeling is that India is taking the Arab world for granted. They point out that during the Kargil conflict, barring the initial exception of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, none of the Arab countries supported the Pakistani misadventure, despite the fact that Pakistan sent high-level delegations to most Arab capitals. India did not bother to present its case to the Arabs, confident as it was with the support it received from Washington.

Officials of Arab countries argue that the security of Arab nations is also a guarantee for the security of the Indian subcontinent. Israel, they say, can never come to India's rescue, as that country amounts to nothing without the U.S. They suggest that in order to allay Arab fears and suspicions, the first thing India needs to do is to lift the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the dealings between New Delhi and Tel Aviv. Arab countries, they say, have reasons to be worried if Abdul Kalam makes frequent visits to Israel and no explanations are given for this.

The fact that the Arab League has taken note of Indo-Israeli cooperation means that Arab countries have concluded that the relationship has entered uncharted territory. An Arab diplomat said: "As a sovereign state, India has every right to do what it wants, but it should not endanger the future of the region". Israel may have a close relationship with China, but India's geographical proximity to the Arab world gives a dangerous strategic connotation to any Indo-Israeli links. ■

Furore over transshipment

The Awami League Government in Bangladesh faces Opposition resistance to its proposal to offer transshipment facilities for Indian goods.

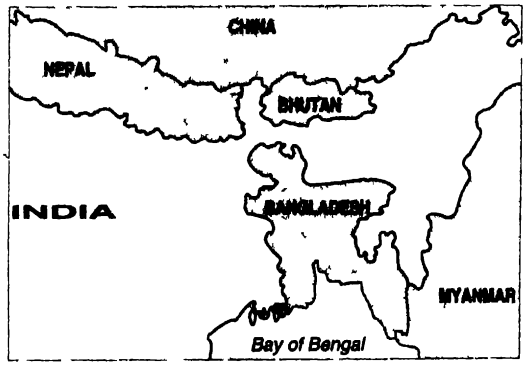
HAROON HABIB
in Dhaka

THE Awami League's struggles to create a secular and civil society in Bangladesh have always run contrary to the preferences of the country's elite. The party, which led and won the liberation war against Pakistan, with support from India, is now in the eye of another storm. Forever criticised for its supposed proximity to India, it now faces fierce opposition over a proposal to offer transshipment facilities to goods en route to the northeastern States of India.

The idea of transshipment of Indian goods through Bangladesh territory was endorsed in principle at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on July 28, primarily in view of the economic benefits it would bring to the country. An official announcement said that a Joint Experts Committee would examine the feasibility of local carriers undertaking such transshipment.

The Cabinet decision kicked off stormy debates and protests. Although there was no mention of "transit" or "corridor", the Opposition alleged that the Government had agreed to give India a "corridor", jeopardising national sovereignty. The Opposition alleged that the Cabinet decision had followed Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Dhaka on June 19 in connection with the inauguration of the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service.

The Opposition, which includes the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the Jatiya Party led by former President Gen. H.M. Ershad, and the fundamentalist parties, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Oikya Jote, launched a major offensive against the Government. They organised a 30-hour hartal and demonstrations across the country on August 2.



Although the Awami League took a principled stand to open up the economy in tune with the changing global situation, some political commentators believe that Sheikh Hasina virtually dropped a bombshell ahead of the general elections by agreeing to examine the transshipment proposal. Opposition politicians, particularly those who are known for their anti-India stance, were waiting for a chance to collar the Awami League. Branding the Government an "Indian stooge", they alleged that since returning to power in mid-1996 the Awami League had acted only in India's interest. They accused the Government of compromising national interest by enter-



PAVEL RAHMAN / AP

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia leads a procession in Chittagong on August 23.

ing into "unequal agreements" with India.

Khaleda Zia declared that all "unequal treaties" with India would be scrapped when she came to power. She also accused India of masterminding the assassination of her husband, President Gen. Ziaur Rahman, during an army rebellion in 1981. When an Indian spokesperson termed her accusations "untrue" and "false and outrageous", she denied the press reports that had quoted her. Ershad and another Opposition leader, Prof. Golam Azam, alleged that the Sheikh Hasina Government's policies were designed to serve the purpose of India.



PAVEL RAHMAN / AP

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the grave of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15.

THE Awami League, which led a movement in the 1960s for the cause of secular Bengali nationhood, relentlessly fought against the military rulers of what was then East Pakistan. It achieved independence for the country and at the same time many enemies for itself, mainly among pro-military politicians, religious fundamentalists and anti-secular forces. These groups have now forged a strong unity, and some of them still believe in the "One Pakistan" concept. Some of them dream of making Bangladesh a "Muslim Bangla" or an Islamic state, as the Taliban did in Afghanistan. Anti-India slogans have become louder. Newspapers that are progressive and that supported Liberation warned the Government that the Pakistani intelligence network in Bangladesh had become stronger than ever before.

When the Awami League returned to power 21 years after it was forced out following the assassination of the country's founding father, 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it alarmed two political sections – anti-Bangladesh forces and the beneficiaries of the coup in 1975. Sheikh Hasina's initiative to change existing political patterns and curb communalism added to their worries.

The Awami League also took some significant decisions with regard to improving relations with India. Bangladesh signed the landmark Farakka Barrage Treaty in December 1996 to share Ganga waters with India. Another agreement sought to restore peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), which witnessed tribal insurgency. The treaty completed the process of repatriation of more than 50,000 tribal refugees from Tripura and led to the opening of a direct bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta. When India and Pakistan try to normalise relations, many anti-India forces in Bangladesh either welcome the move or remain silent. Yet they are reluctant to accept the improved relations between Bangladesh and India.

However, the measures taken by the Government have been welcomed by a large section of the people, including business leaders and intellectuals. This group believes that Bangladesh should not tread the anti-India path and instead begin a new chapter of regional cooperation.

The transshipment issue is likely to have an impact on the general elections, which may be scheduled for end-2000 or early 2001. Observers do not see any possibility of negotiations between the Opposition and the Government. Although the Opposition had demanded a discussion in Parliament, it boycotted the current session from August 29, when the ruling party presented the transshipment issue for discussion. It has planned a siege on Dhaka's Central Secretariat on September 12.

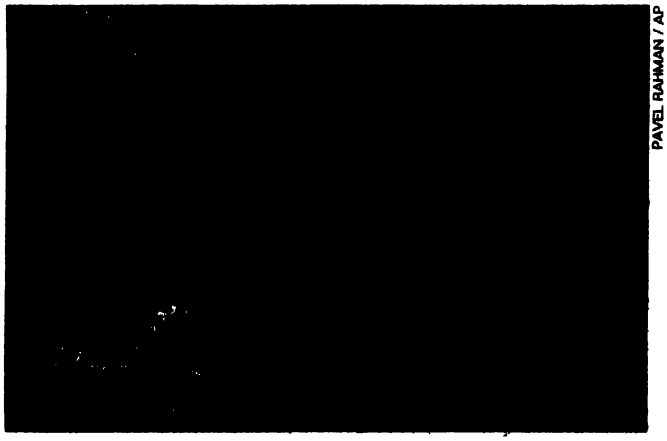
The Opposition alliance is trying to bring the Government down "through a mass upsurge" on the questions of "transit" or "corridor". It will try to capitalise on the transshipment issue in the elections, which will be held under a neutral caretaker government.

It is not clear what the ruling party will do to counter the Opposition onslaught. The ruling party believes that one reason for agitation is to protect the "killers" of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – the death sentences awarded to them by a lower court (*Frontline*, December 4, 1998) are awaiting the Supreme Court's approval.

Awami League general secretary and senior Minister Zillur Rahman observed: "Begum Khaleda Zia, in cooperation with the anti-Liberation forces, is trying to implement the blueprint of her late husband Gen. Ziaur Rahman, who tried to make Bangladesh a neo-Pakistan." He added: "Patriotic people will not allow them to do so."

President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Abdul Awal Mintoo said: "Transit will not only bring foreign exchange for Bangladesh, it will also develop our transport sector and benefit our economy." Other business leaders said that allowing transit or transshipment would reduce the widening trade gap with India.

Several smaller, Left-leaning parties, including the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), the Jatiya Party (Mizan-Manjoo) faction, the National Awami Party (NAP) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh, say that the transshipment issue should not be viewed as a political one, but should be seen in the economic context of the changing global situation.



PAVEL RAHMAN / AP

Activists of the Bangladesh National Party at work on August 18.

However, several leading newspapers, particularly the more independent ones, projected the proposal as "a dangerous treaty undermining Bangladesh's interests". The Government has constituted a 12-member task force to examine the benefits from the transshipment.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed produced documents to show that the Khaleda Zia Government had signed an agreement in 1995 for the transshipment of Indian goods through Bangladesh. Tofail Ahmed, who has invited the Opposition for an open discussion on the issue at any place, including the floor of Parliament, said: "Earlier the Indian goods were supposed to be transshipped through Bangladesh by Indian carriers, but we have decided to use our carriers, considering the national interest."

The Government says that Bangladesh and India have agreements on the use of railways and waterways and partial land transit is already in operation. Bangladesh also has an agreement with Nepal for railway transit for 218 km through Indian territory. Tofail Ahmed said: "Transshipment by road is also not new. It is already there. We are negotiating to expand it, protecting our own interest."

The Government says that Bangladeshi trucks have been carrying Indian goods transshipped through riverways from Sherpur and Chattak to the border under the 1995 agreement. Negotiations are also in the final stage to facilitate the passage of Indian goods from Chandpur to Agartala. According to World Bank and Asian Development Bank statistics, Bangladesh may be able to earn taka 2,000 crore a year and employ 2.5 lakh workers if India is granted transshipment facilities. Some quarters, however, doubt these figures.

The Government's arguments have not convinced the Opposition. "We have taken an oath on the blood of our comrades to resist the Government's evil design. If necessary, we will give more lives," said Khaleda Zia, who led a huge procession of vehicles across the country on August 26.

The Opposition alliance also sees the transshipment issue as part of an "Indian design" to suppress the "freedom struggle" in the northeastern States of India. "We can't allow India to transship its troops and weapons through Bangladesh. We can't make our country the target of the northeastern Indian States, which are fighting for their independence," she said. ■

On the Wye track

Follow-up on an agreement between Israel and Palestine over the implementation of the Wye accord is expected to be slow, with sudden spurts of activity in between.

KESAVA MENON
in Bahrain

"I HAVE to say that these people intend to implement the agreements," Saeb Eerekat, one of the principal Palestinian negotiators, said the other day about his Israeli counterparts. This kind of language has not been heard for years in West Asia, and it shows that beneath all the obfuscation and dramatics on several fronts, some progress is indeed being made here. However, crunch-time in the Israeli-Palestinian track of the negotiations is nearing, and while sudden spurts forward are possible, much of the movement will be slow and grinding.

For the Palestinians, the situation is quite favourable in some ways and not so comfortable in others. On the positive side they enjoy the kind of relationship with the United States administration which could not have been dreamt of a few years ago. A sympathetic President will continue to occupy the White House for a year and more and Bill Clinton would like to round off a process in which his administration has invested so much time and energy. This President cannot seek re-election and does not therefore need to keep looking over his shoulders at potentially hostile domestic lobbies. On the other hand, his wife seems ready to seek a Senate seat from a constituency where the Jewish lobby is dominant and this will inhibit him from exerting too much pressure on Israel.

But the point, as brought out by Eerekat's statement, is that the need for such U.S. pressure appears to have receded. Although no Israeli Prime Minister can possibly say it in so many words, Ehud Barak, the present incumbent, appears to have realised the legitimacy of the Palestinian case. Unlike his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu, for whom negotiations and signed agreements were mere tools to delay and obstruct a settlement being reached, Barak seems genuinely interested in making a deal. Barak is no push-over, and sometimes seems overly eager to prove this point. But from some relatively unnoticed measures he has taken, it is fairly clear that he does want to settle Israel's disputes with the Palestinians.

While Barak's track record and the content of his election campaign did indicate that he would be different from Netanyahu, the months since his electoral victory in May have not been an anxiety-free period for the Palestinians. About the only firm promise that Barak made as soon as he won was that he would withdraw Israeli troops from the enclave which they occupy in south Lebanon. The obvious implication of that statement was that Barak was keen to make a deal with Syria. When Syrian President Hafez al Assad responded with alacrity, bestowing unprecedented praise on the Israeli leader, the Palestinians had reason to fear that they would be left in limbo as Barak switched attention to the Syrian track of the negotiations.

Israel believes that the disciplined and firmly-led Syria presents a real threat to its well-being. In contrast, as Barak has himself noted, the threat from the Palestinian sub-state is "ludicrous". While a deal with Syria would be valuable for the Israelis from the security point of view and also because it would help stanch the bleeding wound that their occupation of south Lebanon has turned out to be, a final settlement with the Palestinians would at best bring an end to terrorist attacks. It is also widely recognised that a settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will not necessarily bring an end to the attacks. But security arrangements to deal with this threat are in place and they will only have to be continued. In terms of relative benefits Israel has more to gain by making a deal with Syria.

Assad has not forgiven Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (as he did not forgive Egypt's Anwar Sadat or Jordan's King



JACQUELINE LARMA / AP

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.



ADEL HANA / AP

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Hussein earlier) for breaking Arab unity and making a separate deal with Israel. Although Assad continued to insist that a settlement with Israel would only be possible if the Jewish state withdrew from "all" occupied Arab territories (that is, Palestinian as well as Syrian and Lebanese territory), he would not have been unhappy if Arafat was sidelined in these negotiations. In other words, the Syrians would not have been interested in handing out any sops to Arafat if Israel turned around and made the leadership in Damascus its main interlocutor in the negotiations.

During the initial phase of Barak's prime ministership, the Palestinians made frantic efforts to ensure that their fears were not borne out. They received a lot of sympathy from a U.S. administration which, annoyed with Netanyahu's intransigence, had drawn closer to the Palestinian leadership. The U.S. administration would have also realised that its diplomatic objectives would not be served if a negotiating process into which it had invested so much was side-tracked and substituted by another set of negotiations where it might not have a central role.

Besides U.S. advice or pressure, there were other factors which inhibited Barak from following a policy of ignoring the Palestinians while he settled with the Syrians. There was always the probability that the Palestinians would explode, receiving wide international sympathy in the process, if Israel were suddenly to begin ignoring their interests. When Barak made his promise about an early withdrawal from Lebanon, some Israeli analysts had predicted that his policy towards a settlement with the Arabs would be on the following lines.

As a first step Barak would make a strong positive gesture to the Palestinians, and having thus quietened them for a while, move firmly on the Syria-Lebanon track of the negotiations. Once he was able to secure an agreement which would enable him to pull out his troops from Lebanon, Barak would have the necessary domestic support that would enable him to make bold decisions on the very difficult issues that are to be discussed with the Palestinians in the "final status" talks – the future of Jerusalem, the return of the refugees, statehood, borders, Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and so on. It is too early to say whether this prognosis will be borne out in full because the first part of it – the making of a strong positive gesture to the Palestinians – has yet to be fulfilled.

One very necessary measure which Israel is treaty-bound to take, and which would also convey a clear positive signal to the Palestinians, is the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum signed in October 1998. Under the terms of the Memorandum, Israel was to hand over another 13 per cent of the West Bank to full or partial Palestinian control (in addition, that is, to the 27 per cent over which the Palestinians already have some authority), release about 650 prisoners from Israeli jails, open a safe corridor between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and so on. Netanyahu, who signed the deal and got the Palestinians to agree to tougher security measures in exchange, transferred a mere 2 per cent of additional West Bank territory and then reneged on the deal, accusing the Palestinians of not fulfilling their security pledges.

Barak was not happy about the Wye Memorandum to start with. It provides detailed maps of the land which is to be included in the three-phase transfer process. While most of the land to be included in the second phase of the transfer apparently does not pose much of a problem (from the Israelis' security point of view) portions included in the third phase would impose a tighter squeeze on isolated West Bank Jewish settlements. Territories under Palestinian control would encroach closely on these settlements or access roads to them.

One way out of the dilemma would have been for Barak to see the writing on the wall and announce that these isolated settlements were not viable and would be closed down. However, he probably lacks sufficient domestic support to enable him to take such a measure so early, and in any case the Israelis argue, and correctly from a legalistic point of view, that the issue of settlements cannot be taken up in this current "interim phase of the peace process". Barak has tried to get the Palestinians to a third phase transfer which would be closer in time to the start of the final status negotiations. The calculation appears to be that some idea about the future of these isolated settlements will begin to firm up by then or at least that by then the majority of the Israeli public would have come to recognise by then that these settlements would not survive a final peace deal.

There were several other indications that Barak was not following a Netanyahu-esque policy of "agree and cheat". According to reports in Israeli newspapers, although Barak was not happy about some of the land transfers provided for in the Memorandum, he was not rejecting Palestinian demands outright but suggesting creative options. For instance, he was reported to have offered parcels of land which would have increased the areas under contiguous Palestinian control in lieu of land in the Judean desert which Israel has agreed to transfer but would like to retain for military purposes. Other reports that Barak has significantly increased the quota for Palestinians seeking employment in Israel also indicate that the new Prime Minister has brought a refreshingly different approach to the issue.

Palestinians, who became extremely suspicious about the Israeli leadership during Netanyahu's tenure, would most

naturally have thought that they were being confronted with more of the same old thing. They had been promised a certain amount of land in the Memorandum and they were determined to get it well before the start of the final status talks. Over most of August there was much confusion, compounded by contradictory statements, about the existence of an agreement on principle with regard to the parcels of land identified for transfer and the time-table for the two-phase transfers. By the end of the month it appeared safe to say that the two sides appeared close to clinching a deal.

There were also differences between the two sides over the identities of the prisoners to be released. Netanyahu, true to his style, had released ordinary criminals instead of political prisoners. For long Israel had maintained that it would not release any Palestinian prisoner who had "blood on their hands". As Eerekat pointed out, this was a rather bizarre position to take, considering the fact that the two sides have not exactly been playing soft-ball for the past fifty years. Confusion continued to dog the issue till the last moment, but it appeared that Israel had significantly diluted its position and that it had come to a point where it would retain in custody only Islamic militants who had actually killed Israelis.

Disagreements over the specifics obscured to an extent the contrasting strategic approaches of the two sides. The Palestinians, being the weaker party, had come to rely on the U.S. "facilitators" (who had in course of time become first mediators and then arbitrators) to extract concessions from the Israelis. Almost from the outset, Barak declared that he wanted the U.S. to revert to its "facilitating" role and insisted that bilateralism be the leitmotif of the negotiations with the Palestinians. He therefore threatened that he would implement the Memorandum as originally conceived, and to the detriment of Palestinian interests, if they did not accept the modifications which were so close to being mutually worked out.

What these contrasting approaches meant in real terms was that the Palestinians wanted the negotiations over the implementation of the Wye Memorandum to drag on till U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in the region and helped finalise the deal. The Israelis, for their part, were equally determined to ensure that Albright's only contribution would be to grace the signing ceremony with her presence. ■

A summit in Central Asia

At a significant session, the Shanghai Group of Five nations discuss diplomatic and political initiatives pertaining to regional security.

JOHN CHERIAN

BISHKEK, the capital of the Central Asian Republic of Kyrgyzstan, hosted the fourth summit of the "Shanghai Group of Five" on August 24 and 25. Leaders of the group, which comprises China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, reaffirmed their commitment to establishing durable peace and stability in Asia. The main goal of the association is sub-regional security. All participants of the summit came out strongly in favour of establishing a nuclear-free zone in the region. The Bishkek Declaration, issued at the end of the summit, focussed on the importance of jointly fighting international terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious fundamentalism.

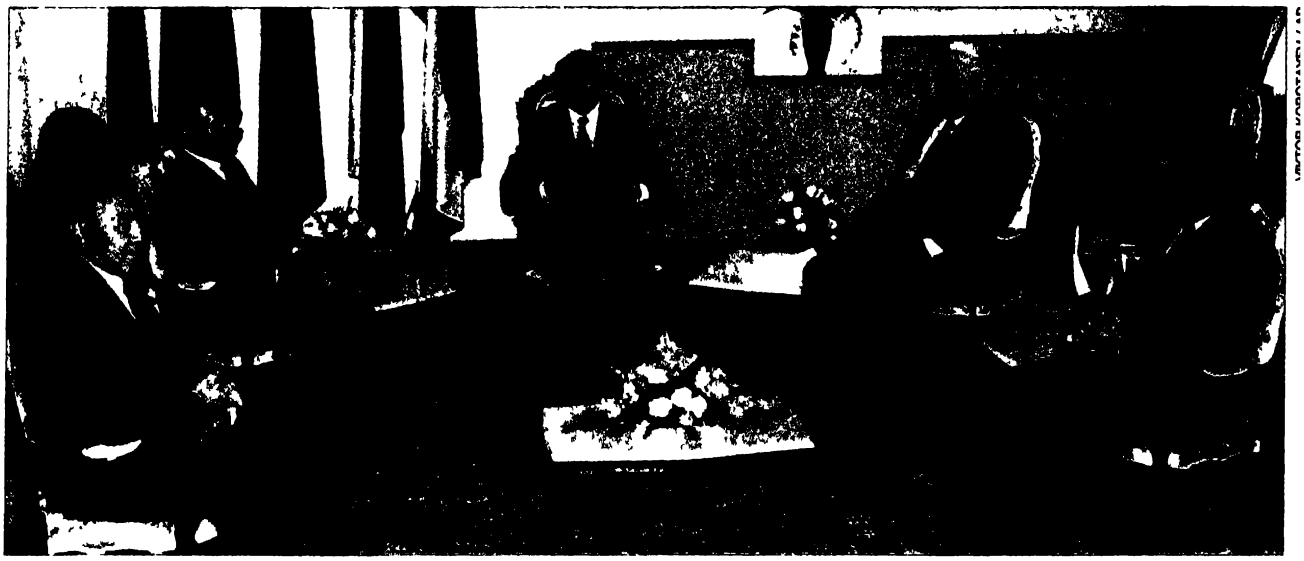
Since the group first met in Shanghai in April 1996, it has come forward with important diplomatic and political initiatives. At Shanghai, the five nations signed an agreement on military matters and on confidence-building measures on their borders. At the Moscow summit in 1997, they agreed on mutual arms reductions along their common borders. The two agreements have provided a basis for military detente in the Asia-Pacific region. The borders between China and the Central Asian republics have been tranquil and most of the territorial disputes in this vast area of the Asian continent have been settled.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin said at the latest summit that the common goal of the association was to create a unique zone of peace along the 10,000-km-long border shared by the five countries. All the leaders stressed that the grouping was not a political or military bloc aimed at any state in particular. Some of the countries in the grouping, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have good relations with the United States. But China and Russia have openly aired concerns about the U.S' bid to redraw the geopolitical map of the world in its favour and its growing tendency to trample on the sovereignty of nations.

Coming just months after the Western aggression on Yugoslavia and in the context of continuing air strikes on Iraq by U.S. and British planes, the Bishkek talks touched on these and other important global security problems. Yeltsin's statement that he was ready for a "battle against Westerners" may have been hyperbole but his remark that "some countries obviously strive to create a world order suitable only to them, disregarding the objective trends of multipolarity" struck a chord. Senior Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministry officials have in recent months vociferously criticised the U.S. for using force in many parts of the world without the sanction of the United Nations Security Council.

Russia and China are worried about some emerging trends in the region, especially the creation of a U.S.-Japan-South Korea security triangle. They are also critical of Washington's plans to revise the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and the new plans being drafted in Washington and Tokyo to set up regional anti-missile defence systems. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov emphasised that the Bishkek Declaration reflected the general international mood in favour of the restoration of a multi-polar world and a rejection of Washington's claims that it was the sole remaining superpower. The Bishkek Declaration specifically stated that "multi-polarity is the general trend in the development of the contemporary world, facilitating the long-term stability of the international situation".

Another important paragraph in the declaration talks of "the determination not to allow the use of their countries' territory for organising any activities detrimental to the sovereignty, security and public order in any of the five nations." This point was included, according to



(From left) President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, President Jiang Zemin of China, President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan, President Boris Yeltsin of Russia and President Imomaly Rakhmonov of Tajikistan at the Bishkek summit.

observers, at the insistence of China, which is embroiled in a diplomatic spat with the U.S. on Taiwan.

For China, Taiwan is one of its own provinces, and it is angry with U.S' continued encouragement of Taiwan's attempts to secede formally. The U.S. also continues to be the main supplier of arms to Taiwan. Taiwan is also trying to buy influence among the cash-strapped countries in the region. There is also a suspicion that the Uygur separatists in China are getting support from some influential sections in Washington.

One of the highlights of the summit was the meeting between Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Their meeting, according to media reports, exceeded the scheduled time. The two leaders gave top priority to the dangers posed by the anti-missile defence system being planned by Washington and Tokyo. According to the Russian media, the two leaders also expressed their "serious concern" about the situation in the sphere of nuclear weapons and agreed to cooperate to stop nuclear proliferation. Before the start of the summit, there were reports that Beijing would bring up the issue of nuclear proliferation in South Asia.

The Central Asian countries had expressed their misgivings about the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan when the Shanghai Five met in Almaty last year. However, at Bishkek, open criticism was confined to Washington's stated intention of deploying the anti-missile systems. The Chinese and Russian positions on the issue coincide: the two countries are of the opinion that such a move would sound the death knell of the ABM treaty, besides giving a fillip to nuclear proliferation and bringing to an end the trend towards global demilitarisation. The last thing Moscow wants at this juncture is to spend its scarce resources on another arms race.

Washington has been ingeniously trying to claim that the projected anti-missile defence shield is planned only against North Korean missiles (*Frontline*, April 9). Moscow and Beijing, however, dismiss Washington's threat perceptions about North Korea: they argue that given the dire economic straits North Korea is in, it poses no real threat to powerful countries like the U.S. and Japan. Moscow and Beijing are convinced that Washington is using North Korea as a bogey for its far-reaching strategic ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region.

Ivanov told the media in Bishkek that during their one-on-one talks, Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin explored avenues "for further practical strategic partnership between Russia and China in the international arena". He said that the two leaders reaffirmed their viewpoint that the future world order should be multi-polar. Beijing and Moscow, meanwhile, let it be known that they too had contingency plans in case Washington and Tokyo went ahead and deployed new missiles.

Another worry for the Shanghai Five is the growing threat posed by fundamentalist groupings inside their own territories and in the immediate vicinity. Russia has virtually lost Chechnya to the forces of religious extremism and is currently engaged in a fierce fight to keep these forces at bay in Dagestan. Kyrgyztan is also facing a serious challenge from Islamic groups. In fact, even as the summit was in progress, about 1,000 Islamic militants seized Kyrgyz hostages in the mountainous southern region and grabbed international headlines. Among those seized were four Japanese geologists and a senior Kyrgyz army official. The Kyrgyz Government is finding it increasingly difficult to subdue the Islamists, who have a strong following in the Fergana valley in neighbouring Uzbekistan. Beijing is worried about its own Islamists, who have been active in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous district. China wants to coordinate with its neighbours in its efforts to combat the separatists. There are an estimated 200,000 Uygurs in Kazakhstan and about 50,000 in Kyrgyztan.

The Shanghai Five are also concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, which has had a direct impact on Tajikistan, a member of the grouping. Tajikistan's politics has been volatile since the Taliban consolidated its hold over Afghanistan. It is only the presence of elite Russian troops on the border with Afghanistan that has prevented a bloody Islamist takeover of the country. In fact, all the countries in the grouping have been adversely affected by the developments in the region. Along with its fundamentalist version of Islam, Afghanistan also exports guns and drugs in huge quantities. The Bishkek Declaration in its very first paragraph emphasises the importance of joint resistance to international terrorism, drug-trafficking, smuggling of arms and "manifestations of national separatism and religious extremism". ■

Press under pressure

The issue of the Pakistan government's continuing attempts to muzzle the press is linked to the wider issue of democracy and good governance, freedom of expression and tolerance.

BEENA SARWAR

RETIRED Group Captain Cecil Choudhry relates the tale of the enraged man who pounded his three-year-old son's fingers with a hammer the boy had used to dent the father's new car. His rage subsided, the boy was rushed to hospital. The crushed fingers had to be amputated. The father was at the son's bedside when the boy emerged from anaesthesia. "Daddy, I'm sorry I hurt your new car," he said. "But when will my fingers grow back?"

While this story is relevant to many aspects of society, Cecil Choudhry recently related it during a talk on the pounding the press has taken from successive governments in Pakistan, especially the present one. And the question left lingering is, will the fingers grow back... or is the damage irreparable?

The issue is, of course, linked to the wider issue of democracy and good governance, freedom of expression and tolerance of criticism. As Choudhry said in his talk, it is the responsibility of the press to hold anyone in public office accountable. If someone has anything to hide, he or she should not be holding public office. If the press is allowed to carry out this role, there would be no need for an Ehtesaab (accountability) bureau.

But those in power are invariably so thin-skinned and quick to take offence that they refuse to tolerate criticism, especially valid criticism. Some of them have been fortunate enough to have advisers such as the lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan, who can prevail upon them to avoid heavy-handed tactics against offending publications and journalists and take recourse instead to legal measures. Others, such as the present lot, are surrounded by sycophants who know that what will make the masters happy is to suggest, and follow through with, extreme measures.

The damage thus caused is immense. For one thing, these measures are invariably clumsy and backfire, blackening the government's and the country's image further. Secondly, and more dangerously for the fledgling democracy, each blow tends to make publishers and newspaper owners more cautious. In a situation where the newspaper business is also an industry, there is much that the government can do to punish it. The industry's employees too – journalists, reporters and analysts – begin to be more careful about what they write. A kind of self-censorship creeps in, which could be far more insidious and damaging than the press advice that used to trickle in to, sometimes flood, the news desks when Pakistan was governed not by a democratically elected government but by a military dictatorship. It was in August 1988 that the country saw the last of its most recent military dictators. But the country has not really seen the last of him; his legacy is far from dead. Zamir Niazi, in his well-documented book *Press in Chains* observed that repressive press laws and other measures had resulted in conformism going into our blood.

The dictum "people have the right to know" has been changed to "people should know only what the government wants the people to know", he wrote, at a time when the military dictator and his diktat were alive and well.

Today this observation still holds true. Recent examples of the government's attempts to muzzle the press include those employed to put pressure on the Jang group to get rid of reporters and editors who are seen as "undesirable" (*Frontline*, March 12, 1999). Towards this end attempts were made to arm-twist the owner by stopping the company's newsprint allowance and by reopening old tax cases. More recently, Najam Sethi, Editor, *The Friday Times*, was harassed and browbeaten, first by trying to pin a treason case on him and then by allowing a member of the ruling party to appeal to the Chief Election Commissioner on the basis of unproven charges against him. The application audaciously seeks to have Sethi's name deleted from the list of Muslim voters – not only an infringement on Sethi's rights as a citizen but also a move that impacts on the rights of all Pakistani citizens.

Those in power are so thin-skinned that they refuse to tolerate criticism... In a situation where the newspaper business is also an industry, there is much that the government can do to punish it.

Meanwhile, Maleeha Lodhi, Editor of *The News*, Rawalpindi, has been barred from writing in her own paper unless she mends her relationship with the government. This unofficial ban has been in place since April this year, apparently as a kind of compromise between the government and the Jang group following their clash.

At that time a request from the management not to write critical pieces under her own name for the time being had seemed to be a temporary measure, but she has not been allowed to write since then. There has been no official statement in this regard, nor has the government contradicted reports and comments appearing in other newspapers on the issue. Government officials privately fend off criticism by saying that it is a matter between Maleeha Lodhi and her publisher. But if that was the case, she would hardly have been entrusted with the task of bringing out an entire newspaper, including its editorial pages.

To a question why she does not resign, Lodhi replies that that is just what the government would like her to do. "Why should I make it easier for them?" she asks defiantly. Meanwhile, it is a bizarre situation in which an editor is pushed into writing for publications other than her own, in order to present her point of view with her own

byline although editorials written by her are printed in the same publication every day. She is sticking it out, but this kind of pressure does take its toll, and certainly it makes others more cautious. "Please don't quote me," one senior journalist told an international newsmagazine. "I don't want to end up like Najam Sethi."

There are other, more insidious, ways of bringing journalists under pressure, such as harassment by intelligence sleuths and anonymous callers. "When you start getting calls from intelligence agencies at your house, or you find unidentified cars parked outside, you do start being more careful in what you write or do," admits one reporter. These methods of intimidation are used regularly these days, as various journalists would testify, including Lodhi and Nadeem Malik, senior economic correspondent of *The News*, Rawalpindi, to name just two. In January 1999, on two successive nights, unidentified people tried to break into Malik's house, and then again during the day on February 15, 1999 at 11-30 a.m. On other occasions he has been chased and stopped, apparently by intelligence sleuths trying to interrogate him.

This pattern of official intimidation intensified following the publication of a number of Malik's stories on the state of Pakistan's economy, especially on Islamabad's problems with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). On successive nights starting July 13, 1999, Malik received anonymous telephone calls, after he was officially blacklisted by the Finance Ministry. He believes the offending story might have been an analysis on how economic weakness had forced Islamabad to bow to international pressure for the withdrawal of Kashmiri fighters from Kargil. Nadeem Malik apprehends that his personal safety is under threat. He fears that his house may be broken into as threats that he has received on the phone may translate into actions. Some journalists have simply dropped out of sight – stopped writing for the moment, or gone on well-deserved holidays abroad, removing themselves physically from high-pressure situations. Those who remain are conscious of the phenomenon of self-censorship, and of stories being killed, at least for the present. Some of these stories involve high-level corruption, but they cannot find their way into print right now. Journalists working outside the mainstream national media in smaller towns and cities face other kinds of risks.

What is needed at this point of time is introspection and openness, a clear-sighted examination of what is wrong and an open discussion on how to overcome the problems.

In July, the News Editor of a Sindhi daily, *Kawish*, was arrested by the Kotri police, forcing journalists to take to the streets in protest in Moro. As an editorial in *The News* (July 26, 1999) noted: "This was not an isolated incident. Reports of one or the other Sindhi daily or weekly being suspended and its editor taken into custody regularly appear in newspapers. The troubled city of Karachi... makes the job of journalists even more demanding as private mafias are as interested in getting a favourable press as the government. Elsewhere in the country, unless they cooperate with the administrative and political hierarchy, journalists at the local level are likely to face their wrath usually on the pretext of anti-state activities or one of the many laws used to curb the freedom of expression.

"The role of Pakistan's vernacular press, especially the Sindhi-language publications and small papers in many towns of Punjab, in giving voice to the people at the local level is little acknowledged. This small-town press has, by and large, been a messenger of authentic public sentiments at the grassroots. And doing this job scrupulously often means inviting the fury of local administrations and other segments whose interests are hurt by independent reporting and dissenting views."

Journalists in small towns know precisely what this fury can do, as Sikandar Bhutto, a senior reporter in Ghotki, testifies. He and a number of his colleagues in rural Sindh constantly face police harassment and have often been charged with false cases. Arrest in any of these cases can mean severe beatings and torture. One journalist recently lost hearing in his left ear because of police brutality.

It is hardly surprising that, as *The News* editorial put it, "the example of intolerance set at the national level has been impacting at the local level by fostering the same behaviour of officials towards journalists."

THE pattern of intimidation and intolerance is visible also in the government's dealings with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially since the introduction of the so-called Shariat Bill in 1998, which many of them have opposed and organised resistance to. Constitutional Amendment 15, while apparently Islamising the legal system, in effect gives the Prime Minister immense powers – which obviously is the real motive behind it.

"Civil society is in a make or break situation," the Internet news agency Rediff on the Net quoted Lodhi as saying. "This is a fight against rulers who represent the Pakistani version of the Taliban. They have a flawed view of civil society and are socially conservative about women."

The government's ban of some 2,000 NGOs in Punjab and 200 in southern Sindh this May was followed by the announcement that it would enact a law for NGOs. This move is under processing, the idea being to curb political activism and raise the level of awareness, which is very much a part of the work being done by NGOs such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Shirkat Gah and the Aurat Foundation, groups which are being particularly targeted and pilloried as "enemies of the nation".

Today, when tensions along the border are running high, and politicians from both India and Pakistan are openly threatening aggression, this bogey is particularly useful in suppressing dissenting reports and opinions. At a time when Pakistan needs to be united to face the external threat, it is considered highly unpatriotic to criticise the government and its policies.

But can we afford not to? As far as the government is concerned, there is no opportune moment for criticism. A good press and civil society is one that takes what is dished out and wags its tail in gratitude no matter what is served.

What is needed at this point is introspection and openness, a clear-sighted examination of what is wrong and an open discussion on how to overcome the problems. Silencing criticism and dissent is not the answer. ■

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A radical blueprint

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela appears determined to revamp the country's discredited political system.

JOHN CHERIAN

EVER since Hugo Chavez became President, Venezuela's politics has been in ferment. Although the elite at first tried to co-opt Chavez, the paratrooper-turned-statesman has insisted on implementing his agenda of radical reforms. He has gone full steam ahead with his programme of restructuring. The newly elected Constituent Assembly has started in earnest the business of rewriting the Constitution and restructuring the corrupt and rotting state institutions.

Since he assumed the presidency, Chavez's popularity has grown by leaps and bounds. Opinion polls show that more than 70 per cent of the Latin American country's population supports Chavez.

Venezuela ranks among the world's biggest oil-producers, and yet the majority of its people live in poverty. The wealthy elite, a minuscule section of the population, wallow in luxury.

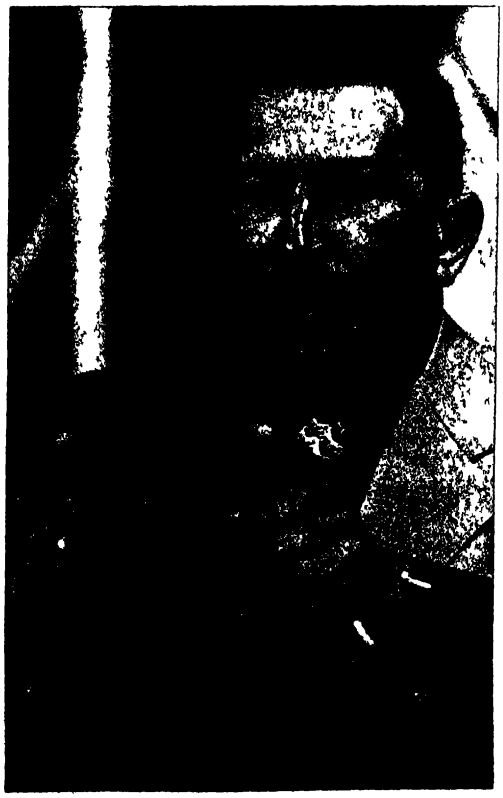
The elite, represented by the two traditional parties, Accion Democratica (Democratic Action) and the Social Christian Party or the COPEI, have found it difficult to cope with the new reality represented by Chavez. Chavez has been their *bete noire* ever since he tried to stage a coup in 1992, backed by leftist officers and groups that were fed up with the corruption and economic mismanagement of successive governments. On his release from prison, Chavez embarked on a mission to reform Venezuelan politics. Many Venezuelans considered his bid for the presidency a quixotic one; however, Chavez persisted and, despite overwhelming odds, was elected President in December 1998. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who was in Venezuela as part of a high-profile international team of observers during the election, described his victory as a "peaceful revolution".

Although the two traditional parties were decimated at the hustings, they along with the smaller political parties still control the Venezuelan Congress, to which elections were held earlier. In the past few months, Congress seemed intent on stymieing the political initiatives of Chavez rather than in providing constructive opposition. During the 1998 election campaign, Chavez had given top priority to reforming the Venezuelan Constitution, which was adopted in 1961. He had promised a new Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution, if he was elected. The issue has remained controversial from the outset as the 1961 Constitution does not provide a legal basis for the creation of a new Constituent Assembly.

Soon after he was elected, Chavez restated his commitment to convene a Constituent Assembly that had the power to dissolve Congress and dismiss the Supreme Court. He said that Congress did not reflect the political realities or the will of the people. Both the Supreme Court and Congress stood in the way of Chavez's revolutionary project of reforming Venezuela's discredited political system. Congress, which could have helped Chavez in amending the Constitution, instead accused him of mounting a "creeping coup" against the legislature and the judiciary.

This left Chavez with no alternative but to call for a referendum on convening a new Constituent Assembly. The Supreme Court also gave a ruling that convening a Constituent Assembly by referendum was not unconstitutional. The court clarified that while the Constitution limited the means by which the sitting Congress could reform the Constitution, that did not apply to a Constituent Assembly.

In the referendum, Chavez's plan was overwhelmingly approved, and in the elections that followed, his supporters won 121 of the 131 seats in the new Constituent Assembly. After the Constituent Assembly was sworn in, Chavez reiterated that its main tasks were to rewrite the Constitution and root out corruption.



FERNANDO LLANO / AP

President Hugo Chavez.

On August 25, the Constituent Assembly formally assumed law-making duties, rendering Congress practically irrelevant. The Assembly was assigned not only the task of creating a new Constitution in six months' time but also the responsibility "to restructure the state". Congressional leaders of the Opposition adopted a conciliatory tone and later declared a long summer recess for Congress.

In the last week of August, the Constituent Assembly announced the setting up of a "judicial emergency committee" to review 2,000 charges of corruption and incompetence against judges and recommend action. The majority of Supreme Court judges voted in favour of the Constituent Assembly's decision. But the Chief Justice, Cecilia Sosa, resigned from the bench dramatically, stating that the "court had committed suicide to avoid being murdered". The senior judge's action was just the cue Congress needed to



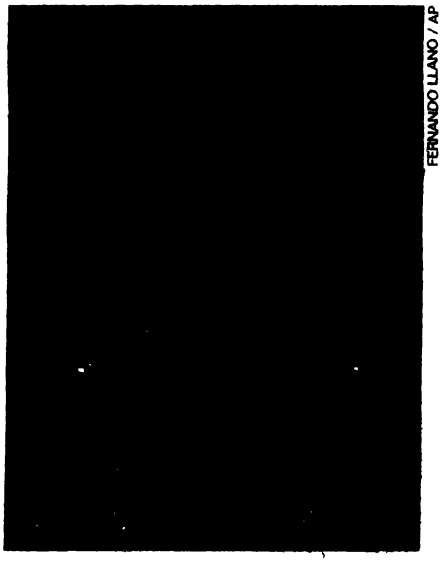
A demonstration outside the Congress building in Caracas in support of the new Constituent Assembly on August 30.

launch a last-ditch attempt to scuttle the radical blueprint Chavez had in mind. The leadership of the Opposition-dominated Congress announced that Congress would reconvene to discuss the dispute involving the judges

The Government retaliated by issuing a decree under which a committee of four Assembly members and three "independents" was to take over the main functions of Congress. The Government also announced that it was setting up a committee to investigate charges of corruption among legislators. Legislators opposed to Chavez reacted by calling for a congressional session in defiance of the decree. In the presence of their supporters and the media, the legislators tried to force their way into the Congress building, violating an earlier agreement brokered by the Catholic Church. Under the terms of the agreement, a commission was to be set up to discuss the differences between Congress and the new Constituent Assembly. The action of the legislators had the support of the Mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, a leading light of the Democratic Action Party.

Minor clashes between supporters of Chavez and the largely outnumbered supporters of the Opposition followed. Luis Miquilena, President of the Constituent Assembly, said that the Congress members were acting in bad faith and that it was impossible to negotiate with people "who make a commitment, sign it and three hours later turn their back on it".

On August 30, the Constituent Assembly voted formally to remove the legislative control of Congress on budget and tax matters. Congress had used these powers in a petty way, refusing to sanction President Chavez's trips abroad. Chavez is scheduled to visit neighbouring Panama in order to take part in the inauguration of its new President.



FERNANDO LLANO / AP

Chief Justice Cecilia Sosa, who resigned on August 24.

Chavez has strongly defended his actions and emphasised that they are democratic. "A peaceful and democratic revolution is under way," he said recently. He went on to add that the state had gone bankrupt and that "the corrupt elite had taken control of power". Some of the proposed constitutional changes include allowing two consecutive six-year terms for the President. At present, the President is allowed only one five-year term. Chavez says that continuity is needed at the helm to complete the restructuring he has promised. He also wants a post of Vice-President, who will be nominated by the President, to be created. Chavez has also indicated that he would like judges to be elected by the people.

President Chavez has so far not spelt out his plans for the ailing Venezuelan economy. His Government, however, has managed to keep a tight leash on the profligate oil sector. At this juncture, Chavez seems to be treading warily as the United States and some of Venezuela's other neighbours are suspicious of the path that the country is taking. ■

Simmering discontent in Brazil

A protest march by left-wing parties, trade unions and others signals the popular frustration against the IMF-initiated austerity programme adopted by the government.

VIJAY PRASHAD

ON August 26, over 100,000 Brazilians gathered before the National Congress in Brasilia, the modernist capital of the world's fifth largest country. The "March of the 100,000" was organised by a coalition of left-wing parties, trade unions and the Movement of the Landless. Signs with slogans such as "Out IMF, Out Cardoso" signalled popular frustration with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) austerity programme that has been adopted by the Government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a one-time Marxist theorist. One opinion poll showed that 59 per cent of the people who responded to questions thought that Cardoso was doing a "bad or terrible job". A further indication of the prevalent discontent was the handing over of a petition by the marchers to the Government. Signed by 1.3 million people (of a population of 163 million), the petition called upon Cardoso to investigate the 1998 privatisation of Telebras, the national telephone company. The marchers felt that austerity was organically linked to corruption.

Three days before the march, the IMF released a report praising Brazil for its economic performance. "To lay the foundation for sustained recovery," the IMF noted, "the authorities' principal challenges are to build on the progress already achieved in implementing fiscal consolidation and to accelerate structural reforms." The disjuncture between the IMF and the Brazilian masses is enormous. One indication of this came when the savvy Cardoso told the media that "the message (of the march) is noted. We have to look at what lies ahead." At the same time, Cardoso sneered at the protest, calling it the "March of the Directionless".

In the 1970s, the importance of state regulation was such that many people nodded when Richard Nixon said that "we are all Keynesians now". Two decades later, however, the tide has turned, as even liberal regimes resort to the logic of structural adjustment and state deregulation. The word from Brazil, as from Washington, is that "we are all neo-liberals now". The protest was a mark of widespread resentment against the narrowed political horizon – one that privileges the gross domestic product (GDP) over the index of general misery.



FRALDO PERES / AP

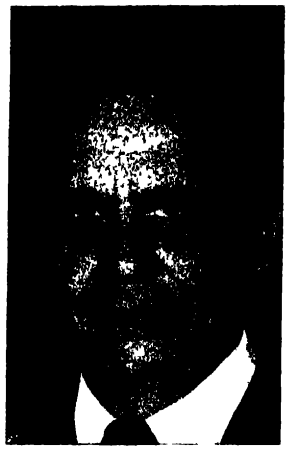
At a protest march in Brasilia on August 26, protestors carry a coffin with the message, "Bury Fernando Henrique Cardoso before he buries you."

BRAZIL has been central to the world economy for centuries, at least since 1625 when its slave plantations allowed the Portuguese to supply all of Europe with sugar. The reckless use of human beings and of nature devastated the Brazilian northwest, which is now a desolate region prone to drought and desperation. In 1957, as Amerindian labour built the magical city of Brasilia in the thick of the Amazon, the United Nations found that children in the northeastern region suffered from protein deficiency. Their body weight was, on an average, 40 per cent less than that of children in sub-Saharan Africa. The legacy of Luso-colonialism and British mercantilism hung heavily on the bodies of the Brazilian working poor.

In 1889, the Brazilian military overthrew the monarchy to rid the nation of parasitical leaders. The new oligarchy adopted the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte (whose slogan "Order and Progress" is the motto of Brazil) and pledged to modernise the country. Although Brazil abolished slavery at that time, the new regime did not attempt to dismantle the *latifundio* (the powerful, large farming families). The *flagelado*, (the "tormented ones"), or the Afro-Brazilian peasants of northeastern Brazil, earned their "freedom", but they quickly re-entered enslaved conditions out of necessity. The reforms enacted by the military remained superficial since the country continued to rely upon the export of sugar and rubber as well as of raw materials. Production of goods for the domestic market was not on the new positivist order's agenda.

After a short bout with democracy, the military, with the blessings of the United States, once again took over the reins of Brazil, from 1964 to 1985. The land reforms it intro-

duced did not break up the *latifundio* but instead neutralised whatever marginal gains had been made by the peasantry and restored the untrammelled power of a few families. From 1964 until 1973, the economy of Brazil enjoyed an 11 per cent rate of growth, as the country produced about 45 per cent of Latin America's goods and services. The broken lives of numerous leftists, trade unionists and the bulk of the workers paved the path to prosperity. In 1973, Brazil was hit by the oil shock, and the military oligarchy reduced the nation's oil imports by a substantial amount and freed its own lax laws to allow oil merchants the right to speculate in the Amazon. When the military came to power in 1964, Brazil's foreign debt was $3 billion. In 1985, the civilians inherited a debt of over $100 billion, a liability that only grew in the next decade.



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

BRAZIL, like other South American nations, has taken its time getting used to the logic of capitalist democracy. In 1992, President Fernando Collor de Mello was impeached on corruption charges. The country was in dire straits. Cardoso came to power in 1995 with a promise to end the economic uncertainty marked by an inflation rate of 2,000 per cent. His "Real Plan" offered the country a new currency (the real); he also lowered the inflation rate to a manageable 4 per cent. This was done, for the most part, at the behest of international capital flows, by the sale of precious state enterprises, including the oil company and major utilities, and by further opening up the Amazon for raw material extraction. Foreign investment rushed into the country, from $2 billion in 1995 to $34 billion this year. To retain this money within Brazil, Cardoso raised interest rates to 50 per cent. A rise in unemployment (18 per cent in industrial areas), food prices and the budget deficit ($100 billion or 8 per cent of the GDP) crippled the Cardosian reforms. Inequality, never low in Brazil, is now at an embarrassing high – 20 per cent of the population controls over 80 per cent of the wealth and 1 per cent of all landowners hold 44 per cent of the agricultural land.

While the military ruled Brazil, Cardoso pioneered the Dependencia school of Marxism. Cardoso, along with Gunder Frank and Paul Baran, argued that colonial regions such as Latin America remained underdeveloped because of the vast surplus extracted by colonisers who then invested these capital sums to develop their own countries. The theory, which remained at the level of circulation, did not consider the way colonialism reorganised production relations and how imperialism negotiated the class struggle within the colony. At the policy level Cardoso remains a Dependencia, since his strategy for Brazil is to reverse the flow of capital without making any changes in the basic production structure. The reality, however, is very different. The inequities of Brazil, including those in agriculture and industry, remain unaddressed as finance is seen as the sole means to rescue Brazil from the plight of colonialism and dictatorship.

In January 1998, investors withdrew billions of dollars from the country ($1.2 billion in one day) as the real was devalued. Although Brazil was in a debt crisis for some time, the devaluation put pressure on it to take immediate action. This crisis, however, was less for the Brazilian people and more for the overexposed U.S. financial houses. If Brazil defaulted on its $228-billion debt, U.S. creditors such as Citigroup ($3.9 billion), Chase ($3.9 billion), BankAmerica ($3.3 billion), J.P. Morgan ($2.2 billion), Bankers Trust ($900 million) and BankBoston ($860 million), would bear its brunt. Many U.S. firms rely on the Brazilian market for their sales, so the integrity of its foreign exchange remains important to them. Coca-Cola, for example, derives 17 per cent of its worldwide sales from Brazil, as 20 per cent of U.S. exports find their way to Brazil. Brazil is to the U.S. what South-East Asia was to Japan.

The IMF and the U.S. met Cardoso in November 1998 and urged him to adopt an austerity plan. Although the IMF claimed that the bail-out was intended to help the structural adjustment policy, it was clear that the money was intended to prevent a meltdown of U.S. interests. Cardoso pledged to slash Brazil's social service budget and to ask public sector workers to contribute more money towards their pension funds. U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin announced that "it is essential that Brazil implement its programme promptly and convincingly." President Bill Clinton noted that "a strong Brazil makes for a stronger United States." The U.S. offered $5 billion to the final loan of $41.5 billion ($18.1 billion from the IMF, $5 billion each from the International Development Agency and the World Bank, and the remainder from the G-7 states).

THE day before the March of the 100,000, Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez (himself in the midst of a crisis) told Brazil's leading newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo* that "the market has gained the status of God." He urged Brazilians to stop "dogmatically copying the savage neo-liberal models that are imposed on us." At the same time, Lawrence Kreicher of Alliance Capital Management (who administers $6 billion in "Emerging Market" assets and who owns $600 million in Brazilian debt) noted: "We are not going to place more money in Brazil until we see a political improvement." In other words, until Brazil cowers before the IMF. The value of the real dropped sharply and the Central Bank held an unscheduled auction of dollar-indexed domestic debt to protect the currency.

The 100,000 protestors paused before the Congress building. Despite the austerity regime, Brazil plans to spend $800,000 on a moat around the Congress building to protect the politicians from the people. Lula da Silva of the Brazilian Workers' Party, who lost three close elections to the presidency, told the marchers that the Cardoso regime asked "for IMF blessings on its knees." "If Cardoso resigns," he said, "it would be a gracious gesture, but Cardoso has no grace... This is just the beginning. We hope that Cardoso listens and feels the clamour of the people." The Left alliance (including the Central Labour Union with its 19 million members) and the Catholic Church have planned a protest called the "Cry of the Excluded" for September 7, Brazil's Independence Day. Progressives, Chavez noted, needed to "find a new road for our countries and people." The March of the 100,000 offered stringent criticisms of neo-liberalism. One hopes that new roads will be laid to help emerge from the IMF's clutches. ■

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In the doldrums

Brazil's economy comes under severe strain after the sharp devaluation of the real, and the austerity measures proposed by the Government are unlikely to alleviate the problem.

V. SRIDHAR

CLASSIFIED as an "emerging market" by investment banks, Brazil is a poor country. Nearly half of its population of 160 million lives below the officially determined poverty line. According to an activist group that is conducting a campaign to get Brazil's foreign debt cancelled, the income distribution profile of Brazil is among "the worst in the world". Extreme inequalities in land distribution reinforce the image of a deeply divided society. One per cent of the population holds nearly half of the country's total arable land. The richest 10 per cent of the population earns about 44 times more than what the poorest 10 per cent earns.

Although opposition to the austerity measures adopted by the Government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso has swelled since the collapse of the real in January, anger is mounting also against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) because it is widely perceived to be the main initiator of the austerity measures. The mood of outrage has quickly yielded to one of anger as it has become clear that while investment bankers made a killing during the run-up to the devaluation of the real in January, the poor are asked to tighten their belts to face the severe austerity measures.

Allegations of sleaze have rocked the nation. The latest of these relates to the privatisation of the national telecom company, Telebras. The IMF has also been drawn into the controversy because of allegations about the manner in which it organised the $41.5-billion "bailout" early this year in association with the G-7 countries, with the active support of private financial institutions. There has been outrage over reports that while private banks – mainly from the United States – booked huge profits on the basis of privileged access to inside information available from Brazil's Central Bank, several large U.S. banks, including Chase Manhattan and J.P. Morgan, made huge profits when the real collapsed in January. Chase Manhattan, for instance, earned $150 million in January 1999 from its Brazilian operations – double its net earning in the whole of 1998. It is estimated that between July 1998 and January 1999, $50 billion worth of foreign currency, equal to 6 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was appropriated by private – mainly foreign – financial institutions. The speculative raids resulted in the Central Bank's reserves falling from $75 billion to $27 billion during this period.

The sharp devaluation of the real has caused a sharp increase in prices. An increase in the prices of basic goods of the poor such as bread, and of essentials such as fuel, has had a cascading effect on the general price level. The outrageously high levels of interest (at one time it was more than 80 per cent on an annualised basis; although it has come down, it is still at a high level of nearly 25 per cent) have put tremendous pressure on indigenous manufacturing. Brazilian industry, traditionally regarded as one of the most diversified in the developing world, has thus come under severe strain. There have been massive job losses, as signalled by

Taking a break from work at a charcoal furnace in northern Brazil. The income distribution profile of Brazil is among the worst in the world.



DARIO LOPEZ MILLS / AP

the recent layoffs in factories belonging to Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen.

The Brazilian Government has also resorted to a general freeze in public spending. The obvious victims have been the social sectors. Activist groups fighting against the "neo-liberal agenda" claim that the public health system is in danger of collapse. The IMF's traditional prescription of austerity has caused massive lay-offs among the bureaucracy, the dismantling of social programmes, and the sale of state assets to private (and foreign) entities such as banks. The cuts in government spending will affect pensions, health care and education. Brazil has also provided guarantees to the IMF that its servicing of foreign loans will remain unhindered.

The freeze on transfer payments to State governments threatens to undermine the large country's federal structure. Itamar Franco, Governor of the State of Minas Gerais, led anti-government and anti-IMF protests over the austerity measures. He said that the IMF's policies in Brazil would lead to "further recession and unemployment", adversely affecting the "poorest sectors of the population". Since early this year Franco has emerged as a national figure because of his refusal to repay his State's debts to the federal government. Even as the international media portrayed Franco as a "rogue Governor", six other Governors joined him in demanding a moratorium on debt payments to the federal government.

The real collapsed in January when its "crawling peg" to the dollar was broken. Central Bank Governor Gustavo Franco was replaced by Francisco Lopes, who later figured in a scandal. Lopes was sacked in April after refusing to testify under oath before a Senate committee investigating the conduct of the Central Bank's affairs just before the collapse of the real. There were allegations that Lopes traded in inside information with private banks during the crucial period. The owner of one of the banks is reported to have claimed that he had paid informants in the Central Bank who provided him with details of impending changes in interest and currency policies. Lopes accompanied Brazilian Finance Minister Pedro Malan to the U.S. in January to negotiate the bailout package with the IMF, the U.S. Treasury Department and private banks.

In the Memorandum of Economic Policies submitted to the IMF on July 2, 1999, the Brazilian Government said that it was "fully committed" to the course of fiscal adjustment. The Government has submitted to Congress a draft of the Fiscal Responsibility Law. It informed the IMF that this would be the pillar supporting the fiscal adjustment. Quantitative limits are to be set not only on indebtedness but also on the number of personnel at each level of government. Indirect tax reforms and pension reforms are also part of the plan submitted to the IMF. Inflation is to be "targeted", implying that monetary policy would remain paramount. The obvious question about how Brazilian domestic industry will cope with this kind of severe targeting is, of course, not elaborated. The programme to privatise state-owned banks (PROES) is to proceed rapidly. When the programme was launched, there were 30 such banks; only six are projected to survive after two years, when the programme comes to a close.

The IMF, in a statement issued on August 23, expressed satisfaction with progress being made in Brazil. It expects GDP to decline by 1 per cent in 1999. This is after the virtual stagnation in 1998, when the economy grew by just 0.1 per cent.

Between April 26 and 28 the Foreign Debt Tribunal conducted a public hearing at the Joao Caetano Theatre in Rio de Janeiro to hear the case for the cancellation of Brazil's debts. The venue of the meeting is the site where the national hero Tiradentes was publicly hanged by the Portuguese colonial administration in April 1792. More than 1,200 people participated in the hearing, which was organised by a cross-section of organisations representing agricultural workers, churches, lawyers, industrial workers and political groups.

The Tribunal, working to reinforce the Jubilee 2000 Coalition's international campaign to cancel the debts of poor countries, argued that Brazil's debt had increased from $148 billion in end-1994 to $270 billion in March 1999. During this period, $126 billion was paid to foreign creditors. It ruled that this kind of borrowing – making fresh borrowings to finance interest payments on past borrowings – was unsustainable. It said that the Brazilian Government regarded the financial system as an "end in itself", neglecting health, education, employment, demarcation of indigenous lands, agrarian reform, the environment, and the elderly and the children. The Tribunal condemned the "Brazilian debt process" and held it as "grossly unjust and illegitimate." ■

■ WORLD AFFAIRS

D.B.S. JEYARAJ

ON September 2, the deputy leader and military commander of the People's Liberation Organisation of Thamil Eelam (PLOTE), Nagalingam Manickathasan alias Thasan, became the latest victim of Sri Lanka's ongoing ethnic conflict when an explosion occurred at Vavuniya, the southernmost town of the predominantly Tamil Northern Province. It happened at the 'Lucky House' camp where the headquarters of the PLOTE functioned in Vavuniya. Lucky House is situated within the Vavuniya Urban Council limits, at Rambaikulam behind the St. Anthony's Catholic church and about half a mile from the Clock Tower road junction.

Along with Manickathasan, his lieutenant Illango who was the Vavuniya regional military leader of the PLOTE, and Vino, a former member of the Kaluvanchikudi *pradeshiya sabha* (local authority) in Batticaloa district were also killed. Another cadre, Uthayan alias Thavam, was seriously injured. Residents of Vavuniya described the explosion as a powerful one; it reverberated through the town. Vino died instantly and Illango a little later at the spot; Manickathasan died on the way to hospital.

There was some confusion initially about the mode of attack. The police first stated that a suicide killer of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was responsible for that. Subsequently they said that an explosive device of the Claymore variety had been fixed on the ceiling above the staircase and triggered just as Thasan and Illango were coming down from the first floor. The extensive damage caused to the building seemed to bear testimony to this.

Informed sources in Vavuniya said that the initial impression of a suicide bomber being involved was caused by the fact that Vino took the full force of the blast: his body was torn to bits. Vino was ascending the stairway while the other two were descending. Thavam was standing at the foot of the staircase. Since Vino's body had disintegrated, it was presumed at first that he was a suicide bomber.

The explosion at the Jaffna Municipal Council in Nallur last year, in which the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) Mayor of Jaffna, Sivapalan, Jaffna military commandant Brigadier Mendis and several high-ranking police and municipal officers were killed, was

Who killed Manickathasan?

The killing of the PLOTE leader in Vavuniya on September 2 right inside the fortified local headquarters of the organisation raises a host of questions.

also carried out in a similar manner. Until then, Claymore devices were usually placed on the ground as landmines to target mobile patrols or convoys. Deploying one on the ceiling and making it explode in a downward direction was considered an LTTE 'innovation'.

According to sources in Vavuniya, there were 15 to 20 people on the ground floor waiting to meet Manickathasan. None of them was harmed. According to eyewitness reports, Manickathasan had just asked his men to prepare tea for the waiting people: those were his last words.

The prevailing confusion was compounded by the fact that the explosion had occurred within the fortified premises. When there were doubts about the involvement of a suicide killer, the question was how such a person would have managed to enter the camp, walk upstairs to the room and self-destruct. The same doubt persisted when the cause was attributed to an explosive device fixed on the ceiling. Again the question is how it was possible to affix an explosive device there.

The preliminary answer to these questions was that it was an insider's job: there had to be collaboration by some PLOTE cadres in the affair. In fact, a person closely trusted by Manickathasan could have been responsible. If the bomb was triggered by a remote device, how did the person responsible know that Manickathasan was coming down the stairs at that very moment? Was that person then close at hand? These questions raise certain doubts.

BORN in 1959, Manickathasan was involved in Tamil militancy from his teens. He hailed from Jaffna town. His father, Nagalingam, ran a small lumber depot at Martyn Road in the heart of the town. Thasan's mother is Sinhalese and, incidentally, is the sister of former Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) general secretary Upatissa Gamanayake's mother. Gamanayake, along with JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera, was killed in military custody in 1989, during Ranasinghe Premadasa's presidency. It was an interesting case of two cousins being actively involved in two extremes of the political spectrum.

Thasan was earlier a junior member of the LTTE. After the split between former PLOTE leader Umamaheswaran (who was killed in July 1989) and LTTE supremo V. Prabakaran in 1980, he threw in his lot with the former. Along with Umamaheswaran he was one of the founder-members of the PLOTE. He later went to Lebanon and obtained military training in one of George Habash's PFLP camp. He returned to Sri Lanka in 1981, and is said to have been responsible for the gunning down of four policemen at an election meeting of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in Nachimarkovilady, Jaffna. Thasan was arrested on suspicion and detained in Colombo. He survived the Welikade prison massacre of July 1983 and was then transferred to the Batticaloa jail. He escaped from that jail and made his way to India. He spent several years in Chennai and Orathanadu in Thanjavur district, trying to recover from health problems caused by torture in custody. He returned to Vavuniya in early 1987 and set up a PLOTE camp in Chettikulam.

Vavuniya town as well as the greater part of the district has long remained a citadel of the PLOTE. Thasan and the military wing formed the cutting edge of the organisation. One consequence of Manickathasan's endeavours was that the LTTE, in spite of its overall hegemony, could not retain a dominant presence in Vavuniya town and its environs. After the death of Umamaheswaran and Kandaswamy alias Sangiliyan in 1989, there was some internal restructuring. D. Siddharthan, son of former TULF MP V. Dharmalingam, became the PLOTE leader. Manickathasan became its military commander. Soon he became its deputy leader too.

Gradually, the PLOTE devised a new equation with the Sri Lankan armed forces and began to enjoy absolute power within Vavuniya district. The taste of such power had a corrupting influence, according to PLOTE insiders themselves. Soon Thasan began imposing taxes on the people. Vehicles involved in transporting people and goods had to pay a levy. Businessmen and farmers had to pay up too. The PLOTE under Thasan exercised a monopoly over the sale of eggs and coconuts in Vavuniya. "Donations" were extracted from ordinary people too. Those who did not pay up were dubbed LTTE supporters, "arrested", and tortured. Suspected LTTE members or informants too were detained and tortured. There was internal repression; several PLOTE cadres were subjected to this harrowing treatment.

There were several torture centres in Vavuniya, the most notorious one being the Malar Maaligai (flower palace) camp and the Lucky camp. The existence of a torture camp in Lucky House was dramatically revealed last year when a detenu in shackles escaped and burst into the adjoining St. Anthony's Church while morning Mass was going on. He fell at the feet of the priest and cried out for protection. When armed cadres of the PLOTE entered the church and tried to take him away, the priest refused to allow them to do so. The PLOTE members turned nasty but the worshippers prevented them from being violent. Ultimately the police arrived and rescued the man. This incident as well as many others were highlighted by Amnesty International.



PLOTE leader Manickathasan.

In recent times, Manickathasan displayed an ambitious political streak when he contested the Jaffna Municipal Council elections and aspired to be the Mayor. The TULF won and Sarojini Yogeswaran became the first Mayoress. Thasan was elected councillor but he declined to serve and returned to Vavuniya. There began a controversial, perplexing and troubled phase in his life.

One aspect of this phase was the launching of a

vicious intra-organisational campaign to oust PLOTE leader Siddharthan. All those identified as Siddharthan's supporters were warned not to set foot in PLOTE offices. Subsequently, Thasan seemed to have realised that he lacked the ability to function as the PLOTE head. He opted to allow Siddharthan to function as the *de jure* leader while he himself would be the *de facto* leader. A few weeks before his death, both PLOTE leaders appeared jointly before sections of the media and declared that there were no differences between them.

The second controversial aspect of Manickathasan's conduct was his open confrontation with another Tamil group. the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). The clash began as a turf war, with both groups competing to levy "taxes' from the traders of Vavuniya. Soon Manickathasan led a bitter campaign against TELO, leading to the death of several cadres and supporters. TELO retaliated and soon there was a full-scale 'civil war' in Vavuniya; at one stage the entire town was paralysed. Several ordinary people were caught in the crossfire. The residents of Vavuniya agitated for the disarming of both groups. The security forces confiscated some of their arms. But both groups objected to this, saying that they were needed to defend themselves from the LTTE. The situation became too hot in Vavuniya, and the leaders of both groups shifted temporarily to Colombo.

But the conflict spread to the national capital. The TELO leader in Vavuniya, Rajaratnam Kugarajah alias Kugan, and two others were shot dead at a shopping complex in Bambalapitiya. It was widely believed that Manickathasan himself had executed them. There was a public outcry that the Tamil groups should not be allowed to continue the violence in Colombo and the police began looking for Manickathasan. He then flew out to Singapore and from there to Mumbai.

From there Thasan moved to Chennai. Finding Chennai inhospitable, he returned to Colombo.

THE third and perhaps the most controversial aspect of Manickathasan's conduct was his attempt to appease and align himself with the LTTE. Earlier, Sri Lankan intelligence officials had discovered that the PLOTE was harbouring suspected LTTE operatives in its camps. Calendars published by the PLOTE with the picture of a tiger mauling a lion lying spreadeagled over the northeastern area of a map of Sri Lanka were confiscated. Thasan gave some interviews to the Tamil press in the course of which he said that the LTTE and the PLOTE were brothers, while the Army was always the enemy. On another occasion he said that the PLOTE would "give up" Vavuniya if the LTTE wanted it. When the armed forces began confiscating arms from PLOTE cadres, he threatened to team up with the LTTE and fight the government. He announced that he had instructed his junior cadres to join the LTTE. Later there were reports in the Sri Lankan media that more than 70 such cadres had indeed joined the LTTE.

AGAINST the backdrop of such bizarre conduct by Manickathasan, his killing too has become a matter of speculation. Although the needle of suspicion naturally points to the LTTE, there is reason to think otherwise because of the recent overtures Manickathasan made to that organisation. Whether the Tigers would have killed someone who was trying to ingratiate himself with them is a moot question.

Given the prevailing state of affairs, other possibilities also remain. It could have been TELO; it could have been the dirty tricks department of the Sri Lankan Army; it could even be the handiwork of PLOTE elements opposed to Manickathasan. Given the fact that Lucky House was a veritable fortress, an internal squabble being behind the killing is a distinct possibility. It was only a few years ago that Manickathasan was being blamed for the killing of Arjuna, the PLOTE leader from Trincomalee who participated in the ill-fated invasion of the Maldives that was thwarted by the Indian Navy. He was also thought to be responsible for the death of Karavai Kanthasamy, a political activist of the PLOTE who was on the verge of crossing over to the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). It is also rumoured that Thasan travelled to Switzerland and killed a former cadre, Robin, and his wife in order to suppress information about his own involvement in the killing of Umamaheswaran.

All these signs of internal divisions within the PLOTE and enmity with other groups, notably TELO, has caused a cloud of doubt to appear whenever the PLOTE was targeted effectively. Last year Manickathasan's deputy, Alavaanku Das, was blown up using a Claymore mine when he was travelling on a tractor. Thasan was travelling in another vehicle. Last year, the PLOTE MP from Wanni district, Shanmuganathan alias Vasanthan, was killed in another landmine attack. Shots were fired at the house of another PLOTE MP, Balachandran, but he survived. In July, Thasan's aide, Sabaratnam Baskaran alias Dumal, was killed in a Claymore mine attack.

All these incidents in Vavuniya taken along with those in Jaffna against PLOTE members indicate that the LTTE has been consistently targeting the PLOTE. It has not been possible to point the finger of guilt conclusively because of the suspicion that other agencies too may be involved.

Such a climate of uncertainty is one in which the LTTE thrives. It continues with its actions systematically and ruthlessly while the victims and aggrieved parties indulge in mutual recrimination. The Special Task Force commandos of the Army have been taking action against TELO in Vavuniya. They think the recent landmine attacks by the LTTE against them were carried out with the connivance of TELO. In that context, the killing of Manickathasan too will raise doubts.

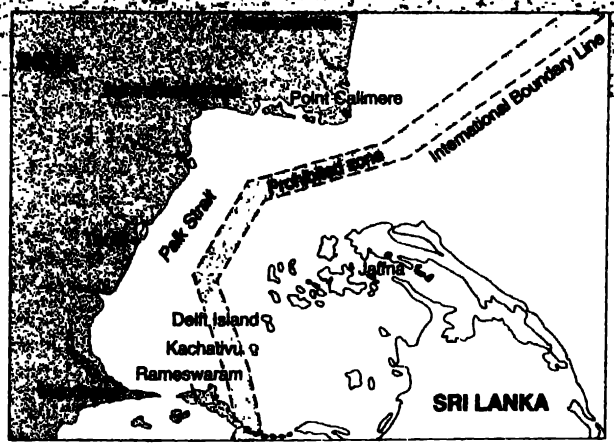
Nevertheless, to those analysts who have been observing the pattern of the LTTE's attacks, there is no doubt about who is responsible for the latest attack. The LTTE is currently aiming to demolish all effective alternatives to it within the Tamil community. In Vavuniya the PLOTE enjoys some popular support though much of it was eroded owing to Manickathasan's ignoble conduct. Still the LTTE wants to reduce the PLOTE to a non-entity through selective assassinations. It may like to co-opt some of the junior PLOTE cadres. LTTE deputy military commander Balraj himself came from PLOTE. The LTTE, however, would not accommodate senior members from other groups. They are forever dubbed traitors or anti-social elements who must be eliminated. In the case of Manickathasan, he was always perceived by the LTTE as a "thug and criminal" who had to be eliminated. He had also killed and tortured a number of LTTE members and supporters. So there never was any chance of his being pardoned and accepted by the LTTE.

For now, the questions about his death will linger. But it will be only a matter of time before the truth emerges. The important factor, however, is to recognise that the killing would not have been possible without internal connivance in the PLOTE. This means that the LTTE has deeply infiltrated the movement. That should make the alarm bells ring for the PLOTE, other Tamil groups and in the final analysis the armed forces of the country. ■

In risky waters

Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen who seek to make a living in the Palk Bay region face harassment as the bilateral maritime agreements are not sensitive to questions related to their fishing rights.





In Vercode village, some of the boats damaged by the Sri Lankan Navy.

MUKUL SHARMA

THE list is long. Pathianathan, S.P. Royappan, Susha Raj, John, Sebastian, M. Sahayam, Pandi – they are among thousands of fishermen of Tamil Nadu who fish in the Palk Bay and other seas between India and Sri Lanka. When they stray into Sri Lankan waters, they are arrested, harassed and sometimes injured or killed. Their boats are sunk or captured. Scores of Sri Lankan fishermen have met the same fate at the hands of the Indian Navy and Coast Guard. The charges against them are similar: illegal entry into the territorial waters of a neighbouring country to engage in fishing activity. The fishermen are harassed for another reason too: with the continuing problems of terrorism in India and ethnic strife in Sri Lanka, they are often mistaken for terrorists. The sheer need to make a living leaves the fishermen with no choice but to continue fishing in the increasingly unsafe waters, even at the cost of being gunned down.

The bilateral agreements on maritime zones and related issues agreed upon by the two countries on June 26, 1974 and March 23, 1976 would seem to treat the question of the fishermen's security and their fishing rights as tradable commodities, which can be given or taken away in order to satisfy geopolitical or security considerations.

Sri Lanka and India share a maritime border extending to more than 400 km. In the Palk Bay region, in which the island of Kachativu is located and which lies between the coastal regions of Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram districts and Sri Lanka, firing, killing, detention and imprisonment of fishermen are a regular feature. In 1996, I.K. Gujral as External Affairs Minister informed Parliament that 11 fishermen had been killed in 20 incidents of shooting by the Sri Lankan Navy on their fishing vessels. The Sri Lankan Navy admitted to its involvement only in three of the reported incidents.

The Tamil Nadu Government, in its report on the situation up to 1991, said: "Since 1983, till the end of August 1991, there have been 236 incidents of attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy on Tamil Nadu fishermen. Three hundred and three

boats have been attacked and 486 fishermen have been affected; 51 boats have been destroyed; 135 fishermen have been attacked and injured. Over 50 fishermen have been killed; 57 fishermen have been injured in firing incidents. The Sri Lankan Navy has seized 65 motor boats and arrested 205 fishermen. There has been an increase in these incidents, particularly this year (1991)."

Further, in an update, the Tamil Nadu Government noted in November 1993 that 25 fishermen were killed and 109 injured. A total of 136 attacks had taken place on fishing boats; 15 of the boats had sunk.

RAMESWARAM in Ramanathapuram district is an island situated in south-central Bay of Bengal. It has a coastline of approximately 80 km, a land area of some 38.5 sq km and a fishing community of around 35,000 people, of whom around 8,000 are sea-going fishermen. To the island's south is the Gulf of Mannar, and to its north is the Palk Bay. At its eastern tip is Dhanushkodi, from where it is only about 16 km to Talaimannar in Sri Lanka.



Saghai Nagar is a settlement of 1,000 fishermen in Pamban village near Rameswaram. Pathianathan, 45, who lives there with his wife and six children, says: "I had a country boat. On the stormy night of November 5, 1996, Richard, Armstrong, Adaikalam and I set sail. Our boat inadvertently crossed into the Sri Lankan side near Talaimannar. When we realised this, we started retracing our course, but we were confronted by a Sri Lankan naval boat. We beamed the light, raised our hands and begged for mercy. But they opened fire and kept shouting. They captured us, removed our shirts, blind-folded us and started beating us. They pushed us onto their boats and continued to beat us. We were taken to the Mannar jail. The following day we were produced in a court in Kothi Mannar. We were detained in the Mannar jail for two more days and from there we were taken to the Marihana police station and detained for a week. We were served a small quantity of food, that too at odd hours. We even went on a hunger-strike for one and a half days."

He continued: "After 10 days in captivity, somebody from the Indian Embassy came to see us and assured us justice. But we spent 100 days in several police stations and jails before we were taken to Jaffna and handed over to an Indian naval ship at mid-sea." Pathianathan's life has changed since that incident. "We did not get the boat back. We made five trips to Talaimannar to recover the boat. When we got it back four months after our release, the boat

Tackling over-harvesting

MUKUL SHARMA

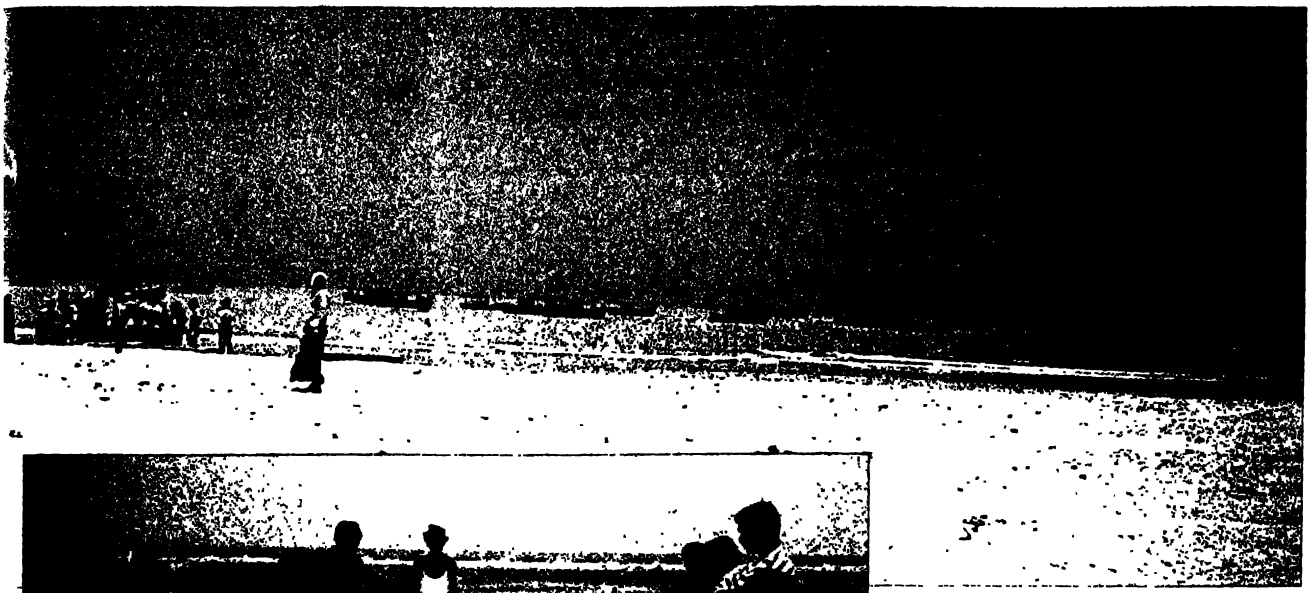
SRI LANKA faces the problem of over-harvesting of its coastal waters. In order to address this problem, the Government encourages deep-sea fishing by offering a number of subsidies. The country's marine fisheries sector currently produces around 220,000 tonnes a year from two-thirds of the area of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

A report compiled by Steve Creech with inputs from organisations such as the Forum for Human Dignity, the Social and Economic Development Centre, the National Fisheries Solidarity and the National Union of Fisheries says that there has been a rapid increase in the number of mechanised coastal fishing craft, while the number of traditional craft has remained unchanged. One-day deep-sea vessels, according to it, have become near-extinct, whereas there has been a near-explosion in the number of multi-day fishing boats.

According to government figures, in 1995 the country had a fleet of 1,543 multi-day fishing vessels. Now their number is close to 1,800. Deep-sea fishing within the EEZ is at the point of or nearing over-exploitation: 19 per cent of the small boats and 39 per cent of the larger boats reportedly fish outside the country's territorial waters. Nearly 74 per cent and 64 per cent of the boats operating from Negombo and Chilaw respectively fish beyond the EEZ. The deep-sea fishing boats are also getting bigger, another indication of the desire of the fisherfolk to fish off the Sri Lankan coast and for longer durations. Five years ago, boats measuring even 50 feet were not common; now the demand is for boats as long as 60 or 70 ft.

The report says: "When they begin to search for fish outside Sri Lanka's EEZ, deep-sea boats face a number of problems. To the north-east and north-west, they are confronted by India's EEZ. To the west, they encounter first the Maldivian territorial waters, then those of the Seychelles. To the south-west lies the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) of Diego Garcia. To the east lie the territorial waters of Indonesia. Fines for illegal fishing in Seychellian waters are approximately Seychellian $50,000 a day. The boat, gear and catch are automatically confiscated. Likewise in the Maldives, boats, gear and catch are confiscated following arrest. Licences to fish in BIOT are granted at the cost of SLRs 360,000 to SLRs 450,000 a month for long lining. For purse-seine fishing the fee is SLRs 2 million for four months and a daily payment of SLRs 120,000 for each day the boats are engaged in fishing." The quantum of the fines and the licence fees reflect the lucrative nature of commercial deep-sea fishing and the strong desire of states to control fishing within their EEZs, it remarks.

The report concludes: "It is difficult to be optimistic about the future. All the while Sri Lankan Government policy persists in seeking an answer to over-fishing in coastal waters, by promoting deep-sea fishing as an alternative, the problem is likely to continue... The most viable option for many boats is to poach fish from Indian or Maldivian waters – regardless of the risks involved." ■



T S SUBRAMANIAN

Fishing boats and fisherpeople on the Vedaranyam coast.

was wrecked and the engine was missing. We never received any compensation for the loss of our livelihood or for the damage caused to the boat. Our families survived on loans. I am no longer a boat-owner. I am only a boat worker who has a heavy debt to repay."

Susha Raj of the same settlement owned a boat (RMS-30). It was his ambition to have a boat of his own. He took a bank loan to purchase a boat worth Rs.5 lakhs. The bread-winner of his six-member family, Susha Raj set out to fish late in the evening of January 5, 1995 with six others. Around 11 p.m., when they were near Kachativu, Sri Lankan Navy personnel opened fire at them. "The boat began to sink and we were drowning. I swam to safety. The next day I went to sea with 10 boats in search of the other fishermen. We found the body of Arulanandan. On the second day of our search, we found the body of Vinanzis. On the third and fifth days, we found the bodies of Michal, Panja Felice and Anthony near Irumeni and Sashamanakodhi. The body of the sixth fisherman, Moscow, was found near Dhanushkodi after 17 days."

Five fishermen – John, Sebastian, Arulanandan, Austin, George – were in a mechanised fishing boat on July 14, 1997, when they were attacked by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boat was smashed. Says John: "Austin and George died – they went down with the boat. The rest of us swam to Nedundhevve island on the Sri Lankan side. There, some Sri Lankan fishermen rescued us and a local organisation took us to Jaffna for medical treatment. After being hospitalised for five days, we were jailed in Jaffna and produced before a court. No cases were filed against us, but at the end of every fortnight we were taken to court and then sent back to jail. We spent five and a half months in the Jaffna jail. The families of the dead have not got even the death certificates, leave alone compensation. The widowed women have none to care for them. For no fault of ours, our lives are being ruined. It was wind and water currents that took us to the Sri Lankan waters."

Sebastian shows the deep scar on his right hand, which is crippled. "I can't think of a future. I am married with three children and we are now dependent on my father," he says.

The owner of the destroyed boat, K. Raj, now works as a helper on another boat. "I took a loan to purchase the boat. I used the boat for eight months. I got no compensation, though I approached everybody." Why did he stray into the Sri Lankan waters? "We get a good catch there," says Raj.

In Vercode village, 22-year-old Antony Doss works in a fishing boat. He went in Ananth's boat to fish near Talaimannar in 1998. What followed were long, troublesome days. "Eight boats were fishing together. The Sri Lankan Navy captured all the boats but released four of them instantly. The other boats were kept at sea in Talaimannar under the Navy's watch. We were forced to fish for four days and the catch was taken away. No food was given, except one slice of bread each in the morning and in the evening."

Sahayraj, also from Vercode, owned a fishing boat (RMS-1829). It was taken out into the sea in December 1997 but never returned. Raj, Acquin, Sunil and Albert, who were in the boat, also disappeared. "The parents keep asking me about their sons, but I have no answer. I have spent around Rs.40,000 to search for them. I suspect the boat was hit by the Sri Lankan Navy and it sank with the fishermen on board," says Sahayraj.

Sahayraj himself was arrested in March 1998 when he was fishing near Nedundhevve. "It happened early in the morning. The Sri Lankan Navy captured four of us. All our belongings – the catch, a compass, a radio and a tape-recorder – were taken away. We were beaten, and released after 24 hours," remembers

Sahayraj. "Our lives and livelihood are in danger and no government has done anything about this."

Felix Gomez, Assistant Director of Fisheries for the Rameswaram region, says that between 1983 and 1997, 74 fishermen have been shot dead and 251 injured.

The incidents are not limited to Rameswaram. Fishermen of Pudukottai and Nagapattinam districts are also harassed. On January 29, 1990, James Chellathurai, Karuppan and Raja set out in their mechanised boat (ARS-32 Arulmurugar) from Kottaipattinam in Pudukottai district. The Sri Lankan Navy fired at the boat, which caught fire and sank. Raja was killed. A fishing boat (BDK-609 MP) that set out from Jegathapattinam on May 20, 1991 with four fishermen – Mayavan, Manivannan, Senthivel and Senchivel – capsized following heavy firing by the Sri Lankan Navy. The four fishermen have not been traced. Muthuvel Rajendra, Samsu, Justin, Kumar Ravi and several others from Pudukottai district have either witnessed or suffered as a result of such firing. Chinnathambi, Murugan, Veerappan, Govindarasu and several others have been missing for several years after similar incidents.

ON the Indian side of the maritime border, Sri Lankan fishermen are caught regularly by the Indian Coast Guard or Navy. According to the Sri Lankan newspaper *Island* (May 18, 1998), 80 Sri Lankan fishermen were at that point under detention in India and 25 vessels had been confiscated. S. Gautama Dass, Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Chennai, said: "According to our information, there are more than 100 Sri Lankan fishermen in Indian jails."

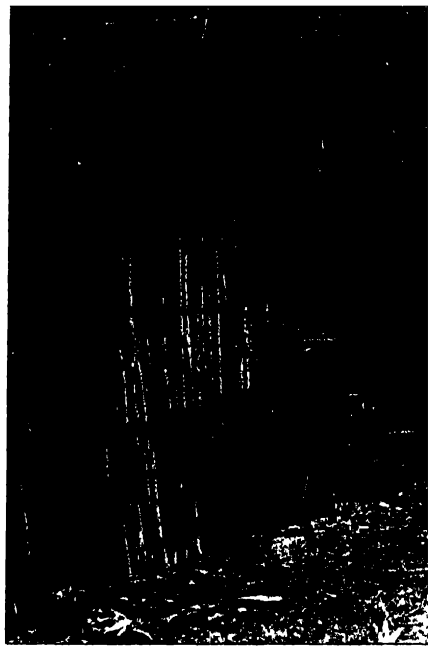
In May 1998, W. Antony Vincent, a Sri Lankan boat owner from Munnakara, Negombo, waited desperately outside the Madurai Central Jail in Tamil Nadu. He was in India to retrieve his boat 'Philip Sahana', which had been confiscated, and also to get five fishermen released. Vincent spent more than Rs.10,000 to reach Thiruvananthapuram and Madurai and meet several people. His boat had cost him Rs.9 lakhs five years earlier: he had taken a bank loan of Rs.3 lakhs and had to repay Rs.15,000 each month "I was not in the boat. So I don't know how the capture took place. The fishermen who were captured – K.S. Nicholas, W. Wilbert, K.S. Joseph, Sirinimal Fernando and Wijendra Wadugu Chandra – wrote to me that they were fishing on the Sri Lankan side of the Gulf of Mannar when the Indian Navy seized the boat. The boat is kept in Keelakarai, south of Mandapam. I want it back, otherwise I will not be able to survive. I am also making efforts to get the fishermen released... One day this country, the next day the other... how can we earn a livelihood?" he asked.

W. Wilbert, who is lodged in the Madurai Central Jail, says: "Personnel of the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard pursued our boat while we were returning after fishing on April 3 last year. They asked us to surrender, but we tried to flee. The Navy people said that they arrested us because the Sri Lankan Navy killed Indian fishermen."

H. Mahadevan, an All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) leader, explained how Sri Lankan fishermen were harassed: "Fifteen Sri Lankan fishermen were released from the Madurai jail on May 25, 1998. They left with their boats from Mandapam. A lot of drama preceded their release. They had been charged under the Customs Act for smuggling in shark skin. Basically nothing incriminating was found in the vessels and the only material available was fish. A confession was obtained to the effect they smuggled in shark skins for sale in India at a better price than in Sri Lanka. Actually marine fish fetches a much better price in Sri Lanka than in India, and shark skin is an internationally traded item, in whose case no significant price differences are likely – in fact, exploitation by middlemen ensures that the beach prices of fish are often lower than what they should be. The Customs at Tuticorin levied a penalty of Rs.47,000 on the fishermen. In addition, they were prosecuted. What followed was a case of miscarriage of justice, and genuine fishermen were convicted as smugglers."

According to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, between 1993 and 1997, as many as 269 Sri Lankan boats were seized and 338 fishermen detained. It takes up to a year to obtain the release of fishermen. Captured boats are not returned for years.

Gautham Dass says: "Whenever we get some information regarding the arrest of our fishermen, we inform the Tamil Nadu Government. The State Government gets a report from the departments concerned and sends it to the Central Government. The Central Government takes a political decision about the release... We don't provide any legal support to the captives."



Vercode village. (Right) In Pamban village, the family of a fisherman who was killed at sea; a mother holding photographs of her dead sons.

THE fishermen's travails have their genesis in the maritime agreements of 1974 and 1976. The 1974 agreement demarcated the maritime boundary between the two countries in the Palk Strait and ceded Kachativu to Sri Lanka. The 1976 Agreement demarcated the boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal and barred each country's fishermen from fishing in the other's waters.

The 1974 agreement handed over Kachativu to Sri Lanka (*Frontline*, April 22, 1994) The tiny, uninhabited island is situated in the Palk Strait at a distance of between 12.8 km and 16 km from the nearest points of Sri Lanka and India respectively. Article 5 of the agreement, which safeguards the rights of Indian fishermen and pilgrims (who visit the isle to take part in the St. Anthony's festival there), states: "Subject to the foregoing, Indian fishermen and pilgrims will enjoy access to visit Kachativu as hitherto, and will not be required by Sri Lanka to obtain travel documents or visas for these purposes." Article 6 states: "The vessels of India and Sri Lanka will enjoy in each other's waters such rights as they have traditionally enjoyed therein."

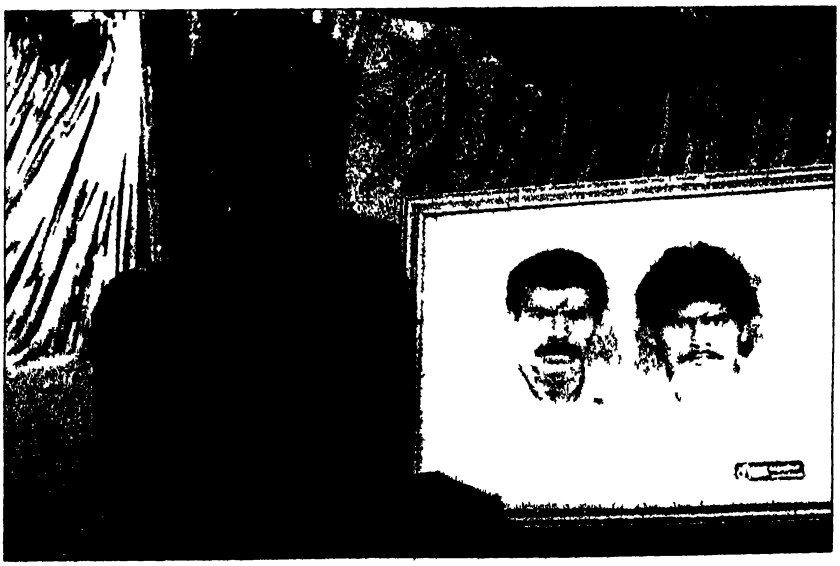
This agreement or any of its provisions was neither discussed with the State



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governments, fisherpeople's organisations or political parties, nor debated in Parliament before it was enforced. There were other dominant considerations for the then heads of state.

The aftermath of the 1971 insurrection by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) witnessed a change of mood with regard to the credibility of the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Government in Sri Lanka. The country went through a severe economic and political crisis. The Kachativu settlement contributed to a large extent in lifting the morale of the Bandaranaike regime. (S.D. Muni, "Kachativu Settlement: Befriending Neighbouring Regimes", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.9, No.28; July 13, 1974; page 1,121).

The maritime boundary settlement also helped curb the anti-India hysteria in Sri Lanka. In fact, the agreement strengthened the relations between the governments of Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Sri Lanka extended its support to India on some vital issues. While several countries condemned India's nuclear explosion in May 1974, Sri Lanka accepted India's stance on putting its newly acquired nuclear capability to peaceful use. Besides, when Pakistan tried to use the 15-member ad hoc United Nations Committee as a forum to attack India over the nuclear explosion, Sri Lanka in its capacity as the chairperson of that committee prevented the use of the forum for that purpose (Muni, as cited earlier). Thus the agreement was a political decision, with no thought or consideration to the fishermen.

The 1976 Agreement is entitled "Agreement between India and Sri Lanka on the Maritime Boundary Between the Two Countries in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal and Related Matters". There was an Exchange of Letters on the same day as it was signed between India's Foreign Secretary and Sri Lanka's Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs. These letters also constituted an agreement. Significantly, this agreement was signed when India was under Emergency rule, when no discussion or dissent was permitted.

Paragraph I of the Exchange of Letters says: "With the establishment of the Exclusive Economic Zones by the two countries, India and Sri Lanka will exercise sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources of their respective zones. The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Sri Lanka, nor shall the fishing vessels and fishermen of Sri Lanka engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone of India, without the express permission of Sri Lanka or India, as the case may be."

It is the different interpretations of this portion of the Exchange of Letters and of Article 5 in the 1974 agreement that have led to the controversy over whether or not Indian fishermen have the right to fish in and around Kachativu. The Sri Lankan Government argues that the relevant portion of the Exchange of Letters supersedes Articles 5 and 6 of the

1974 agreement. It also claims that Article 5 allowed Indian fishermen only to dry their nets in Kachativu and not to fish in and around the island. Since then, India and Sri Lanka have held several meetings to solve the riddle. As Prof. V. Suryanarayan, Director, Centre for South and South-East Asian Studies, Madras University, who has studied Kachativu and the problems of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay region, says: "It is always a fire-fighting exercise by both the governments, without removing the causes of fire. In fact, who cares in New Delhi and Colombo about the shooting and killing of some hundred poor fishermen?"



MUKUL SHARMA

Sahayraj with another sufferer in Vercode. Sahayraj's boat was taken out into the sea but it never returned.

FOR the coastal fisherpeople, the immediate fallout of the rise of terrorism and militancy was that in 1993 Sri Lanka banned all types of boats in its territorial waters extending from Trincomalee to Mannar, thus giving a *carte blanche* to its Navy to open fire at any boat. In times of heightened conflict, Colombo promulgates emergency regulations, which convert Sri Lanka's territorial waters into a Prohibited Zone. Sri Lankan fishermen living in Jaffna and Mannar face restrictions on the types of boats they can own, areas where they can fish and the time they can spend at sea, owing to security reasons. Similarly, the Indian Government applies strict measures to prevent the infiltration and movement of militants. In these situations, nobody distinguishes between militants and fishermen.

Indian fishermen are a regular target of attack allegedly by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On April 23, 1997, a number of Indian fishermen were injured when the LTTE attacked a Sri Lankan naval camp in northern Talaimannar, using Indian fishing vessels as cover. The militants virtually dragged the fishing vessels along with them. Muruganandan, president of the Ramanathapuram District Fishermen's Association, complains: "LTTE men regularly take away our fishing boats and send the crew back. People belonging to Rameswaram have lost at least 40 boats. As recently as March 1998, LTTE members came as close as Tondi on the Indian side of the sea and took away a fishing boat."

Felix Gomez, Assistant Director of Fisheries, also views terrorism as an important issue. "It is owing to suspicion that most shooting incidents take place. In April 1998, one Indian boat was in the Sri Lankan waters, and its lights were switched off. The Sri Lankan Navy captured it, suspecting the crew to be LTTE men."

There exist some gray areas regarding the impact of terrorism on the fisherpeople. A.J. Vijayan, a leader of the fisherpeople, said in Rameswaram that generally fishermen who sought a livelihood from fishing were not involved in any activity supporting Tamil militants across the border. It is alleged that some anti-social elements supply goods to the militants. Local fishermen point out that there are about 30 mechanised boats which are owned by people who do not belong to the fishing community. These boats are actually not used for fishing, they allege, and wonder what these could be doing at sea.



MUKUL SHARMA

W. Antony Vincent, a Sri Lankan boat-owner, waiting outside Madurai Central Jail in Tamil Nadu. His mission is to recover his boat confiscated by the Indian Navy and get five fishermen who went in it released.

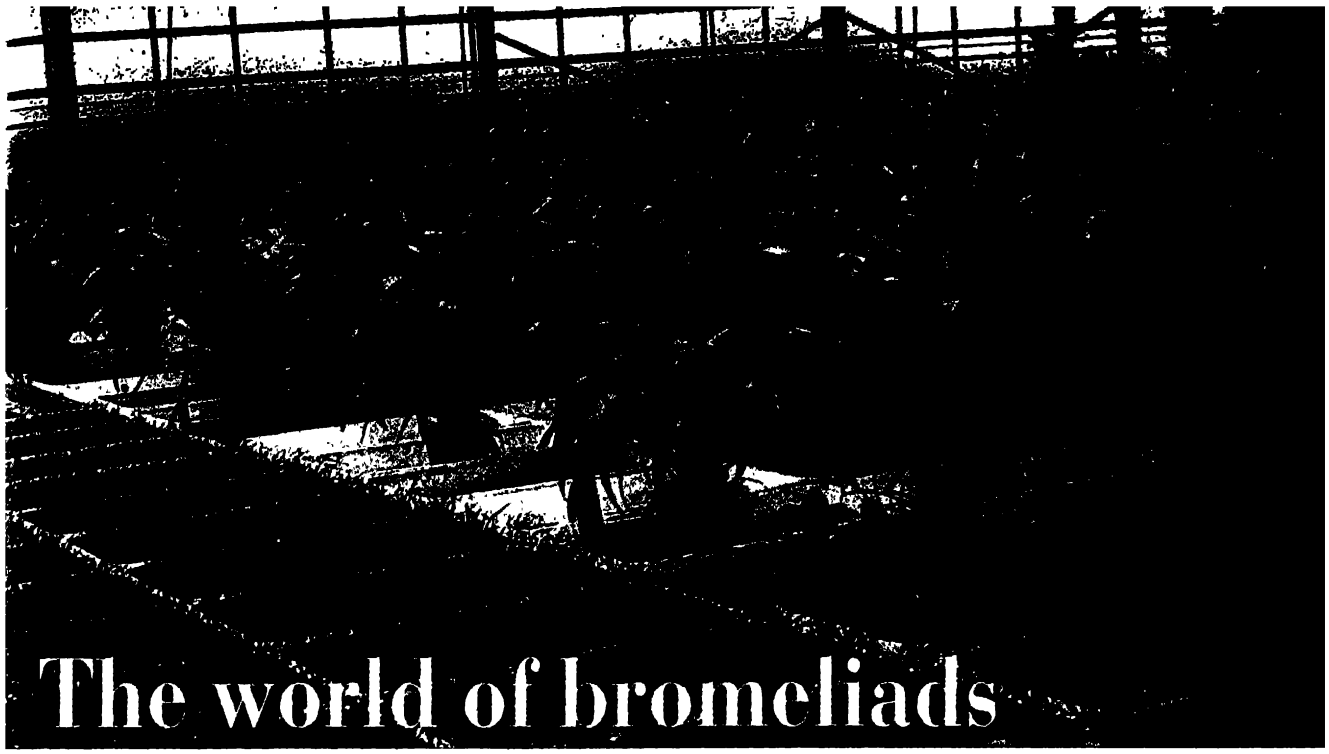
WHAT forces fishermen from Tamil Nadu to the Sri Lankan waters beyond Kachativu, up to the Delft Island off the Jaffna coast, even at the risk of being killed? What compels the Assistant Director of Fisheries for the Rameswaram region to say: "If fishermen do not cross the border today, tomorrow there will be no fishing in the region"? One answer is that the ocean currents and sedimentation on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Strait have made it a rich field of Tiger prawns, which fetch a high price. Another lies in the massive growth of fishing activity and income-sharing in the region. According to information from the Fisheries Department, the number of trawling boats operating from Rameswaram is about 1,000. In the traditional sector, there are about 1,500 craft. Ramanathapuram ranks first in the total marine fish landing of Tamil Nadu; it accounted for 23.57 per cent during the 1993-96 period. The growth rate of marine fish landings in the district is much higher than that of the State as a whole. It was 44.9 per cent during 1987-90, 10.6 per cent during 1990-93 and 20.7 per cent during 1993-96, whereas it was 9.9 per cent, 8.3 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively for the whole State.

When the coastal region-wise marine fish production for 1992-96 is considered, the Palk Bay, with only 27 per cent of the coastline, accounted for 36.7 per cent of the State's fish landing, while the other two major coasts, Coromandel and Gulf of Mannar, with 35 per cent and 32 per cent of the coastline respectively, accounted for 28.6 per cent and 25.9 per cent respectively.

The system that is in vogue in Rameswaram also puts pressure on the fisherpeople to seek fishing grounds much closer to the Sri Lankan coast, where the availability of shrimp is high. Unlike other places in the State, where the net income is shared between the boat owner and the crew in the ratio 60:40, in Rameswaram the boat owners pay daily wages. There are special wages for overnight trips, and incentives based on the catch in bottom-trawling. For every one kg of shrimp, the driver gets Rs.20, the second hand Rs.15 and the deck hands Rs.10 each. As a result, the crew want to catch more, even in dangerous waters.

"If you don't decongest Rameswaram and other affected areas, there will be no solution to the problem of fishermen from India and Sri Lanka crossing into the territorial waters of each other's country," says M.K. Suresh, Commandant of the Coast Guards in Mandapam. ■

This report is part of Mukul Sharma's forthcoming book **Landscapes and Lives: Environmental Clippings from the Edges of Rural India.**



The world of bromeliads

Bromeliads are fascinating plants, easy to grow and ideal for indoors.

Text & pictures
KESHAB C. PRADHAN

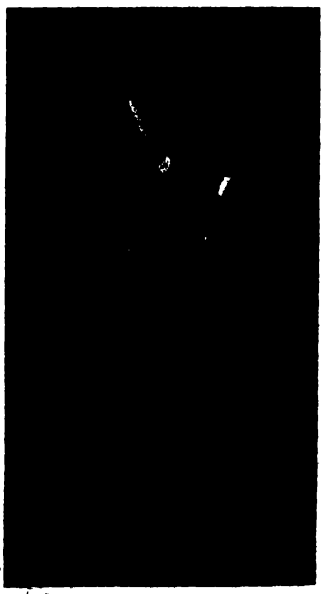
IT was the spring of 1993. We were on our way to Amsterdam from Nancy in France to see Floriade, the flower festival of Holland. On the way was Ghent, where a rhododendron enthusiast we met at a rhododendron congress in Germany a few days earlier had asked us to drop by if we happened to pass that way. Ghent also happens to be the begonia and azalea capital of the world. My friend suggested that we have a look at the bromeliads and sent along a specialist from his institute to show us around the leading bromeliad nurseries.

Acres and acres of bromeliads were grown meticulously in green-house conditions. I was told that it was a very popular pot plant in Switzerland and Germany and that its cut flowers were also catching on. We brought home some representative samples to plant in Sikkim. They have liked the place, in the foothills of the Himalayas, and are growing well, although they tend to sink in deep winter. The temperatures here are rather mild – not exceeding 30° C in summer and hovering around 10° C in winter. However, it is not the optimum for bromeliads. Of late, we have brought them out of the poly-houses and into the field. Bromeliads are fascinating plants. They are easy to grow and make excellent

Guzmania and Tillandsia (blue) in a nursery in Belgium. Bromeliads are an ornamental part of the plant kingdom. There are around 2,000 species in about 50 genera.



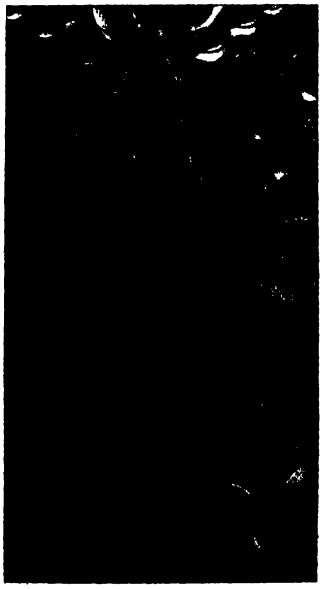
Aechmea Chantinii.



Guzmania 'Magenta'.



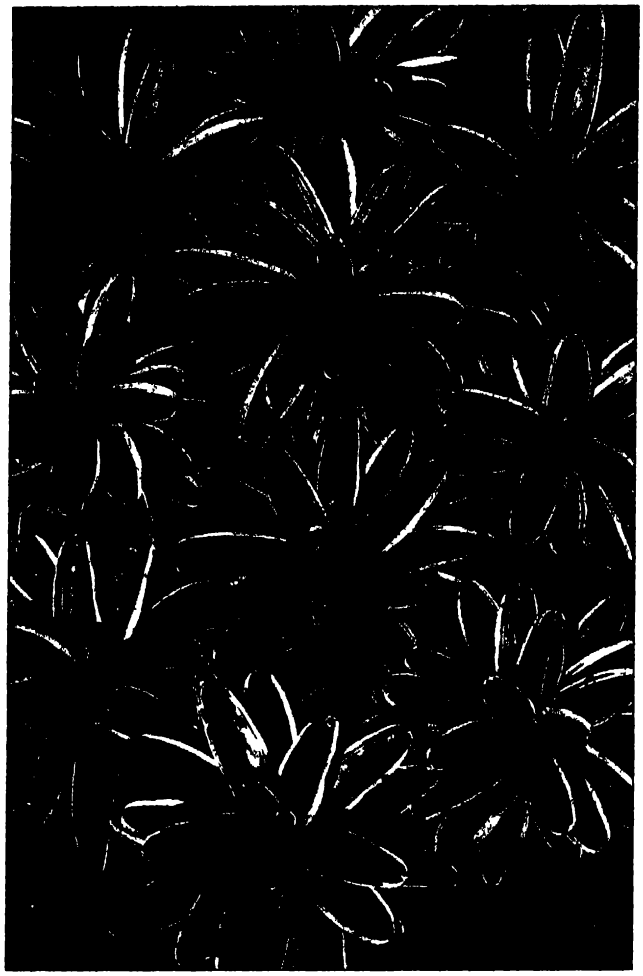
Billbergia Zebrina.



Cryptanthus 'It'.



Vriesea Splendens.



Neoregelia 'Flandria'.

indoor plants. I have seen many of them growing well in Bangalore and in the Western Ghats and Kerala, where the climate is typically tropical. This is understandable since the hot, humid tropical jungles of Central and Southern America, especially the Amazon forests in Brazil, happen to be their original home.

In their native home, bromeliads are the companions of orchids, palms and aroids, dwelling as epiphytes on trees or as terrestrials on the forest floor. They are an ornamental part of the plant kingdom. They are usually in the form of a rosette of leathery leaves with bizarre and strikingly variegated designs. Their flowers are either hidden deep in the centre, jutting out from pools of water and surrounded by brilliant inner leaves, or carried high on showy spikes and feathery racemes. There are around 2,000 species in about 50 genera. They receive the moisture they need through their central funnel of leaves and can survive for a considerable length of time without roots. As such they are ideal for home decoration – in hanging pots, as wall pieces, on driftwood, in landscaping and so on.



Aechmea Fasciata.

Bromeliads prefer filtered sunlight. They require porous light soil, such as peat and leafmould, or shredded coconut husk with brick chips, charcoal and some organic manure. Since they hardly have any root, the smaller the pot the better. A 15-centimetre clay pot is good enough for the largest plant. The compost should be kept moist but not soggy. The rosette of leaves should be filled with water all the time. It is usually the practice in trade to make them flower prematurely by pouring a solution of calcium carbide into the centre of the plant.

Propagation is usually by offshoots, which appear in spring. They should, however, be left attached to the mother plant until they are large enough to be handled for rooting.

Unfortunately, in India bromeliads have not received the acceptance they deserve. Some success stories and a better representation in flower shows and botanical gardens should help popularise them among garden lovers and flat dwellers. ■

Keshab C. Pradhan is a former Chief Secretary of Sikkim and a floriculturist.

Cosmic surprises

The spectacularly vivid images obtained by the orbiting X-ray observatory Chandra create a sensation among astronomers.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

THE cosmos abounds in mysteries, and the first images beamed on August 26 by the orbiting X-ray observatory, Chandra, a little over a month after it was launched aboard the space shuttle Columbia on July 23, have already thrown up two and created a sensation among astronomers. The images have been described as extraordinary. "This observatory is ready to take its place in the history of spectacular scientific achievements," said Dr. Martin Weisskopf, Chandra Project Scientist at the Marshall Space Flight Centre (MSFC) of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Named after the Indian-born Nobel laureate Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, whose work laid the basis for much of the understanding of the cosmos today, this most powerful X-ray telescope inspires great expectations. And not without reason. For, the first images from the Chandra X-Ray Observatory (CXO) have resulted in two remarkable discoveries – and these were only "First Light" observations using the telescope. "First Light" is something similar to the commissioning of a ship – the instrument, after being launched and checked, is readied for measurements. It is not the actual first light through the telescope. That occurred on August 13 when the telescope's aperture door was opened. "First Light" measurements are a means to standardise the instruments against signals from some well-known stellar objects. But in the case of Chandra these initialising exercises themselves brought a wealth of cosmic surprises.

One image traces the aftermath – the expanding shell of hot gas – of a supernova explosion that is believed to have occurred 320 years ago. The supernova remnant is in the constellation Cassiopeia in our galaxy and is called Casseiopeia A or Cas A. Scientists say that it has been imaged in such "stunning detail" (in the X-ray region of the spectrum) that they can see evidence of what may be a neutron star or a black hole near its centre. Scientists have described it as the best X-ray image ever of a cosmic object. This discovery is expected to answer one of the many questions about Cas A that have bugged astronomers. A supernova remnant usually harbours in its centre a compact, highly dense star called the neutron star. Until now, no one had seen any central object in Cas A; it had eluded detection in optical, radio and even X-ray wavelengths. Chandra has, however, shown that it exists. For the present, the object has been named Leon X-1 in honour of Dr. Leon van Speybroeck, the key man behind the design of Chandra's highly sensitive X-ray-reflecting mirrors.



GAMMA LIAISON

This X-ray image of the Cassiopeia supernova remnant is the official "First Light" image of the Chandra Observatory. Two shock waves are visible: a fast outer shock wave and a slower inner shock wave. The inner shock wave is believed to be the result of the collision of the ejecta from the supernova explosion with a circum-stellar shell of material, heating it to a temperature of 10 million degrees Celsius. The bright object near the centre may be the long-sought-after neutron star or black hole that remained after the explosion that produced Cassiopeia A.

Supernovae (see box) are exploding stars, which spew out enormous amounts of energy and radiation and are seen as extremely bright objects. Despite its proximity (only about 9,100 light years away), for some reason the explosion had been missed by astronomers. It was discovered by Karl Jansky, the pioneer of radio astronomy, in the 1930s – it was one of the first radio-emitting stellar objects discovered. The nature of the explosion that resulted in the remnant Cas A, however, remained an enigma of sorts. Although radio, optical and X-ray observations of the remnant indicate that it was a powerful explosion, the visual brightness of the outburst was perhaps much less than that of a normal supernova. It is believed that Cas A was produced by the explosion of an unusually massive star that had already ejected most of its outer layers. Chandra may come up with clues to why Cas A is not quite like other known supernovae.

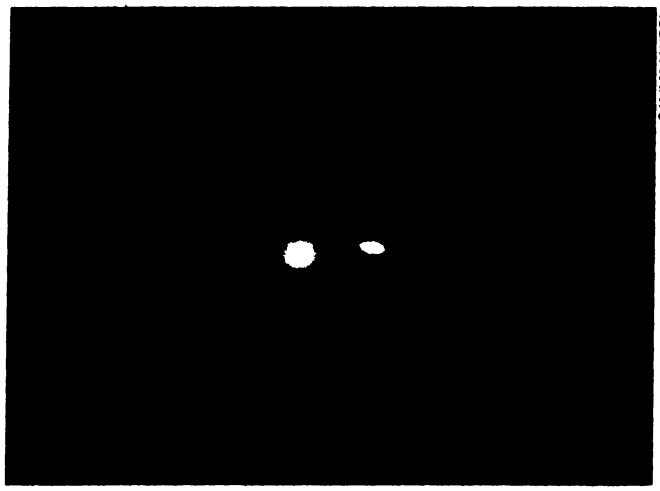
The spectacularly vivid images obtained by Chandra should allow scientists to trace the dynamics of the remnant and its collision with any material ejected by the star before it exploded. Extensive observations in radio, infrared, visible and X-ray wavelengths have revealed an incomplete shell of expanding gas with 300 glowing compact knots of material at temperatures of up to 28 million degree Celsius. Its outer shell is expanding at a speed of 800 km, creating shock waves rushing into inter-stellar space at tens of millions of kilometres an hour. These violent sonic booms cre-

ated by shock waves have created a vast 30-million-degree bubble of gas that is emitting X-rays for Chandra to see in fine detail. The first image has revealed the collision of the debris from the exploded star with the matter around it. Chandra has also detected both the fast outer shock wave and the slower inner shock wave with great precision in addition to giving tantalising evidence of a neutron star associated with the explosion.

Heavy elements in the hot gas produce X-rays of specific energies. The detectors aboard Chandra (see box) will also provide Cas A's precise X-ray spectra. These measurements make it possible to identify the heavy elements present and their quantities. This is necessary to understand how the elements essential for life were created and spread through the galaxy space by exploding stars. This should also help resolve another long-standing question: why is the Cas A a source of cosmic titanium-44, a radioactive isotope of the metal.

Infrared and X-ray spectral studies conducted until now have revealed the presence, as in all supernovae, of oxygen, neon, silicon, sulphur, argon, iron, calcium and even magnesium silicate, the stuff of inter-stellar dust. But the oddity about Cas A is that it seems to have an unusual abundance of Ti-44 as compared to nickel-56, another product of nucleosynthesis in a star. The presence of Ti-44 was discovered from the indirect evidence provided by the orbiting Compton Gamma Ray Observatory (CGRO) – of emission lines corresponding to scandium-44 decaying into calcium-44, the last leg of T-44's life cycle. If correct, Ti-44 holds the clue to the nuclear fusion in the core of the star that exploded. Chandra will look for Ti-44 from the sample of star material just above the layers that formed the neutron star that seems to be present and will perhaps throw light on what Cas A's contribution will be in the making of future worlds of our galaxy.

While Chandra's image of Cas A corresponds with earlier X-ray pictures taken by the United States-German-United Kingdom X-ray satellite ROSAT, it has given an incredible amount of detail and that too just after 90 minutes of exposure, where ROSAT took days to make its image. This is an indication of the power of Chandra's on-board instruments, making it the largest and the most sensitive X-ray astronomy telescope in the world. Chandra is expected to do for X-ray astronomy what the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope (HST) has done to optical astronomy. Chandra's observations *vis-a-vis* Cas A are not yet over; they will continue even as the telescope's calibration and verification tests will be carried out over the next few weeks. One of the observations will be to confirm whether the spectrum, brightness and time variation of the point source at the heart of Cas A do correspond to a neutron star.



GAMMA LIAISON

From Chandra, an X-ray image of PKS 0637-752, a luminous quasar six billion light years away. It radiates with the power of 10 trillion suns from a region smaller than the solar system. The source of this energy is believed to be a supermassive black hole.

EVEN before Chandra focussed on Cas A, it had made an amazing discovery with regard to a distant X-ray source called PKS 0637-752, a luminous quasar in the farthest reaches of the universe, six billion light years away. The quasar has been emitting energy with the power of 10 trillion suns, but from a region smaller than our solar system. It has little background X-ray noise or clutter and was also known to be a point source (against a dark background), making it an ideal target for sky calibration of the on-board instrument for what is called "point spread function", a measure of the on-axis blur of the focussed radiation in the telescope. But, as Dr. Harvey Tannanbaum, Director of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory's Chandra X-ray Centre in Massachusettes, observed after what CXO saw in the quasar, "nature often has surprises in store."

Instead of a neat little point source, Chandra found a massive jet spewing from the quasar. Although radio observations in the past have shown a jet, astrophysicists involved with Chandra did not expect to see it in X-ray because of the ultra-high resolution that has been achieved in radio observations by using multiple telescopes in conjunction. Dr. Tannanbaum said: "It is immediately apparent that we are not seeing a dot, that we are not seeing a simple point source." The jet appears to be at least 200,000 light years long, a huge expanse in intergalactic space, which can hold the entire Milky Way.

This serendipitous discovery poses a fundamental question to theoretical and observational astrophysics: how can such a massive burst of matter and energy extend across so much of space? Chandra's image, combined with radio telescope observations, should provide insights into the processes by which supermassive black holes can produce such cosmic jets. It was after detecting the jet-spewing quasar that the CXO was aimed at Cas A, an extended object which gave rise to its own fresh set of mysteries.

According to the Chandra Project team, both images confirm that Chandra is in excellent health and that its instruments and optics are performing up to expectations. The experiments planned and designed for Chandra will commence once its orbital check-out and calibration phase is over.

SINCE X-rays are absorbed by the earth's atmosphere, space-based observatories have become necessary. Based on the recommendations of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Chandra, originally called the Advanced X-Ray Astrophysics Facility (AXAF), was conceived in the 1970s as an advancement over the Second High-Energy Astronomy Observatory (HEAO-2, also called the Einstein Observatory), which was launched in 1978. Chandra has been billed as one of NASA's new Great Observatories for Astrophysics, complementing the already orbiting HST (which looks at visible and near infrared wavelengths) and the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory (which looks at even higher energies than Chandra) and the

planned Space Infrared Telescope Facility (SIRTF) and ground-based radio observatories.

With the arrival of the first images from Chandra, U.S. scientists have begun to claim that Chandra has put the country back in the lead in X-ray astronomy. Unlike the HST, which has a circular orbit, Chandra has a highly elliptical orbit with a perigee of 10,000 km and an apogee of 140,000 km (one-third of the distance to the moon). Its minimum life is about five years; it is, however, expected to last for at least 10 years.

The importance of X-ray astronomy stems from the fact that X-rays in the universe are not an oddity; they are present everywhere. Every major class of astronomical objects emits X-ray frequencies. It takes temperatures of around a million degrees to produce X-rays. X-ray sources have also been found to display tremendous time variability, indicating rapid dynamic events that produce X-rays. The Einstein Observatory found X-rays coming from quasars to normal stars to hot gas pervading the space between clusters of galaxies and many extra-galactic sources. Weisskopf said: "Most of the mass in the universe seems to be tied up in hot X-ray emitting gas, even more than what is seen from stars in the galaxies." It was X-ray astronomers who, based on observations on Cygnus X-1, came up with evidence for the existence of black holes. (The black hole emitted X-rays.)

Dr. K.P. Singh, an X-ray astronomer with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), said: "To understand really the most important elements of Chandra, one has to compare it with what we have had so far and what is likely to become available during its lifetime." It was the advent of truly focussing X-ray telescopes that revolutionised X-ray astronomy. This began with the Einstein Observatory, which brought about a technological leap in imaging and sensitivity. Einstein Observatory was able to image with a blur (the angular resolution) of 4 arc-second. This increased the sensitivity to detect faint sources or features by a factor of about 1,000 through the simple act of focussing over much smaller detector areas than before. After that came ROSAT, which had even smoother mirrors. Its resolution was similar to Einstein, but because of a reflecting area that was four to five times larger than that of Einstein, it was much more sensitive. It also had a long operational life. The number of X-ray sources rose to 100,000 with ROSAT, as compared to 10,000 with Einstein and 800 before.

After ROSAT came ASCA (US-Japan), which had a poorer spatial resolution but pioneered the use of sensitive (single photon counting) CCD X-ray cameras and increased the spectral resolution by a factor of 10. Dr. K.P. Singh said that Chandra had much more improved X-ray mirrors with a designed resolution capability of 0.3 arc-second. Unprecedented, this improves the sensitivity beyond that of ROSAT by over a factor of 10, even though its effective area is only slightly larger. It also has a better bandwidth, which is important for spectral studies. According to him, the CXO will, therefore, be able to see much deeper into the universe than before and would be the best tool to study faint and distant populations. "It has the sensitivity to look for distant and faint objects at a factor of 20 to 50 times better than anything that has been done before," Weisskopf said.

So what are the things that Chandra can do once it becomes an operational laboratory? According to Weisskopf, Chandra's ability to dissect energy spectrum and look carefully at line features and their characteristics will enable the study of plasmas in the vicinities of black holes and neutron stars and other regions of high energy activity. The largest and most massive objects in the universe are galaxy clusters, an enormous collection of galaxies. These are held together by gravity and much of their mass is in the form of an incredibly hot, X-ray emitting gas that fills the entire space between the galaxies. But neither the mass of the galaxies nor that of the hot gas is sufficient to hold a cluster together. So scientists believe that a dark matter which exerts this gravity, but cannot be seen, exists. So, what and where is this dark matter? X-ray observations with the help of Chandra can help map the location of the dark matter and help its identification. "Perhaps we, the geographers of the universe, will not discover what the dark matter is, but surely map where it is," Weisskopf said.

Of supernovae and quasars

T. RAMACHANDRAN

A SUPERNOVA occurs when a massive star has used up its nuclear fuel and the pressure drops in the central core. The matter in the core is crushed to higher and higher densities by gravity, and the temperatures reaches billions of degrees. Under these extreme conditions it becomes nuclear matter, whose enormous repulsive force violently reverses the collapse. A thermonuclear shock wave is generated through the expanding debris, fusing lighter elements into heavier ones and producing a brilliant cosmic bonfire. The shell of matter spewed out creates a bubble of multimillion-degree gas, called the supernova remnant. The hot gas will expand and produce X-rays for thousands of years. About every 50 years a star explodes in our galaxy. Cas A is a prime example.

The study of supernova remnants is essential to understand the origin of life on the earth. The heavier elements present in the clouds of gas and dust that collapsed to form the sun and other planets, such as carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, iron and so on, came from such catastrophic explosions, which spread them throughout the galaxy. Supernovae thus keep renewing the galaxy through star formation out of the spewed-out matter.

Quasars are peculiar, bright, star-like objects that radiate as much energy per second as a thousand or more galaxies from a region that has a diameter about one millionth of that of the host galaxy. Supermassive black holes with the mass of millions of stars are thought to lie at the centre of most large galaxies, driving this enormous energy generation. The evidence comes from optical and radio observations which show a sharp rise in the velocities of stars or gas clouds orbiting the centres of galaxies. High orbital velocities mean that something massive is creating a powerful gravitational field, which accelerates the stars. X-ray observations indicate that a large amount of energy is produced at the centres of many galaxies, presumably by the infall of matter into a black hole. In any event, the energy radiated by a supermassive black hole can be stupendous as it gobbles up large clouds of gas. This is apparently what is happening in quasars. ■

Chandra, the most advanced

R. RAMACHANDRAN

At the heart of Chandra is the High Resolution Mirror Assembly (HRMA). Since high-energy X-rays would penetrate a normal mirror, special cylindrical mirrors were created. The two sets of four nested mirrors resemble tubes within tubes. Incoming X-rays will graze off the highly polished surface and will be focussed on the detectors at the end of the telescope (with a focal length of 10 metres). Such grazing incidence is necessary because at greater angles of incidence, X-rays will just pass through materials such as mirrors. Chandra's mirrors are the largest of their kind and the smoothest ever created. The largest of the eight mirrors is about 1.2 m in diameter and 1 m long. The mirror assembly itself weighs more than a tonne.

At the end of its 13.8 m telescope, Chandra has two sets of focal plane detectors, which analyse and render the radiation focussed on to them by the front end of the telescope into images and spectra. Both the instruments are "two-in-one" devices consisting of an imager or a camera and a spectrometer. The spectrometer comes into play when a transmission grating is swung into place behind the telescope mirrors to spread the X-rays into separate energies, much in the manner a prism breaks visible light into its colours.

One of the devices on board Chandra is the AXAF CCD Imager and Spectrometer, or ACIS, which uses 10 charge-coupled devices (CCDs). AXAF itself stands for the observatory's original name - Advanced X-Ray Astrophysics Facility. Four of the CCDs, in a 2 x 2 array, constitute the imager (ACIS-I), which produces images 2048 pixels across, much like video camcorders and digital cameras, but detect X-rays, covering about 16.9 arc-minute of the sky. The moon has an apparent diameter of 31 feet, which gives an idea of the area in the sky that the instrument images at a given time. The spectrometer (ACIS-S) uses a strip of six CCDs to take X-rays from an object and [illegible] them into 12,288 discrete channels corresponding to 50 different X-ray energies.

The second instrument is the High Resolution Camera (HRC) which uses micro-channel plates (MCPs), a completely different detection method, with a resolving power of 0.5 arc-second, which is equal to reading the letters of a traffic sign from a distance of 20 km or a newspaper from a distance of half a km. The MCPs are ultra-thin microscopic lead oxide tubes carrying electric charge. To achieve this kind of resolution, 69 million MCPs are used. The tubes are about 1.25 millimetres long and just one-eighth the thickness of the human hair. An X-ray entering a tube liberates an electron that bounces off the wall and releases several more and so on, until an avalanche of 30 million electrons arrives at the bottom where the discharge is interpreted as a measure of the X-ray's energy. The imager part of the device (HRC-I) is a single array 9 cm x 9 cm with a 31 feet x 31 feet field of view. The spectrometer, HRC-S, is a single 2 cm x 11.8 cm strip with special metal foils masking some parts to help spectral analyses.

Indian scientists too have contributed to the HRC. Dr. Somak Raychaudhury of the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune was part of the team at the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics, which was responsible for the design and calibration of the HRC from September 1992 to February 1995 when the design was completed. The fabrication of the camera and the actual calibration were, however, completed in early 1996. According to Dr. Raychaudhury, his contribution was to simulate the working of the HRC, given the spectra of the typical stellar objects that Chandra would be used to observe. This involved studying the energy response of various materials and deciding on the material to be used in the instrument, such as the material for its UV (ultraviolet) filter, the coating for the micro-channel plates, the camera shutter, the [illegible] on. Dr. Raychaudhury also designed an optimal set of ground calibration tests.

The other outstanding astrophysical question that Chandra may help answer is about the identity of the powerhouse that is driving the explosive activity in many distant galaxies, the centre of many of which are sources of incredibly enormous amounts of energy and radiation, particularly X-rays Scientists theorise that massive black holes are at the centre of galaxies, gobbling up material Detailed observations with the help of Chandra can probe even the faintest of these active galaxies and study not only their time variability, but also how such intense emissions are generated in the first place

Weisskopf believes that some of the most astronomical discoveries that could be made with Chandra would relate to the so-called extended objects Many types of X-ray sources are extended the debris of exploding stars as shock waves heat the inter-stellar medium, dense regions of bright X-ray stars, the hot gas in galaxies, and clusters of galaxies, the largest known structures in the universe 'In my opinion, the pictures will be as spectacular as any of the pictures from Hubble," said Weisskopf

The CXO will however, have to contend with competition even before it completes one year in orbit Two observatories are ready for launch in early 2000 – the XMM , the European X-Ray Multi-Mirror telescope, and ASTRO-E, a U S - Japanese satellite The XMM will have four times more the effective area of the CXO Although its blurring will be more, the XMM will have a higher spectral resolution, according to Dr K P Singh It also will carry X-ray CCD cameras ASTRO-E will have an effective area similar to the CXO, but with a blur factor higher than that of the CXO and less than that of the XMM It will have five independent telescopes which will carry CCDs, one will carry a new instrument called microcalorimeter (MCM), having a high spectral resolution at medium X-ray energies, thus having an edge over the CXO and the XMM However, since the MCM needs to be cryogenically cooled, it will have a life of only two years The other four telescopes will, however, have a minimum life span of five years

The new millennium is, therefore, going to be the era of X-Ray astronomy in the true sense of the word. According to Dr. K.P. Singh, notwithstanding the other proposed X-ray observatories, Chandra will be the best for cosmological studies and will remain at the forefront until the end of its life. ■

Dealing with dementia

Interview with Dr. John Copeland.

"Memory loss, considered normal among the elderly, is actually a disease that needs to be treated," says **Dr. John Copeland**, founder-director, Institute of Human Ageing, Liverpool. Dr. Copeland has all through his career worked towards understanding and measuring mental illnesses. However, since teaching took much of his time (he held the Chair in Psychiatry at the University of Liverpool until his retirement in 1997), he could not devote much time to research. Yet research, which he began to pursue after his initial training in psychiatry in the United States, remained his first love. Beginning with a U.S.-U.K. diagnostic project supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, Washington, Dr. Copeland kept in touch with state-of-the-art research in mental illnesses and published over 50 articles in journals and books. After retirement, he turned to full-time research.

Dr. Copeland standardised the diagnostic techniques for many mental illnesses. These included procedures to measure the geriatric mental state (GMS), for which he devised a computer-aided system.

Dr. Copeland, who was recently in Chennai to train doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and health workers in the measurement of GMS, spoke to **Asha Krishnakumar** on the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of dementia. Excerpts:

▶ *What is dementia, and what are its symptoms?*

Dementia is a slow decline in what we call cognitive functions and memory. Memory loss is usually the most obvious symptom. All of us lose memory to some extent as we grow older; most people over 30 would have at one time or the other forgotten some names. The harder you try to remember, the more difficult it becomes to recall. Then suddenly, it comes to you in a flash when you are not thinking about it.

Then comes a situation when you cannot remember where you have kept things, and spend a lot of time searching for them. We consider that normal. But for some reason, which we don't understand, ageing affects memory and, to a lesser extent, the other functions of the brain.

When people begin to forget the names of their family members and friends, causing difficulty and confusion, memory-loss becomes a serious problem. I think that is when the serious problem of dementia begins. The progress of loss of memory in dementia is very quick. Usually, within six months to a year, there is a serious loss of memory.



V. GANESAN

The symptoms can vary slightly. The problem begins with an immediate loss of memory, for instance, forgetting where the car is parked. Then, gradually, other symptoms and memory problems occur. People begin to have difficulty calculating numbers, working out finances, finding the right word and, eventually, they may even have difficulty in putting on their clothes because they have forgotten how to. Some tend to put on clothes upside down or inside out. Eventually, they become quite immobile. It is a sad and tragic condition.

▶ *Is dementia specific to any intelligence level or social group?*

It affects people of all intelligence levels and social groups. It is also not confined to any age group, except that certain varieties tend to run in families and occur much earlier in life, any time after 30. The more common types occur around 70 years, and the incidence increases with age. So, at 90, the strike rate can be one in three people.

It is, of course, easy to confuse dementia with normal ageing. In all cultures, memory loss is seen as the final stage of ageing. Earlier, when some people aged faster and went into the child-like stage of dementia, they were said to have become senile. Now we know that it is a disease. Therefore, we ought to be able to tackle it and cure it. There is a lot of research going on to identify the different varieties of dementia.

▶ *What are the different types of dementia and when can each be diagnosed?*

There is Alzheimer's disease, named after Dr. Alzheimer who first described it. It progresses steadily in a short period of time. You can detect it from within a year or two to almost 10 years of its occurrence. There is another kind which fluctuates. This seems to be associated with vascular problems (see box). There is now the new one, the Lewy Body. This was discovered by Dr. Lewy. Apparently this is not very dissimilar to Alzheimer's disease, but if you look through a microscope at the brain of a person with Lewy Body, it shows lumps in the brain. Also, people with Lewy Body sometimes react very badly to drugs.

▶ *What are the rates of incidence of the different types of dementia?*

In Liverpool, when we looked at the pathology of the brains donated by people for research after death, we found that Lewy Body was a rare condition. The commonest form was Alzheimer's disease. We don't know much about it, except that it is hereditary. We know people who have lived up to 90 with that genetic make-up although they did not have more than a 50 per cent chance of living beyond 50.

These early studies were based on hospital data. But only when we did community studies to see its distribution in the population did we find that the genetic make-up we know of was not as clear a factor as we thought it was. There may be other genetic factors, which have not been discovered. However, what we know now makes a considerable difference to our understanding of the problem. Yet it doesn't explain most cases.

▶ *What are the different kinds of treatment for dementia?*

There are several types of treatment. For instance, when the brain deteriorates, you lose some chemicals. You need to give

drugs to compensate for the loss and improve the condition. There is evidence that this process helps, though not dramatically. However, none of the drugs now available makes a big impact. They do not cure, they simply replace the lost chemicals.

There is a group working on drugs that arrest the disease. We now understand a lot about the chemistry of the brain and what happens to it in old age. So, efforts are on to intervene in this chemical process in order to stop the disease. Many drug companies have invested money in this research. However, nothing has come out of it yet.

▶ *How does one manage people with dementia, particularly with the breakdown of the joint family system where the extended family used to take care of the elderly?*

The major problem is looking after these people. Traditionally, as you said, they were looked after by the joint and extended families. This was the case all over the world. It is a myth that people in the West do not look after their elderly. The breakdown of the extended family is therefore going to create a major social security problem all over the world.

▶ *With life expectancy at birth improving considerably, there will also be an increase in the proportion of the elderly in the population. With this the incidence of dementia will also increase. What are the issues involved in the management of dementia a country like India has to address?*

The population of the world is set to change and there is going to be a higher proportion of older people. Two decades ago, the Queen of England used to send about a hundred telegrams to people completing 100 years. Now she sends 4,000.

In Norway, the population aged slowly over the last 100 years. So they had 100 years to prepare themselves to face the problem. But in countries such as Brazil and India, for instance, the proportion of older people had hardly risen until 10 years ago. But subsequently, it rose sharply. The projections for the future are also very sharp. These countries now have to look seriously at the economic and social implications of this problem for society.

Another important need is to diagnose the disease in the early stage. Otherwise, even if treated, those affected by it may be left disabled to a certain extent. So it is important to focus on questions such as how to recognise the symptoms.

▶ *What are the problems in diagnosing dementia? How did you work out the computer-aided system of diagnosis?*

There is a general worry about the differences in diagnosis, particularly of the younger people, in the U.S. and the U.K. In the U.S. there were high levels of schizophrenia cases recorded in hospitals. But that was not the case in the U.K. The U.S. government was worried. So, I and my colleagues were asked to look at this problem. We did a study, comparing the diagnosis on admission to hospitals in both countries. We found no difference in the number of cases at that time when we applied our diagnosis in the U.S. So it was clear that the American diagnosis was very different from the European. And partly out of that study an interest grew in the U.S. and the U.K. in looking at diagnostic issues – trying to bring some science into what was until then a clinical impression.

With help from the U.S. government, we started looking at the diagnostic problems among the aged. A large number of people were apparently going to American hospitals with dementia, while a much higher proportion went to English mental hospitals with depression. Again, we were able to show by using the same diagnostic criteria that there was no difference between the two. Many of the cases that were diagnosed as dementia in the U.S. were diagnosed as depression in the U.K. In fact, when patients were treated for depression in the U.S., they got better.

Then, in Liverpool, we prepared a detailed schedule and did a survey to get a more accurate recording of symptoms in order to measure GMS. The next stage was to bring consistency into the diagnosis. This was necessary because until then we expected doctors to do the interviewing and make their own diagnosis after understanding the symptoms.

So we did a survey, and from its results we devised a computer-assisted diagnostic system we called AGECAT (aged geriatric examination computer-assisted taxonomy). This is a standardised method of diagnosis and can help diagnose many diseases, including dementia. After we published this work, many centres in the world showed interest in using this system.

▶ *For what other diseases is AGECAT used?*

AGECAT gives a range of diagnoses as well as differential diagnoses. People have found that quite useful. It helps in looking at depression, schizophrenia, neurosis and so on. It is now used widely throughout the world.

Some years ago, I realised that there were nine centres in Europe using GMS/AGECAT for population studies. At that time we approached the European Union and asked for funds to set up a programme involving data-sharing by these centres. We used the data put out by these centres and published a number of papers showing the prevalence of depression. Recently, 12 medical centres in Asia showed an interest in this and we have brought them together.

▶ *India is going to face a major problem with an increase in the population of the aged. Do you plan to include India in your study?*

We have just begun our work in India. Eight centres are doing this work. We are trying to bring them together.

Study group on dementia

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

AN international group – 10/66 for Dementia – was formed recently by Dr. Martin Prince and Prof. John Copeland in collaboration with medical centres in various countries that study the effects of ageing.

Two groups of doctors, from the Schizophrenia Research Foundation, the Voluntary Health Services (VHS) and the Public Health Centre (PHC), all in Chennai, have been chosen to be a part of this group.

The first group is headed by Dr. Thara Srinivasan, a psychiatrist and director of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation.

The second, a joint venture between the departments of neurology at the VHS and the PHC will have Ravi Samuel, a psychiatric social worker, who is currently a Paul Hamlyn Fellow at the National Hospital, London, as convener. Ravi Samuel has received overall training in dementia care, cognitive behaviour therapy and so on. The supervisor of this group is Prof. Krishnamoorthy Srinivas, chairman of the departments of neurology at the VHS and the PHC.

The first 10/66 workshop was held by the group headed by Prof. Krishnamoorthy Srinivas in March. The second was held by the group headed by Dr. Thara Srinivasan in June. ■

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I am now looking at ways to get these centres to collaborate with one another without having to spend too much money. This is because there isn't much money in India to spend on this.

▶ *Are there no common obvious symptoms for dementia?*

A majority of symptoms are fairly straight-forward. For example, loss of appetite and loss of concentration and memory. So that is why, I think, we don't have a problem. But nevertheless, we have to make sure that we measure the same sort of things the same way everywhere. That is the first stage. Once that is done, we can rely on the computer system to give us the diagnosis. Once we collect all the information from all the centres, we can find out what the underlying causes for dementia are across societies, and what causes one society to be more prone to dementia or depression than another.

▶ *How do you measure the GMS, and how does India compare with other Asian countries and the world?*

To compute the GMS, patients are interviewed and all health data recorded and coded. In this, you have to make a judgment about whether the symptoms the patients describe are genuine symptoms. Those data are then fed into the computer. The computer then comes up with the diagnosis – it may say this is an organic condition and may give you the level of severity. Doctors may disagree on the diagnosis. That is why we are now standardising symptoms across countries with the help of surveys. This system seems to work in Britain, Australia, India and some other countries.

In terms of the incidence of dementia, there is no difference among countries. Using the GMS, we found that incidence levels varied between 4 per cent and 5 per cent in the population above 65 years. This is the result from the surveys done in many countries by the European group, the Asian group, our group in Liverpool and in India.

▶ *What is the state of the art in research on dementia?*

An enormous amount of work is going on. Neurochemists are working on brain tissues. They are looking at the chemical structure of the brain and how progressive are the lesions that are formed. Geneticists are trying to discover the genetic qualities of the population with dementia. They have had one breakthrough, with the discovery of Apo-E 4 (those with Alzheimer's disease). Now they are working towards another. Then there are the pathologists who are looking at the brains of the dead and trying to reconstruct how they got to that condition. The chemical composition of the brain that leads to this problem is also being studied to help in the early recognition of the condition. People are visualising the brain with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and using positron emission tomography (PET) to know the chemistry of the brain.

So a lot of work is going on, but it is slow. The interest started with us in the 1970s. There is a conference on dementia almost every week somewhere in the world. Therefore, there is hope that we will make substantial progress very soon. But the countries and governments should not be complacent. As we do not know how long it will take for a breakthrough, we need to be prepared for the social problems dementia causes.

▶ *Do you think people should "age gracefully"?*

I feel one should not age gracefully because ageing gracefully means that you recede to the background in a dignified way. Why should it be so? At 65 you can still contribute substantially. The elderly people also need an economic and political position in society. Otherwise, they will be squeezed out by the younger generation. There has got to be some balance between the young and the old. Elderly people cannot sit back and let the youth run over them. So, I think you should age "disgracefully". ■

For early prevention

KRISHNAMOORTHY SRINIVAS

DEMENTIA has become a major problem the world over. In an interview to *Frontline* (May 21, 1999), Prof. Sid Gilman discussed Alzheimer's disease in detail. Many of the causes of dementia are reversible: for example, thyroid and Vitamin B-12 deficiency and some kinds of brain tumours and clots. However, one neglected area is vascular dementia. It was V. Hachinski and his colleagues who drew attention to this condition. However, even now, neurologists and physicians are a little sceptical about this term despite the fact that the term multi-infarct dementia is used rather freely.

The main risk factor in the case of vascular dementia is hypertension. Prof. H.M. Barnett, a pioneer in stroke research, describes four factors that contribute to stroke. They are: high blood pressure, smoking, accumulation of fats called lipids in the blood cells and diabetes mellitus.

It is necessary for the physician to understand that the onset of this kind of dementia can be prevented by a systematic campaign which would include the launching of a nationwide campaign against smoking; measuring blood pressure periodically and keeping it under control; controlling diabetes and keeping the blood sugar level within reasonable limits, especially in elderly people; and taking drugs called statins to lower lipids in the blood.

Unfortunately, in a country like India, very little is done towards prevention. If the guidelines mentioned above are followed, even heart disease can be prevented. Instead of spending money on treating these diseases, what is necessary is a public health campaign that uses the media to educate people about the risk factors and the preventive measures.

Why does vascular dementia occur? Generally, people associate a stroke with a major paralytic attack. However, strokes of lesser intensity, such as temporary paralysis or numbness of an arm, a leg or one side of the face, also occur. Without being unduly alarmed, people should recognise that these strokes, called transient ischaemic attacks, can be prevented and controlled. In international trials, a consensus was arrived at – that is, 75 mg of aspirin should be taken by individuals who come under the high-risk category and run the risk of having a minor stroke.

At present, Alzheimer's disease is given much more attention than vascular dementia. However, it is important that dementia is tackled at the national level.

A 10/66 Dementia group was formed recently. The K. Gopalakrishna Department of Neurology at the Voluntary Health Services and the T.S. Srinivasan Department of Clinical Neurology and Research at the Public Health Centre, both in Chennai, have been included in this group. ■

The BJP's real agenda

A.G. NOORANI

The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India by Thomas Blom Hansen; Oxford, 1999; pages 293, Rs. 495.

THE skeletons began rattling all the more noisily for the desperate determination with which the cupboard was being shut. The Bharatiya Janata Party tried to assure its allies in the so-called National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that issues such as the Ram temple in Ayodhya, scrapping of Article 370 on Kashmir's autonomy, and a uniform civil code were not on its immediate agenda. But what assurance could it offer its own cadres who supported it precisely because it was committed to these issues and to Hindutva?

The mentors, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), can quietly be squared with. If the RSS could spread its influence when its political front, the Jan Sangh, predecessor of the BJP, was but a constituent of the Janata Party Government (1977-79), its influence, surely, would be far greater if the BJP is allowed to stay in power as the dominant member of a coalition. The RSS boss, Rajendra Singh, declared in an article in *Organiser* (May 7, 1995), entitled "Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi", that "no friendly interaction between the Hindus and Muslims is possible unless the latter shed their intransigence in regard to Kashi, Mathura and Ayodhya."

The silence of a man of such a rabidly communal outlook during the current controversy over the BJP's commitments *vis-a-vis* its pact with the allies, is as significant as that of the dog that did not bark.

First came the calculated leak. "RSS sources" told a correspondent of *The Asian Age* (August 18) that "there has been no dilution in the agenda and ... installation of a BJP-led coalition government at the Centre will be a step towards achieving the implementation of the agenda."

They told him: "Our priority is to install a BJP-led government at the Centre. But that does not mean that it will be done at the cost of our agenda.... It will be the BJP alone which is going to implement our agenda." Atal Behari Vajpayee would be supported to the hilt because he is the best vote-getter available. Incidentally, the issue of *Organiser* in which Rajendra Singh wrote as he did, also carried Vajpayee's famous article "The Sangh is my soul".

It was left to the BJP's general secretary, the too-clever-by-half K.N. Govindacharya, to give the game away as he tried publicly to assure the cadres. He said in New Delhi on August 22 that the BJP remained committed to the three contentious issues even though it accepted the NDA's agenda. Why? Because "with the BJP yet to traverse some more distance *to attain the steering position in Indian politics*, we decided that *in this interregnum of transition* we should commit ourselves" to the NDA's agenda. Kalraj Mishra, Public Works Minister in Uttar Pradesh, confirmed it in Lucknow the next day: "The party is committed to the construction of the Ram temple."



Vajpayee tried frantically to limit the damage, in Ahmedabad on August 23: He was "surprised" to read Govindacharya's statement and said "all contentious issues should not be brought into the political arena". Govindacharya obediently issued a "clarification". Having claimed on August 22 that "we work with bifocal vision", he demonstrated the next day that the BJP also speaks with a forked tongue.

If Pramod Mahajan asserted at Aurangabad on August 23 that the three issues had *not* been sidetracked, J.P. Mathur said the opposite on August 24. M. Venkaiah Naidu declared on August 25: "Even if tomorrow we were to fight an election on our own and get 370 seats, we will not make Ram Mandir part of our election agenda." The very next day he denied having said so. He had said that, not to a press reporter, but on the Star News TV channel, which said his "statement was on tape and could not be refuted" (*The Indian Express*, August 27).

Kalraj Mishra returned to the fray on August 25. "Even now Ram Mandir was a burning issue for us. But since there was no consensus in the NDA on this, it is not part of the joint manifesto with the NDA... *there is no dilution in our stand.* However there are the compulsions of coalition politics...." A *Times of India* report (August 27) from Nagpur said that "the RSS was completely at peace with the BJP on the Ayodhya temple issue, RSS sources claimed. The RSS realises that getting Mr. Vajpayee back into power is much more important." Mamasaheb Ghumre, former vice-president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), told him: "The temple has a better chance of getting built with him in the saddle for five years." Once in power with a solid majority of its own, the BJP will discard the flotsam and jetsam it has gathered in the NDA – and fulfil its own agenda. To paraphrase Milton, case will recant vows made under pain as unsaid and void.

On April 24, 1996, on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections, L.K. Advani, then BJP president, said there would be no compromise on the Ram temple and the matter was high on its agenda. The party's 1998 election manifesto had a whole page on Hindutva, and "cultural nationalism". It concluded with a pledge – to build the temple. The National Agenda for Governance was drawn up *subsequently* and published on March 18, 1998 when alliances became inescapable if power was to be won. The BJP's decision not to bring out its own manifesto this year is as unprecedented as it is meaningful – the 1998 document stands.

ONE must not miss the wood for these trees. The Danish scholar, Thomas Blom Hansen's book makes a timely appearance to remind us of what

is in store for us once the BJP takes us into the wood. Its sub-title captures the theme: what the BJP's concept of Hindu nationalism spells for India's governance and its democracy. His grasp of political theory, intensive field work in Maharashtra, and familiarity with the vast literature on the subject are well reflected in the work. To what do we attribute the saffron wave? One school of scholarship attributed it to "imaginative political strategies", another to the older "reserves of religious nationalism".

Hansen incorporates both the strands but goes beyond them. "My main argument is that Hindu nationalism has emerged and taken shape neither in the political system as such nor in the religious field, *but in the broader realm of what we may call public culture* – the public space in which a society and its constituent individuals and communities imagine, represent, and recognise themselves through political discourse, commercial and cultural expressions, and representations of state and civic organisations" (emphasis added, throughout).

The Sangh's credo is quintessentially paternalistic, xenophobic and authoritarian. "Many Hindu nationalists have only a skin-deep commitment to democratic procedures." But there are some latent fears, some hidden concerns, which it was able to draw upon. Hansen's book is, in its mercilessly incisive analyses, a mirror to Indian society. "Is Hindu nationalism really revealing the dark side of the middle-class culture and social world of the 'educated sections' who have dominated Indian public culture and the Indian state for so long – the authoritarian longings, the complacency, and the fear of the 'underdog', the 'masses', and the Muslims?... The recent Indian experience of Hindu nationalism should remind us that democracy also very often gives birth to forces, desires, and imaginings of an authoritarian and anti-democratic nature, or 'majoritarian' and moral backlashes against what is seen as 'excessive liberalism' in the public culture."

His resume of the course of Indian politics in recent years is prefaced by a thorough discussion of the ideology of Hindu nationalism as developed in the last century and the present one by men of intellect such as Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak right down to the likes of V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar.

The BJP capitalised on the policy of "soft" Hindu communalism which Indira Gandhi adopted after her return to power in 1980. But the seeds had been sown much earlier. "Radical anti-Muslim discourse had coexisted with political pragmatism within the Sangh Parivar and within the older sanghathanist tradition *for almost a century*. What was new in the 1980s was, in other words, not so much the employment of the idiom of Hindu communalism *per se*, but rather the ingenuity and scale with which this idiom was differentiated and disseminated through an array of new technologies of mass mobilisation."

The book makes a timely appearance to remind us of what is in store for us once the BJP takes us into the wood. Its sub-title captures the theme: what the BJP's concept of Hindu nationalism spells for India's governance and its democracy.

Amazingly – or perhaps not – the BJP's supporters in the "respectable" middle class do not find its techniques of mobilisation offensive. The ends justify the means. Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati were found useful. The latter was made a Union Minister. The author quotes one of her election speeches in 1991: "We could not teach them with words, now let us teach them with kicks... Tie up your religiosity and kindness in a bundle and throw it in the Jamuna... Any non-Hindu who lives here does so at our mercy."

Acts of violence are a natural consequence of speeches such as this. No wonder riots followed the Hindutva campaign.

The Sangh Parivar operates from a narrow electoral base and its success is far more tenuous than is imagined. It owes a lot to the erosion of centrist forces such as the Janata Dal. Regionalist parties fell in line. Its electoral constituency is limited to 25 per cent of the popular votes, a mere 15 to 16 per cent of the country's adult population. One limitation to its expansion is that it is confined "mainly to the Hindu upper-caste and middle class milieus". It has no message for social uplift, economic emancipation and gender equality. The women it projects are not known for commitment to issues of gender equality, unlike, for instance, Brinda Karat of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or Gita Mukerjee of the CPI.

The Hindutva movement has wreaked sheer havoc in the country. It claimed to have altered the political agenda in the early 1990s, only to profess to discard it at the end of the decade. "Has the Indian democracy been weakened by the BJP's expansion over the last decade and its recent formation of the Central Government in New Delhi? Is this only the beginning of a gradual Hindu nationalist penetration of the public administration, the judiciary, the military, and the press that over time may constrict democratic procedures, and encourage a more heavy-handed line toward public protests, social movements and others who are critical of the government or just oppose economic and social exploitation?... Throughout this work I have presented evidence and arguments that in many ways support the conclusion that the RSS represents a kind of 'Swadeshi fascism' decisively vernacularised and shaped by modern Indian colonial and postcolonial history." But, the author adds, the BJP must not be viewed in isolation from other dark social forces in Indian society. "The advent of Hindu nationalism forces us to ask larger and more uncomfortable questions."

This is not to minimise one bit the seriousness of the sheer evil that is the Sangh Parivar: "There is little doubt that the BJP's road to power has ridden over the dead bodies of thousands of innocent Muslims, and there is no doubt that strong forces within the movement and in the BJP's sizeable constituency among bureaucrats, commercial strata, and officers would like to see India as a much stronger, less democratic, and more repressive state that could provide security, labour, and the pleasant sides of modern life to the elite and the middle class." The Parivar must be viewed in the context of the milieu in which it has been able to prosper and attract support from some who were not suspected of being communal. There are many more closet Hindutvaists than is commonly realised.

The battle for India's democracy is not lost, it will not do to minimise the arduousness of the tasks that lie ahead. The future of India's democracy and its secularism depends on the outlook Indians of all creeds come to share. Ideology matters, still. ■

An officer's prescriptions

R.K. RAGHAVAN

Not a Licence to Kill by Rajendra Shekhar; Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1999; Rs.350.

POLICE-BASHING is a favourite pastime with most observers of the Indian scene. The police are accused of everything from brutality to sheer personal aggrandisement. Almost everyone reading accounts of police performance is inclined to believe that there is little good about the force in India. Undoubtedly, many members of our police forces have contributed wittingly or unwittingly to this sordid image. Also, until recently, whatever was said about the police went unrebutted. There is now the healthy trend of senior police officers – serving officers and those who have retired – penning their side of the story, which lends some balance to all the criticism of the police. Also heartening is the willingness to admit failures and shortcomings and to explore ways and means by which the police can give a better account of themselves. The growing volume of "police literature" in the country is an index of a change in the mindset that had characterised the police psyche for more than a century.

Rajendra Shekhar, a distinguished Stephenian and a former Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation, is the most recent person to record his reflections. While in service he enjoyed a Himalayan reputation for integrity and reluctance to yield to extraneous pressures. This is why what he writes gains credibility.

Like many sensible police scholars, Shekhar sets much store by the recommendations of the National Police Commission (1977). This is meant to bolster his theme that the police are more reactive than proactive. In this context, he cites the lack of attention on the part of the police with regard to preventive action. Fortunately, the charge does not lend itself to generalisation. Some in the higher echelons of the administration alone are aware of how many a crisis had been defused in the nick of time by thoughtful pre-emptive action. But the basic complaint that at the grassroots level there are many who are lethargic and are not inclined to move by themselves and that there is premium on inaction in the existing highly politicised ambience, cannot be brushed aside as being fanciful.

Shekhar uses his knowledge of the scriptures as well as current management literature to great effect. The chapters "The Process of Change" and "The Agents of Change" give more than a glimpse of the knotty issues involved in the process of transforming the police from a 'force' to a 'service'. He is no doubt conscious that cultural differences make universal application of management concepts rather difficult. Nevertheless he draws up a blueprint for skilled leadership ("a tightrope walk") that strikes a ("honourable") compromise between "the real politics of democratic governance" and "abdication of authority to the detriment of the (police) organisation".

The author's prescription for most of the current ills: Empowerment to serve. Not a licence to kill. He looks upon this as a new paradigm that will usher in a phase of "dynamic rule of the law" and "service to the people".

Talking of the "real politics of leadership", he prescribes a formula that is distilled wisdom with which few among the police top brass can disagree: "...on the idealistic plane (he) is required to have no caste, creed or religion. He should be apolitical and democratic. On the practical plane, however, he has to indulge in good politics; to sell his ideas to his Government, to his men, to the public, in organisational as well as public interest."

Public lore in India is replete with comical accounts of individual leaders who had either become the factotums of the ruling party or vainglorious chieftains pretending to be autonomous and were totally out of touch with the cold realities of grassroots politics. It is not very often that one comes across a leader who blends the professional and political needs of the job without inviting scorn or ridicule.

Shekhar's prescription for most of the current ills: *Empowerment to serve. Not a licence to kill.* He looks upon this as a new paradigm that will usher in a phase of "dynamic rule of the law" and "service to the people". He goes on to delineate his five-fold strategy, actuated by the belief that this would somehow refurbish the police image. He pleads for an attitudinal change that will pull the police out of the slough of their own sub-culture that relies rather heavily on conformity and unquestioned compliance.

Those like me who have been in the force for several decades are conscious of the enormity of the task. Shekhar himself should be aware that when he pleads for more internal democracy he is in a hopeless minority. A large chunk of the leadership is smug with the *status quo* and will be averse to the change that Shekhar advocates. This is, however, no case for giving up the movement in favour of a qualitative change in the hierarchical relationship that dominates police organisations.

Shekhar comes out as a man with a vision. Remarkably, there is not even a trace of rancour or bitterness in the many anecdotes he cites in order to lend substance to his theme. This is in contrast with many others who write these days mainly to settle personal scores and, incidentally, also to be in the limelight in the evening of their lives.

Shekhar may not have said anything new or sensational on the police, particularly on how to alter their poor image. But his approach to the problem is refreshing. He needs to be read with all seriousness. ■

Dr. R.K. Raghavan is Director, Central Bureau of Investigation.

The North Korean paradox

GLYN FORD

The Guerrilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea by Adrian Buzo; I.B.Tauris; £12.95.

ADRIAN BUZO is a former Australian diplomat who served in Pyongyang almost a quarter of a century ago. His thesis is fundamentally a simple one. The enigma that is North Korea is directly drawn from its leadership. Nurture, not nature, wins the day. Kim Il Sung, and therefore his politics, was a product of his environment.

Kim, North Korea's leader since his imposition by the Russians in 1946 until his death in 1994, was an uneducated rebellious son of a father who participated in anti-Japanese activities organised by Christian-led nationalist groups. These activities led the family to flee to Manchuria, where the Japanese authorities had limited reach, when Kim was seven years old. In Manchuria, Kim entered the Chinese school system, which he left when he was 14. At 17, he joined a Communist youth group, was arrested and imprisoned for eight months.

By 1933 he was under arms in a Chinese Communist Party-led guerilla group fighting as part of the grandly named Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army. After two years, under sustained Japanese pressure, this 15,000-strong army had been scattered and driven deep into the countryside. Kim rose in the ranks, but it was all small beer. His largest and most famous operation was the June 1937 attack on the Japanese garrison at the Chinese-Korean border village of Bonchonbo with a company of 200 men.

By 1941 the Japanese threat was so severe and so close that Kim and his band left Eastern Manchuria and crossed into the Soviet Union, where after a short interval he, along with the remnants of the Manchurian guerillas, was absorbed into the Red Army's 88th brigade responsible for reconnaissance and infiltration. It was the end of Kim as a combatant. He saw no active service in one of the world's shortest wars, the Soviet Union only entering the war in the East against Japan seven days before Japan's final surrender.

While in the USSR, Kim spent all his time in military circles with two extended trips to Stalin's Moscow to see the future and its works. His superiors in the Soviet Communist Party were impressed by his dedication, discipline and ruthlessness. These led to his selection for a leadership role in autumn 1945 when, a little to their surprise, the Soviet Union found itself as the occupying force in the northern half of Korea.

Kim had been nurtured in almost total isolation. Physically he had been in exile from his homeland since the age of seven. Socially and culturally, since his teenage years, apart from his time in the USSR, he had never lived in a town or city and had been cut off from newspapers, radio and consequently, world events. Politically the situation was even worse. He was a complete unknown outside of his own small circle of warrior Communists.

At the end of the War, Korean Communism had four distinct strands. The domestic Communists who had operated underground during the War in Korea itself, Soviet-Koreans from amongst the party members of Russia's Korean minority, the Yan'an group, Korean Communists who had left Manchuria to fight against the Japanese and the Chinese nationalists under the banner of the Chinese Communist Party, and Kim Il Sung and his former Manchurian guerillas. Over the next 20 years Kim bested them all with a series of kaleidoscopic alliances reflecting the internal situation in Korea and changing relationships with the big two of Communism, the Soviet Union and China.

Kim Il Sung survived his misreading of America when the Korean War was launched in June 1950, and the subsequent invitation to the Chinese to send in hundreds of thousands of "volunteers" when his back was up against the Yalu river as the "U.N. forces" threatened to reach the Chinese border – a setback that triggered the factions into a struggle for supremacy. Most important, he won North Korea's version of the Stalin-Bukharin struggle in 1955 when his "leftist" demand for a forced march to heavy industrialisation driven by Stakhanovite shock-workers won out against "rightist" demands for more investment in agriculture and light industry. When in 1966 he weathered within the Korean Workers' Party a microcosm version of the same challenge, this time to his "Equal Emphasis" policy that placed equal weight on economic development and military preparedness, in favour of channelling more resources into the civilian sector, the battle was over. The last faction fell.

Kim Il Sung was no longer the first among equals; he was now the state, encased by a self-selected carapace of admiring and unquestioning companions from among the former guerillas. The emerging Juche philosophy is best described as a version of Georgi Lukacs' Hegelian Marxism where it is the humans who create nature. The difference is that the catalyst that leads to class consciousness in Lukacs is the party, and in Juche philosophy the revolutionary – almost Nietzchean – leader, retrospectively intellectualised North Korean reality.

Kim's rule had its economic successes. Stalinism was running ahead of South Korea's version of clientalist capitalism until well into the 1970s, but here it stalled as it failed to make the transition from the initial construction of an industrial base to the constant waves of creative destruction required for a modern industrial society. Heroes of Labour butter few parsnips in the era of post-industrial society. Nor does monument building in Pyongyang, with its almost pharonic appearance, help. True, the United States inexorably drove North Korea's military excesses onwards, forcing the economy to live a lie, but in the end it is in an industrial and political cul-de-sac.

If man is the product of his upbringing, what future for North Korea? Kim's son, Kim Jong Il, is, along with the military, in charge of events. They may have nuclear weapons, they have already launched a satellite demonstrating a capability of hitting Japan with a missile, and they "have available for launch" a missile thought to have a range that would encompass the west coast of the U.S. Simultaneously former senior figures in the regime claim that three million people – one in eight of the population – have died of starvation. How will a privileged and indulged son of a man who almost became a God for his people, react? Either we hope Adrian Buzo is wrong or it is clearly in everyone's interest to find a soft landing. ■

In search of perfection

RICHARD BERNSTEIN

T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life by Lyndall Gordon; W.W. Norton; pages 721, $35.

DESPITE the best efforts of biographers, in the public mind a life is too often just a caricature, an identifying line or two. And the most common lines that T.S. Eliot has been reduced to are great poet but miserable man; anti-Semitic, cold-hearted author of immortal verse; a man who committed his troubled first wife to an asylum and then abandoned her there forever.



THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

Lyndall Gordon, the South African-born literary biographer who had already published two volumes on Eliot, has done her best in *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* to rescue both the poet and the man from the simplifying abstractions that have always been applied to him. She has written an intellectually demanding, sophisticated and distinguished book.

By presenting Eliot as a flawed and tireless searcher for perfection, Gordon seems kinder to him than some recent writers, like Cynthia Ozick and Anthony Julius, who have compellingly brought to light his undeniable prejudices, especially his dislike of Jews ("T.S. Eliot and anti-Semitism", *Frontline*, November 15, 1996). Gordon does not turn away from these faults; indeed, she argues that in one way Eliot was even worse than his critics believe because his misogyny was as strong as his hatred of Jews.

And yet the overall effect of her probing and extremely thoughtful study is partly to redeem Eliot, at the very least by picturing him in all of his complex dimensions. "Eliot's admirers played up his mask, while detractors stripped it only to find the flaws," Gordon writes on her very first page. "Both overlooked a man of extremes whose deep flaws and high virtues were interfused." Gordon's book is an attempt to fathom the ways in which this interfusing took place, her theory being that "the 'impersonal' facade of his poetry – the multiple faces and voices – masks an often quite literal reworking of personal experience."

To advance her theory, Gordon, who has also written biographies of Charlotte Bronte, Virginia Woolf and Henry James, takes her readers on a tortuous journey. She tracks the difficult man and his poems from his blue-blood origins in St. Louis to his death in London in 1965, when he was widely proclaimed not just the greatest poet of the century but its literary prophet as well. The consistent theme that emerges is that of a tortured, fastidious figure of puritanical self-denial, horrified by the spectacle of ordinary life in a relativistic and secular age, who strove mightily, as he put it, to sense "vibrations beyond the range of ordinary men."

Although Eliot was born in St. Louis in 1888, his ancestors were from the priestly elite of Boston. (One of his ancestors was a judge in the Salem witch trials.) His father was a brick manufacturer, his mother a minor poet, his other close forebears were ministers in the generally optimistic, upbeat Unitarian church, very different from the sin-obsessed theology that Eliot, who converted to Anglicanism, developed.

Gordon traces a complicated set of influences on Eliot, from French Symbolist poetry to the domineering role played by the expatriate American Ezra Pound, to the Ballets Russes. But Eliot's grounding in New England Puritanism and in the sense of the artist as a solitary voyager, a kind of moral and aesthetic lone wolf, are perhaps dominant in Gordon's portrayal. At least, it is this feature of Eliot that seems to explain his aversion to sensuality and his strangely cold-blooded relations with women.

"Eliot's commitment to the solitary burden of the soul is not out of line with an American plot where the Jamesian New Englander, awakening to life, renounces love out of a finer moral passion 'to be right,'" she writes. The sudden poetic eruption of what Gordon calls "the stern voice of denial" – she is writing here specifically of the *Four Quartets* – is Eliot's hatred of humanity speaking, his powerful sense of "the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering." His goal was to transcend that corruption and the dross of quotidian relationships by the creation of timeless art.

This brought him into painfully inconclusive relationships, notably with his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, and with Emily Hale, the Bostonian companion of his middle years, whom he never married. At the emotional centre was Vivienne, who has generally been portrayed as a victim of Eliot's cruelty and his sexual aversions (especially in the film *Tom and Viv*, adapted from the play of a decade or so ago). Gordon's account of their relationship is far from sympathetic toward Vivienne, who emerges as manipulative, weak, depressive and demanding, the person whom Virginia Woolf called a "bag of ferrets" around Eliot's neck.

Gordon's close readings of the poems, which are complex, intellectually demanding and richly suggestive, are at their most interesting when delineating the links between Eliot's tortured sentimental life and his work. Vivienne, for example, she finds oppressively present in *The Waste Land*, the powerful evocation of urban despair and death of the spirit that made Eliot world-famous at the age of 40. Her lengthy and deep analysis of this poem is one of the most arresting parts of her book. She links Eliot's mocking disillusionment, his dislike of women and Jews, his yearnings for a religious awakening, to the specific anguish he was experiencing.

"Unlike the satirist, Eliot does not criticise an actual world but creates a 'phantasmal' world of lust, filth, boredom and malice on which he gazes in fascinated horror," she writes. Gordon also argues that the work has been largely misread. Critics have "fastened on his despair and erudition," she argues, and in so doing they have missed the "visionary alternative" that Eliot presented in the poem, the "possibility of regeneration."

The theme throughout is a kind of moral agony. It does not excuse the horrible flaws in the man, and, indeed, Gordon makes no attempt to excuse them. It is perhaps Eliot's signal flaw that he forced others to share his moral agony. But moral agony also suggests a bitter, lifelong struggle and an overweening seriousness of purpose, and while these qualities do not make a portrait of virtuousness, they need to be remembered as parts of a complicated and troubling whole. ■

New York Times Service

Monitoring the environment

R. RAMACHANDRAN

The Citizens' Fifth Report on State of India's Environment Volume I: National Overview; pages 440; **Volume II: Statistical Database**; pages 256; edited by Anil Agarwal, Sunita Narain and Srabani Sen; published by the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1999; price: hardbound – Rs. 1,590; paperback – not mentioned.

IF the size of this publication of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the Delhi-based non-governmental organisation involved in, in its own words, "environmentally sound and equitous development strategies", is any indication, environmental concerns in the country have only multiplied manyfold since the earliest in the series, the First Citizens' Report came out in 1982. This time the Report is in two volumes: Volume I presents a report on environmental issues, events, policies and practices, and Volume II provides a statistical database on different aspects of India's environment.



As the blurb inside says, "The Report supplements the information provided in the earlier reports and is not a substitute for them." The Second Report came out in 1984-85, the Third Report in 1991 and the Fourth Report in 1997.

Substitute it is not, because the environmental issues confronting the country and its people are, on the one hand, so varied and diverse, and on the other, growing in number, that it calls for an effort of this magnitude with greater frequency, even once a year. But within its constraints of finance and manpower, the CSE has been doing a commendable job.

Having said that, it must be pointed out that in its scope the current Report marks a return to the original idea of the Citizens' Report with which the First Report was launched in 1982 and perfected in the Second one in 1984; namely, to provide an overview of environmental issues from the perspective of environment as a resource and its entitlement to the people in an equitable and democratic framework. It aimed to provide data and information pertaining to different facets of environment and ecology without any underlying activist agenda. Indeed, the Second Citizens' Report is a valuable document in terms of its content and analysis which became a model for similar efforts in other developing countries.

The Third and Fourth Reports, however, moved away from this concept of a generalised resource document to a specialised one focussing on one issue in detail. Defending that shift, the editors say that it was felt that an overview tended more to focus on problems than offer solutions. However, the premise built in the reports seemed to push the activist's position to a degree more than what scientific objectivity would warrant. The editors of this volume now concede that the possible solutions are varied, given India's size and ecological diversity, and would need much more in-depth research and understanding. The importance of the larger picture, even as specific issues demand focussed attention from time to time, is what has driven the organisation back to the framework of an overview.

THE return to the original conception is a welcome one because it gives the document an identity of its own and makes it a valuable souce of reference of updated quantitative information on environment in the country. Of course, in the intervening 14 years, the CSE's major activities have included bringing out the fortnightly environmental magazine *Down to Earth* which has not done too well in the market but has drawn attention to the need for such a publication that places environment high on the country's developmental agenda, especially in an era of economic liberalisation and increasing consumerism.

The CSE's foray into journalism has certainly impacted on its Citizens' Reports as well and, to that extent, the Fifth Report seems to lean heavily on reportage seen in *Down to Earth* because more or less the same set of people has been involved in bringing out the Citizens' Report. (There are, of course, bloomers such as "INSAT data from an American satellite." But, to reiterate, the flavour of a generalised document on the state of the environment is back, and hopefully it will be maintained in the future.

As usual, the document is well produced with the lay-out making for easy reading. The announcement about the Sixth Report appears in the inside cover of the Fifth Report itself and the proposed contents suggest that it will be a mix of both the kinds of frameworks used for the Citizens' Reports so far. It will include the generalised overview as well as a specialised volume on the ecology of the Eastern Himalayas. However, when it is slated for release has not been indicated, though the suggestion in the introduction is that the publication of the Citizens' Reports is from now likely to be an annual event.

BEING a research-oriented public interest organisation, the CSE has always given importance to data and, from that perspective, the addition of a statistical database on various aspects of environment to the scope of the Citizens' Report is noteworthy. As the introduction points out, statistics on environment are scattered all over the place, not easily accessible. The attempt here has been to compile as much data as could be found in one place. This database has been issued as a companion volume to the main document. The two together should constitute an important reference document for the public and policymakers alike.

The present Report is, on the one hand, an assessment of the future of environment in this country as we enter the next century and, on the other, an indictment of policies that have been pursued by government after government which have gone little beyond pious statements in glossy government reports and political rhetoric. On the ground it might appear that the country has reached

a point of no return. What the report says is that if India learns from the outstanding work done in rural areas like Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently in Sukhomajri, a village near Chandigarh, and Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh, it is possible to reverse ecological poverty (of land degradation) through people's participation and community-based natural regeneration. Indeed, efforts to replicate these success stories in various parts of Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh has demonstrated that it is possible to wipe out rural economic poverty through this approach in the next 20 years.

WHILE this provides hope, the picture on the urban front is one of despair. With increasing pollution, traffic congestion, dirt and filth, all products of the headlong rush into a consumerist lifestyle, life in Indian cities and towns will become unbearable as we enter the 20th century. There is no success story to recount on the urban front, let alone to make efforts to replicate, is the sad picture that the Report conveys. The Report brings together the host of challenges that lies ahead in the march towards sustainable development and a green millennium and calls for "good democracy, good governance and good science".

As in the case of all the earlier reports, this one too carries a "Statement of Shared Concern" which is signed by a host of "concerned citizens", many of whom happen to be CSE staffers. The conclusion of the Shared Concern of the Second Citizens' report was: "... India requires an imaginative political and honest political system, in which elections are fought without black money, contractors and land speculators are put under control, the industrialist who pollutes is prosecuted... the land can be greened and the environment improved, but only if people who control the socioeconomic system can learn to control their greed." The statement in the latest report says: "While the political system has deteriorated even more than what it was in the 1980s, the latter part of our conclusion has been proved right..."

There is an important essay here that focusses on the not-so-obvious role of corruption among government functionaries and officials in environmental degradation, which once again underscores the importance of good governance that can tackle the menace of corruption at all levels. The moot question is: Will the document make a dent on political thinking, and will environment become an electoral issue, coming as it does at the time of elections? Or will it be relegated to the shelves of bureaucrats, as happened in the case of the earlier Citizens' Reports? ■

Fomenting communalism

LYLA BAVADAM

ON July 20, two Muslim boys in Ahmedabad tried to stop a group of Hindu boys from teasing another Muslim boy, who they knew was mentally disturbed. Twelve days of communal rioting followed the incident; eight persons were killed and several injured.

The Bharatiya Janata Party Government in Gujarat attempted to argue that the riots were not communal in character but were driven by a spontaneous upsurge of patriotic feelings over the Kargil war. However, an investigative report released by the Committee for People's Democratic Rights (CPDR) in August showed that such claims were frivolous.

A three-member CPDR team, led by P.A. Sebastian, a Mumbai-based lawyer, toured the affected areas and met victims, social organisations and police personnel on August 7 and 8. Its finding, published as a 15-page report titled "Communal Riots in Ahmedabad", concludes: "A careful analysis of the chain of events shows that the aggressors were the leaders and activists of the Sangh Parivar and the victims were Muslims." According to the report, Muslims too "indulged in violence but it was in the nature of defence and retaliation."

The report documents the build-up to the riots through July. It was engineered through six key events, which in themselves were of seemingly little consequence. The first of these was the celebration of the Indian cricket team's victory over Pakistan in a World Cup match, which was marked by deliberate ostentation in Muslim areas. Provocative and anti-Muslim slogans were raised at these celebrations. In one instance, BJP and Bajrang Dal workers shouted: "Lahore bus *se* Lahore *Jao*" (Go to Lahore on the Lahore bus). The slogan was targeted against Muslims and this, the report pointed out, was "a crude attempt to equate the Muslim citizens of India and Pakistan".

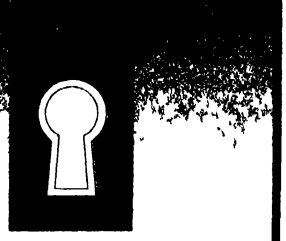
Union Home Minister L.K. Advani's subsequent visit to his constituency, Gandhinagar, became the next pretext for communal mobilisation. Advani accompanied the ashes of a soldier from the area, who was killed in action in Kargil. Slogans shouted at a public meeting addressed by Advani turned from anti-Pakistan to anti-Muslim. Significantly, soon after the meeting, the BJP, the Vishwa Hindu



PARAS SHAH

In Saraspur, one of the areas affected by communal riots in Ahmedabad in July.

An inside look at the world outside



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The real story. Every time

Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal opened offices in Meghani Nagar, the soldier's neighbourhood. Local residents told the CPDR that the activities carried out from these offices were decidedly communal, a position which was supported by Deputy Commissioner of Police Vinod Mal. He said that the police had addressed letters to local parties asking them to "restrain their cadres from precipitating a communal situation."

On July 8, the conflict escalated. Stones were thrown at an Id-e-Milad procession, participants of which, ironically, were shouting anti-Pakistan and anti-Nawaz Sharif slogans. Six days later, the annual Jagannath rath yatra was used to vitiate the atmosphere further. Several localities through which the yatra passes have a history of communal conflict, and according to the report, no effort to provoke another one was missed this time. Devotees at the yatra traditionally chant the slogan "*Jai ran chod, makhan chor*" in praise of the deity, Krishna. This year, while the yatra passed through sensitive areas, the slogan "*makhan chor*" was changed to "*Mian chor*", a reference describing Muslims as thieves.

The CPDR report records that at this year's yatra, the VHP distributed leaflets containing yet another allegation, which is often a central theme of Hindu communal mobilisations. One such leaflet spoke of an "international conspiracy of Christians/Muslims to abduct Hindu girls, tempt them... take on Hindu names to hoodwink them." It says: "They tempt them with offers of marriage and then cheat them." Local presidents told the CPDR that the Muslim community had gone out of its way to resist such provocation, with its ordinary members staying indoors while community leaders visited the Jagannath temple and offered Rs. 51,000 by way of donation as a gesture of inter-religious amity.

On July 17, Sonia Gandhi addressed a well-attended public meeting in Ahmedabad. The CPDR analysis shows that this was the decisive moment that, in retrospect, appears to have unnerved the BJP, and apparently the Hindu Right decided to act. The first incident of violence came on July 20 at Kadiya Naka in Daryapur, where the two Muslim boys attempted to end the harassment of a mentally disturbed boy. Severely beaten, the boys tried twice to file a formal police complaint. On both occasions, police personnel were unavailable. An angry crowd that had gathered in Daryapur threw stones at the local police stations. The police responded with a lathicharge, and were supported by stone-throwing by some local Hindus.

According to the report: an hour after the first clash, three Muslim boys were stabbed to death in Daryapur; rioting broke out in the area and spread to Kaupur and Saraspur; and one more Muslim was killed in these riots. On the same day, in nearby Saraspur district, the Muslim chawl (slum housing complex) at Jalampuri was attacked by a mob of up to 200 men. The residents informed the CPDR team that they received no help from the Sharkota police station. A local resident, Mohammad Hanif Seth, told the CPDR team: "As many as 300 families had to flee and take shelter in the Kalapur railway station".

On July 23, VHP activists began shouting anti-Muslim slogans and throwing stones at Muslim-owned food stalls in Gomtipur district. A luxury bus owned by a Muslim was burned. The police were called in, but they only charged a Muslim with looting one of his co-religionist's stalls. The local Magistrate's bail order in this case, as quoted by the CPDR, succinctly pointed out that "it was unbelievable that a Muslim looted a Muslim-owned stall".

Charges of police bias also emerged from a July 28 attack on some 180 Muslim families in Guptanagar, where officers are alleged to have beaten women with rifle butts. The last violent incident was reported on July 31, when one of the Muslim owners of a restaurant died of burn injuries after communally inspired attackers set the establishment on fire. The arsonists were named in a first information report as VHP and Bajrang Dal workers, one of whom the CPDR report identifies as the president of the Bajrang Dal unit in Ahmedabad.

All evidence points to the fact that the riots were an attempt by the Hindu Right to whip up communal frenzy prior to elections. The report says that the basic motive of the Hindu Right in engineering the violence was to bring about a communal consolidation. Girish Patel of the Lok Adhikar Sangh said that Shankersinh Vaghela's alliance with the Congress(I) had left the Sangh Parivar "desperately seeking an issue to mobilise the Hindu masses".

As the CPDR has demanded, the election-eve riots and their handling deserve a judicial inquiry. In the absence of a meaningful inquiry and real administration of justice, this round of riots, like several others that have marked Ahmedabad's troubled history, would only be another phase in the ripping apart of the city's social fabric. ■

India's billion

With the birth of the billionth Indian, as estimated by the U.N's Population Division, one in every six people in the world is an Indian.

LAXMI MURTHY

THE billionth Indian has been born. According to estimates released by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, this event took place on August 15. The announcement was received with considerable surprise, since Indian estimates had placed the event as far away as May 2000. Officials at the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare insist that India is still short of the billion mark by about 12 million. The exact date is yet to be fixed by the technical committee on Population Projection.

The announcement by the U.N. Population Division took even other U.N. agencies by surprise. The U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA), which has been gearing for its Day of Six Billion, was somewhat deflated when the "Day of the Billionth Indian" stole some of the momentum of the build-up to the campaign.

According to UNFPA estimates, the world population will reach the six-billion mark on October 12 – only 12 years after the five-billion mark. From 1804, when the world passed the one-billion mark, it took 123 years to reach the two-billion mark in 1927; 33 years to reach three-billion mark in 1960; 14 years to reach the four-billion mark in 1974. The landmark of five billion was crossed 13 years later, on July 11, 1987, a day which the governing council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggested retrospectively in 1989 should be observed annually as World Population Day. The intent behind this observance was to "focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues, their impact on development and the environment, and on the need to find solutions to these concerns." The theme for the 1999 World Population Day, "Count up to the Day of Six Billion", was intended to drive home the message that although world population growth has slowed, population is still growing – adding 78 million people every year.

Of the total increase in world population, 60 per cent is contributed by just 10 countries. India tops the list – contributing 21 per cent, with China second at 15 per cent. With India reaching the one-billion mark, one in every six people in the world is an Indian. Yet it is clear that the population growth rate the world over is slowing. The growth rate of 1.33 per cent a year between 1995 and 2000 is significantly less than the peak growth rate of 2.04 per cent between 1965 and 1970. In the developing countries, family size has reduced by half in the last three decades.

On October 28, 1998, the UNFPA moved the Day of Six Billion from June 16 to October 12, 1999. Dr. Nafis Sadiq, Executive Director, UNFPA, said: "This is very encouraging news." Yet a closer look reveals that there are distressing reasons underlying the apparent population slowdown. The UNFPA itself admits that this is, according to the revised estimates, partly a result of the HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) pandemic. For instance, in Botswana, one of the countries hardest hit, one adult in four is infected with HIV.



P V SIVAKUMAR

Of the total increase in world population, 60 per cent is contributed by just 10 countries. India tops the list, contributing 21 per cent.

IN any case, how relevant is the precise date of crossing either the billion mark or the six-billion mark? In a vast country like India, exact projections are near impossible and estimates may be way off the mark. While fixing exact dates on these events may be of mere statistical interest, they do serve to whip up a collective frenzy about the population "explosion". It is brought home to us that every sixth person in the world will be an Indian. Cause for celebration? Or alarm? The latter, if the international media are anything to go by.

A case in point would be a "news brief" of the Worldwatch Institute by Lester Brown and Brian Halweil, authors of *Beyond Malthus: Nineteen Dimensions of the Population Challenge*, a neo-Malthusian analysis centred on "over"-population as the major causative factor of food scarcity and environmental degradation. The authors outline a gloomy picture for India: "Well before hitting the one billion mark, the demands of India's population were outrunning its natural resource base. This can be seen in its shrinking forests, deteriorating rangelands, and falling water tables." They quote the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) which estimates that aquifer depletion could reduce India's grain harvest by one-fourth. The gloomy prognosis continues with a dire warning of political anarchy: "Falling water tables will likely lead to rising grain prices on a scale that could destabilise not only grain markets, but possibly the government itself." And in conclusion, the authors intone: "The principal threat now may not be military aggression from without but population growth from within."

The presentation of population growth as a security threat stems from a supposed causal relationship between population pressures and resource scarci-

ties. The main proponent of the scarcity-conflict model, Canadian political scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon, suggests that environmentally induced internal conflict in turn causes states to fragment or become more authoritarian, seriously disrupting international security. The scarcity-conflict model today largely informs foreign policy, besides population and environmental policies. This perspective ignores the other, more important, contributory factors of environmental degradation – colonial forest policies which laid the ground for the ravaging of forests by contractors and the government, inequitable consumption patterns, and polluting technology. Moreover, it ignores the organic relationship with nature shared by many indigenous and rural communities. Human beings are not merely rapacious consumers of the earth's resources, in some social paradigms they also protect and nurture the earth. The unsustainable depletion of natural resources is more characteristic of an urban, industrial society. Rural Indian women have spearheaded ecological movements, questioned the dominant development paradigm, and campaigned for a more sustainable model.

In India, the consumption by the highest income group (1.44 per cent of the population), of electricity, petroleum products and machine-based household appliances – products that have global environmental impact – is about 75 per cent of the total. For instance, the land diverted from food crop production to floriculture not only adversely impacts on nutritional levels, but degrades the environment with high pesticide and fertilizer use.

The consumption pattern of the elite in any Third World country is comparable to the relationship between that country and the "developed" world. In Latin America, for instance, vast tracts of valuable rainforest were cleared for cattle ranching. Owing to favourable tariff treatment, most of the beef in Latin America is exported to the United States, much of it for use in fast-food chains or for pet food. The average Central American eats less beef than the average house-cat in the U.S. Every North American child consumes as much energy as three Japanese, six Mexicans, 12 Chinese, 33 Indians, 147 Bangladeshis, 281 Tanzanians or 422 Ethiopians.

I = PAT, an algebraic equation put forth in the 1970s by Paul Ehrlich and John Holdren, measures the impact of humans on the environment (I) as the product of the number of people (P), affluence/the amount of goods consumed per person (A), and the pollution generated by technology per good consumed (T). This analysis fails to account for various complexities such as who among the monolithic P is responsible for what, and the how and why behind pollution. While the global population reaches the six-billion mark, it is worthwhile to remember that just under 25 per cent of the world's population consumes about 75 per cent of the world's resources and energy, and the same fraction generates most of the world's waste and global atmospheric pollution. The Pentagon, for instance, is the largest single consumer of energy in the U.S. and generates a tonne of toxic waste every minute. It is the "luxury" emissions of the rich that generate almost 90 per cent of the ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and two-thirds of carbon dioxide emissions, rather than the "survival" emissions of the poor. However, the "consumption explosion", with its disastrous implications, appears to engender less fear in the public consciousness than the "population explosion".

Yet the belief that all people use resources and create waste, and large families use more resources and create more waste, gained currency among most international development agencies which put population high on their agendas for problem-solving. The 'T' component of the debate – the highest-polluting industrial processes that provide consumer goods for the wealthiest fifth of humanity – are controlled almost entirely by men in the most powerful transnational corporations and governments, which manufacture chemicals and weapons of mass destruction, with the main goal of maximising economic growth and profit. Yet policies of "population control" are targeted at the "poorest of the poor" – institutionally powerless women whose main goal is survival and have larger numbers of children for complex reasons that range from immediate survival and necessity to high infant mortality, lack of access to health services and patriarchal control over reproduction.

India has one of the longest-running population programmes in the world, and Indian women, especially those from the poorer sections, have been subject to a population reduction programme garbed in euphemisms ranging from "family planning" to "family welfare" and now "reproductive health". Sterilisation accounts for 71 per cent of contraception practice in India and the procedure is usually performed after achieving a family size of three or four children. Although it is an effective option of birth control for the individual woman, it does not have a significant demographic impact. To reduce birth rates dramatically, spacing methods have to gain primacy. From a policy-maker's perspective, long-acting hormonal contraceptives such as injectables (Net En and Depo Provera) and implants such as Norplant are "ideal" because they are provider-controlled. Women need not be relied upon to remember taking the pill, or to keep intrauterine devices in place, and men need not be persuaded to use condoms. The shift to long-acting, hazardous contraceptives is justified on the plea that birth rates have to be brought down in a hurry – the price that women pay with their health is irrelevant.

The much-touted "paradigm shift" in population policy following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 pressured governments to depart from "demographic imperative" language and accommodate women's perspectives. Yet real changes have yet to take place. The panic about population explosions tends to overtake concerns of empowering women and enlarging the coverage of primary health care. The Delhi Population Bill, which was recently introduced in the Delhi Assembly, contains harsh disincentives for those who have more than two children.

For many decades it has been known that birth rates are affected by a variety of parameters – the means of production, that is, whether the economy is in subsistence or industrialised mode; women's status and education; family structures; women's participation in the labour force, and so on. Though Indian representatives at the first World Congress on Population in Bucharest in 1975 popularised the slogan "Development is the best contraceptive", official policy has concentrated almost exclusively on the provision of contraceptives. The technological "solution" of developing more effective contraceptives is a politically safer option than genuine changes which impact on birth rates – land reform, expansion of social services and a just distribution of resources. It is this paradigm which has to shift for birth rates to fall and equitable development to take place. ■

Laxmi Murthy is an activist and researcher in population and gender issues. She is associated with the non-governmental organisation, Saheli.

Questions about capabilities

In the light of experiences worldwide, it is impossible to accept the claims that Pokhran-II has established all-round weapons capability for India. Yet such claims are behind the grandiose vision of India's nuclear future prepared by the National Security Advisory Board.

T. JAYARAMAN

THE draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine (dIND) prepared by the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) is the most hawkish document to emerge so far on the nuclear weapons issue from any official or institutional body associated with the Government of India.

Although it may, on superficial reading, seem to be a fleshing out of the details of the broad nuclear defence posture outlined earlier by the government, particularly in Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Rajya Sabha speech of December 15, 1998, the document in practice stakes out a far more aggressive position on the issue of nuclear weaponisation.

While formally reiterating the position that India should build a credible, minimum nuclear deterrent, the document, in outlining the details of the proposed nuclear doctrine, prescribes in fact an open-ended, far-reaching programme of nuclear weaponisation with maximal capabilities.

The ambitious reach of the programme outlined in the dIND follows directly from the one-sided emphasis that is placed on the credible in the "credible, minimum deterrence" mantra. The minimum, except for its initial ritual invocation, finds little mention in the rest of the document. The crux of the matter is made clear in the key formulation of para 2.2 of dIND that states: "The requirements of deterrence should be carefully weighed in the design of Indian nuclear forces and in the strategy to provide for a level of capability consistent with maximum credibility, survivability, effectiveness, safety and security." Despite the subsequent statement that the basic doctrine is one of "retaliation only", it is clear that it is the vision of para 2.2 that animates the rest of the document.

The scope and quality of the nuclear arsenal and nuclear capabilities that the dIND subsequently prescribes would delight the heart of any nuclear weaponeer. India's nuclear forces are to be such that they can "respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail". They are to be based on a "triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets in keeping with the objectives outlined". In other words, even submarine-launched missiles carrying nuclear warheads are on the agenda. The nuclear forces and their command and control are to be "effective, enduring, diverse, flexible and responsive to requirements".

The nuclear forces envisaged are to be not just survivable, but designed to "endure repetitive attrition attempts with adequate retaliatory capabilities for a punishing strike which would be unacceptable to the aggressor". In other words, the nuclear forces are supposed to survive multiple strikes by any nuclear aggressor



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

At Pokhran, after the nuclear explosion in May 1998.

and then still be able to respond with punishing force. Survivability is to be aided by "mobility, deception and dispersion". The dIND repeatedly emphasises that India's nuclear forces must be ready for quick action.

They must be able to shift from "peacetime deployment to fully employable forces in the shortest possible time," and the efficacy of India's nuclear deterrent is to be maximised by, among other things, the "timeliness" of the response. The fact that this emphasis will push India's proclaimed no-first-use policy much closer to that of a launch-on-warning or launch-under-attack strategy is not allowed to stand in the way of pursuing the "credibility" and "effectiveness" of the proposed nuclear deterrent.

If these prescriptions were to be followed through to the letter, nuclear weapons could become the new growth industry in India. And if global tenders could be floated for such projects, India would have a queue of multinationals at its door, clamouring to be let in on a piece of the action. But regrettably, nuclear weapons and associated technologies are a closed-door affair, jealously guarded and not for export. The NSAB's vision has to be realised by purely indigenous efforts and it is here that reality intrudes on hawkish dreams in a rude fashion.

The problem is that India's technical capabilities in the area of nuclear weapons, their delivery systems and command and control are nowhere near the levels required by the dIND. Nor is it clear how these capabilities could be enhanced to the levels demanded by the dIND in the medium or long term, given the various constraints that operate on the development of indigenous capabilities in the defence sector and the country's track record in this area.

THE first issue in this respect is the limited range of capabilities in the design of nuclear weapons that has been achieved by Pokhran-II, both in terms of reliability, in the military sense of the term, and safety (to the users, that is). Following Pokhran-II, Indian nuclear weaponeers can build basic fission weapons of the implosion-type using plutonium as the fission fuel. One such warhead was tested on May 11 last year. The information on the sub-kiloton tests, and the statements of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) on the range of nuclear weapons codes that were tested therein suggest that some capability exists for variations in the shape and size of the warheads. However, it is not clear that the capability to build reliable fission weapons of the most advanced designs, including 'levitated' pit fission weapons, has been achieved.

These have two important implications for the scope of the arsenal demanded by the dIND. The first is that not too much leeway will be available in the choice of delivery systems. Submarine-based missiles, for instance, will require the careful minimising of weight without loss of yield and the ability to pack warheads with the same yield into smaller and smaller spaces. It appears unlikely that Pokhran-II has delivered such a capability. Secondly, the timeliness of response demanded by the dIND suggests that weapons must be designed so that the fissile material would be already sealed and in place in the warhead, with many such warheads ready on board various delivery systems.

Importantly, the safety requirements for sealed-pit designs include extensive testing in the hydro-nuclear range, something that has not been undertaken so far. Nor does the DAE appear to have adequately tested three-dimensional weapons codes that are required to design 'safe' sealed-pit designs.

The other important aspect of India's current nuclear weapons capability is that reliable and safe boosted fission-weapons or thermonuclear weapons capabilities simply do not exist. Without entering into the merits of the controversy over the yields of the thermonuclear device that was tested at Pokhran, it is clear from the entire history of the nuclear weapons business that one test does not make for a reliable weapons capability. To make matters more complicated, the thermonuclear device tested had a boosted fission weapon as its weapon primary stage. There has been therefore no independent test of a boosted fission weapon either. Without thermonuclear weapons or boosted fission weapons it is not clear how the dIND's claimed objective of a deterrent capability to inflict unacceptable damage on "any potential aggressor" is to be achieved. If the words of the dIND are to be taken at face value, the term 'potential aggressor' includes even the United States. It would be strange to imagine that India could build a deterrent (even if, for argument's sake, that piece of nuclear theology were to be granted any credibility at all) based solely on fission weapons against a nuclear weapons state like the U.S.

Nuclear weaponisation *per se* is bad enough but worse could be in store if it is pursued on the lines indicated by the dIND. If any thermonuclear arsenal were to be built on current capabilities, it would be highly unreliable and unsafe. And this state of affairs could not be remedied without further extensive testing. The logic of the dIND if taken seriously would inevitably lead to the breaking of the moratorium on further nuclear weapons testing that is currently in place, a fact that the luminaries of the NSAB would not have been unaware of.

THE claim of the DAE that the current nuclear weapons codes and the tests conducted at Pokhran are sufficient is completely untenable in the light of the experience of nuclear weapons states like France. This is a particularly illuminating example for understanding the weapons test requirements of a full-fledged Indian nuclear weapons programme, for several reasons. First, the French nuclear weapons programme is by and large an indigenous effort like the Indian one. Secondly, France has tried to bypass the route of several incremental design changes and tested only a few basic designs. Thirdly, the French programme was one of the last to take off and its latest weapon, an advanced warhead designed for use on submarine-launched missiles, began development only in the late 1980s. So like the Indian weapons programme, the French one would also have benefited from the recent developments in basic scientific know-how as well as in computing power, over and above the extensive experience that they already possessed. Nevertheless French weaponeers thought it prudent to conduct 22 tests even for the latest weapon.

Significantly, President Jacques Chirac declared in a television talk-show in September 1995, that France did not "have the technology for small weapons" (even though he ruled out the possibility of further development of such weapons). Clearly, despite the extensive testing done earlier, the French did not consider their technology adequate in some areas of nuclear weapons.

In the light of such experiences worldwide, it is impossible to accept the claims of the defence and atomic energy establishments that Pokhran-II has established all-round weapons capability for India. But undoubtedly these exaggerated claims are very much behind the sabre-rattling of the NSAB and its grandiose vision of India's nuclear future. In an interview to the *Times of India* published on August 22, Chairman of the Atomic



GAMMA

The ocean surface froths during a French underwater nuclear test near the Pacific atoll of Mururoa in 1995.

Energy Commission (AEC) Dr. R. Chidambaram declared: "Our country has full capability to provide technological back-up to the Indian nuclear doctrine." And further: "R&D capability and technological expertise, which we have for every area related to nuclear technology, will enable India to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent *as enunciated in the doctrine* (emphasis added)." On another occasion, in an interview to the Press Trust of India that set off a round of competitive boasting between India and Pakistan about neutron bomb capability, the AEC Chairman was quoted as saying that India can design and build nuclear weapons of "any type or size" *(The Hindu*, August 17, 1999).

INDIAN capabilities with regard to the development of delivery systems are clearly somewhat of a secondary issue in the context of the dIND, given the exaggerated claims about the development of nuclear warheads. But even on this front, the sabre-rattling of the NSAB is underpinned by the lack of a sober assessment of the capabilities of Indian S&T in this area. It is undoubtedly true that with the development of Prithvi and the further development of Agni-II India's nuclear weapons would have a moderate reach. And this capability could certainly be achieved in the medium-term. But the requirements of the dIND are considerably higher, including the development of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and possible tactical nuclear weapons for induction in the Army.

The truth is that the Indian armed forces are heavily dependent on imported equipment. There is not a single combat aircraft in service that is indigenously produced. In the midst of the Kargil near-war situation, India was hurriedly shopping internationally for shells for its imported artillery. The long-promised and much-talked-about Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) is yet to be completed in prototype form. It is not clear when, if ever, it would be a production line item. The development of even conventional arms is enmeshed in difficulties and time and cost overruns. India's indigenous software expertise does not extend in the same fashion to electronic and communication hardware, where imports play an important and crucial role. Indeed, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam himself estimates, in his book *Vision 2020*, that India is self-reliant only with regard to about 30 per cent of its defence needs. But any recognition of this reality is missing in the dIND. The fact that any accelerated move towards weaponisation would attract sanctions that would have a serious negative effect even on conventional arms capabilities clearly does not bother the gung-ho hawks of the NSAB, who desire a state-of-the-art nuclear arsenal and command and control system.

The misplaced emphasis in the dIND on the 'credible' in the "credible, minimum deterrence", in the absence of a real technological capability to back it up, could be dismissed as a farcical exercise, if it were not for some very real dangers that follow from its prescriptions. With its complete dependence on nuclear theology, particularly deterrence theory together with the variant of "damage unacceptable to the aggressor", it is unsurprising to find that the dIND fails to take into account the issue of peace and security in South Asia, which is already seriously threatened by the first halting moves towards weaponisation.

The guiding principle is "India's strategic interests", an ambiguous term that could cloak all manner of superpower ambitions and posturing, and not security.

Despite the posturing that India's nuclear forces are directed against any potential nuclear threat, it is clear that the real confrontation will continue to be mainly with Pakistan and secondarily with China. Several commentators on nuclear issues in South Asia have repeatedly pointed to the fact that it is unlikely that any command and control system can cope with the awesome requirements imposed by the geographical proximity of India and Pakistan. They have also drawn attention to the fact that the low technological level of the two nations would contribute to the lowering of the threshold for a nuclear outbreak, due to accidental, unauthorised or deliberate use of nuclear weapons. Despite the perfunctory noting of nuclear weapons safety and security issues in the dIND, the rest of its formulations run patently counter to such considerations.

In a deeper sense, the country and society most seriously threatened by Indian nuclear weaponisation is India and Indian society itself. The far-reaching programme of nuclear weaponisation prescribed by the dIND would engender a serious negative shift in the priorities of Indian S&T, away from development issues that need urgent attention, towards an inevitable militarisation of science and technology. The pursuit of the mad-cap vision of India's hawks would consume substantial resources, even if the goals set are never reached.

This is hardly the vision of free India that inspired its freedom struggle. India's Strangeloves are well aware of this fact. In demanding that India possess "the will to employ nuclear weapons", the dIND in fact unequivocally advocates that India abandon any moral values in its politics and discard any peace-oriented value system underlying its foreign and nuclear policies. ■

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Voters and consumers

Viewing politics through the prism of marketing management could provide a perspective on the past and insights into the future.

D. SAMPATH KUMAR

TO the lay person, it would appear that there is very little to choose among the multitude of laundry detergent brands on offer on supermarket shelves from competing manufacturers, much less among the many brands from one manufacturer. But Procter & Gamble, the United States-based major in consumer products would disagree. The company has not one but ten brands of detergents for the U.S. market alone – each targeted at what it believes to be distinct consumer segments.

The variety is bewildering. There is, for instance, "Tide", a fairly popular brand, with its promise of an all-purpose detergent wash. "When Tide is in, dirt is out," goes the advertising slogan. The nine other brands cater to different consumer needs for detergents with a variety of attributes. Customers can have the choice of a detergent being made available in solid or liquid form. They can also choose to have it as a concentrate or mixed with inert material – as is commonly done in the industry. Then there is choice available in terms of – with a fragrance and without, in combination with a bleaching agent or a fabric softener, a detergent for washing baby's clothes, and so on.

It is tempting to conclude that such an array of choice is a case of overkill on the part of P&G. On the other hand, it does seem that there indeed exists a diverse range of customer needs in a product as commonplace as a detergent. At least, the success of the company in the marketplace would seem to suggest that. The company, after all, posted in 1998 a turnover of $40 billion (detergents account for a big chunk of it) and net profits close to $4 billion.

NOW, if the consuming public can be differentiated in ten different ways with regard to their expectations from something as commonplace as a detergent, it will be naive to think that the public cannot be so segmentated with regard to their differing expectations in the choice of a particular political party to govern the nation. Conversely, the success of a political party at the hustings will depend on how effectively it segments the voting public and presents a particular visage to individual segments that carry the maximum appeal.

The fundamental issue here is the notion of the Indian voter as a "consumer" in the context of his or her participation in the democratic process of governance. It is easy to see how the average voter is cast in that role. He or she is in the market for a bundle of goods and services that promote his or her sense of well-being. It is a bundle of goods and services that he or she can access only through the political process in the society that he or she belongs to. A political party which seeks his or her mandate for governance is thus in the position of a service provider. The citizen casting the vote in favour of one party or another can therefore be viewed as a choice in favour of one brand (of politics) over a competing brand.

A business journalist looks at the Indian political bazaar in terms of products, market segmentation and success and failure in marketing strategies.

Of course, this bundle of goods and services is not something that he or she can claim exclusive ownership over. Invariably they can be enjoyed collectively with other citizens. The desire of an individual for a society in which he or she will have unfettered enjoyment of the wealth that he or she has accumulated – a privilege that is unencumbered by any risk of expropriation through theft or violence caused by some other member of the society – may come into play. But the fact that the means through which this is achieved – the enforcement of law and order in society – benefits others as well does not in any way dilute its appeal or the relationship between a citizen and a political party (which promises superior law and order enforcement in the society) as that between a consumer and a service provider. The desire of an individual for law and order in society is the most basic of all needs that a political party can offer to meet for voter-consumers. There are other intangibles that might appeal to different sections of the voting public. The promise of land distribution might hold particular appeal to the landless agricultural labourers. The promise of price stability might possibly appeal to the entire voting public. The range of intangibles can be endless.

IF voters are consumers and political parties service providers, can political developments be viewed through the prism of marketing management? They can and in fact they do offer a better perspective on the past besides offering insights into the future. The growth in popular support for the Bharatiya Janata Party in recent years is as good an example as any, in this context. From a party of two elected members in the Lok Sabha in 1984, it went on to command the loyalty of nearly 190 members in a space of 15 years. It has been generally accepted that the degree of success it has been able to achieve in electoral terms is the outcome of the consolidation of large sections of Hindu voters in its favour. It is equally well recognised that it has been able to do so by creating a belief in voters' minds that successive governments in the past resorted to a policy of appeasement of minority religious communities.

In the language of marketing management, the BJP's success can be described as a case of segmenting the market (the voting public) along religious lines. As a corollary, it would seem to have somehow created in the minds of the same public the perception that the product it offers (public administrative service) contains a desirable attribute (non-appeasement) that competing brands do not possess.

Two points need to be made here. Firstly, it is not necessary that there

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should indeed have been "appeasement" in some tangible manner of any section of society. It is just that the public should believe this to be so. In other words, for the BJP's campaign to succeed, it is necessary that large sections of the voting public must believe there has been some kind of appeasement of some segments of the voting public, no matter that the reality is different. This is important. As any marketing professional worth his name will confirm, in marketing, perceptions of value is more important than the reality of value. One can go so far as to say that in marketing, perception of "value" is itself the reality.

Secondly, the voting public should be convinced that a policy of "appeasement," even if it did exist, is immoral and, more significantly, that it is inherently injurious to their own interests. Here again, such a perception may already have existed and the BJP may have merely capitalised on it by segmenting the market in terms of those who agreed with it and those who did not. If on the other hand the voting public did not really think so initially, what the BJP did was to persuade people through product promotion efforts (campaigns) that it did indeed exist. Additionally, it also warranted that its rule would not suffer from such a negative attribute even as the offerings by the competition (Congress, Communists, etc.), did.



At a shop in Bangalore. Principles of marketing have come into play in elections as well.

THE BJP is not really a pioneer when it comes to creating new product values or segmenting the market along new lines. The real pioneer is the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). In the 1950s, when it entered the electoral scene, it segmented the "market" of Tamil voters in terms of those who would acquiesce in the "hegemony" by the North *vis-a-vis* the people of the South (read the Tamils) and those who are opposed to it. Implicit in the division was the claim that while the DMK was opposed to it, the then ruling party, the Congress was in favour of it. Of course, for added measure, the hegemony by the North was also presented as domination by Brahmins, which formulation later metamorphsed into a culture of "Brahminism" as opposed to Brahmins *per se*, in order to add punch to campaign. That it succeeded in imprinting such a "product value" (North vs South) even on Rajaji and the Swatantra Party with its upper-class image did not dilute the consolidation of voters in its favour at the time of the general elections of 1967. Too much should not also be read, in this context, to the role of the anti-Hindi agitation launched in 1965 in Tamil Nadu for the Congress party's defeat in that election. The truth is that the DMK-inspired "market segmentation" of the Tamil voters was well under way by then, and this led to the consolidation of voters in its favour. The language agitation merely hastened the process. In a sense, even the political success of Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav can be attributed to their causing a paradigm shift in the market for the political mandate that all the parties seek.

Customer perceptions of product values do change, primarily because the utility that people associate with the consumption of products changes with time. A bath soap may initially have been thought of as nothing more than a means to remove dirt. But as bathing transforms from an act of personal hygiene into one of undertaking a pleasurable experience (a good marketeer can be counted upon to make it so), a capacity to remove dirt is not what many people look for in a bath soap. Rather, they look for fragrance and even a suggestion of some exotic locale.

And so it is with electoral politics. In the beginning electoral battles were fought on grounds of more jobs, better education, more incomes and so on. That is to say, on "secular" values. As successive governments failed to deliver on their promises of more jobs, more schools and so on, the public began to lose faith in the ability of political parties to do so at all. The stage was now set for the voting public to vest the political process and parties with newer product values. Thus was born the appeal for "sectarian" (religion, caste, community and so on) values.

Where does the country go from here? The marketing crystal ball suggests that the process of segmentation along sectarian lines is by no means complete. The political process seems ripe for even narrower forms of segmentation. ■

The song supreme

M.S. Subbulaksmi is no ordinary musician; she is a living legend, a role model for every aspiring singer. A tribute on the occasion of her 83rd birthday.

C.V. NARASIMHAN



THE announcement by the President of India, K.R. Narayanan, on March 1, 1998, conferring the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award in India, on M.S. Subbulakshmi was received with universal approval. It was the first time that a musician had received this signal recognition. How did this come about?

The short answer is that M.S. is no ordinary musician. Today, she is a living legend, a role model for every aspiring singer.

M.S. was born on September 16, 1916, in Madurai. Her father was Subramania Iyer, a lawyer by profession and a rasika, and her mother was Shanmugavadivu, a well-known veena player of her times. Blessed with a mellifluous voice with total tonal purity *(sruti suddham)*, and an unusual understanding of the subtleties and nuances of our complex musical system, best described as *gnanam*, M.S. quickly became a popular concert artist, as well as a recording artist. Her musical education, beginning with her mother, developed further under a well-known vidwan of Madurai, Srinivasa Iyer. Her first public concert was given when she was 13. She also attained proficiency on the veena, and is an accomplished veena player to this day.

In 1936, M.S. moved to Madras. Chennai was then, as it is now, the capital of Carnatic music. She was already a much-sought-after concert artist. Here she met T. Sadasivam, at that time a senior executive in the popular Tamil weekly *Ananda Vikatan*. She married Sadasivam in 1940, and with it began a new and very fruitful phase in her life.

For the next 57 years, until his demise in November 1997 at the age of 95, he was, in the words of M.S. herself, her "guide, philosopher and friend". With Sadasivam's encouragement she was able to meet the famous vocalists of those times, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Musiri Subramania Iyer and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and also the vainika, K.S. Narayanaswami. With these contacts, her repertoire expanded and her rendering of raga and kriti, *neraval*, *swaram*, and so on attained even higher levels of excellence. Semmangudi became a close friend of the family, when he moved to Madras after his distinguished tenure as principal of the Swati Tirunal College of Music in Thiruvananthapuram. Semmangudi was practically a daily visitor at the T.S.-M.S. home. Musiri was also a frequent visitor, and he gladly shared his special gift for *bhava sangeetham* with M.S.

At *Ananda Vikatan*, the star writer was R. Krishnamurthi, who wrote under the pen-name "Kalki". Besides writing essays, short stories, novellas and musical cri-



At a reception hosted by United Nations Secretary-General U Thant after a special concert by M.S. Subbulakshmi in the General Assembly hall in 1966. Among others in the picture are T. Sadasivam, daughters Radha and Vijaya, C.V. Narasimhan, Under Secretary-General of the U.N., G. Parthasarathy, India's Permanent Representative at the U.N., and James Rubin, an American devotee of Carnatic music.

tiques, he composed songs which M.S. would sing. With the combination of the executive ability of Sadasivam and the literary talent of Kalki, a new Tamil magazine, *Kalki,* was established, which is still going strong.

M.S. starred in a number of films. Her earliest appearance, in the 1930s, was in *Seva Sadan,* in which she gave a superb rendering of the Kalyani kriti "Needu Charana". In *Shakuntala* she was cast opposite the great vidwan G.N. Balasubramanian, and this film was also replete with many song hits. She shared the honours with Shanta Apte in *Savitri* appearing as the sage Narada. Her rendering of "Broohi Mukundeti" in this film made it very popular.

Her brightest achievement in the celluloid medium was as the Krishna devotee Meera. This film was first produced in Tamil and later remade in Hindi. The Hindi version was an instant hit and established her as a great bhajan singer. As the stateswoman-poetess Sarojini Naidu said, "it was pure enchantment... it was a true representation of Meera, nay it was Meera herself singing songs of devotion of prayerful appeal... it was Meera herself come to life." She also called M.S. the Nightingale of India.

Partly thanks to her films, but even more because of the large number of gramophone discs and (later) audio tapes, the voice of M.S. could be heard in every corner of India, from the remotest villages to the crowded metropolises. Her public concerts, which were usually given for the benefit of some favoured cause, drew packed houses. On several occasions, her concerts were open-air affairs, and the audience numbered several thousands.

Her major international exposure began with her programme at the Edinburgh International Festival of Arts in 1963. In 1966, the Secretary-General of the U.N., U Thant, invited her to give a special concert at the United Nations. This programme was given in the magnificent General Assembly hall, and I had the privilege of introducing her to the audience. A coast-to-coast concert tour of the U.S. followed. This was repeated in 1977, and on this visit I had the honour of presenting her programme at the Carnegie Hall in New York, where all the musical greats of this century have performed. She gave the inaugural concert of the Festival of India in London in 1982, which was attended by the Prince of Wales, Prince Charles, who stayed till the end of the programme. In 1987, she gave the inaugural concert of the Festival of India at the Kremlin in Moscow in the presence of the Prime Ministers of India and the USSR.

Her Meera bhajans, soaked with *bhakti,* may be said to have been responsible for her interest in rendering various "stotras" in Sanskrit. Her "Venkatesa Suprabhatam", first in Sanskrit and then in Tamil, rendered with perfect enunciation and beautiful musical intonation, were best-sellers: so was her "Vishnu Sahasranamam." The other side of this record features a ragamalika rendering of the "Bhaja Govindam" of Adi Sankara with a masterly introduction in English by Rajaji.

Rajaji was a major influence on the life of T.S. and M.S. The devotion of T.S. to

Rajaji was total and absolute. Rajaji's composition in Tamil, "Kurai Ondrum Illai", was set to music as a ragamalika by Kadayanallur Venkataraman. M.S.' soulful rendering of this song has become extremely popular, and is sung by many concert artists.

T.S. and M.S. also came under the benign grace of the Paramacharya of Kanchi. It was the Acharya who composed the benediction "Maitreem Bhajata" which M.S. sang at the conclusion of her U.N. and Carnegie Hall concerts, ending with the ringing words "Sreyo bhooyat sakala jananam' (Let there be grace abounding for all mankind).

While on the subject of devotional music, one must mention her record albums of the compositions of the great *bhakta* Tirupati Annamacharya. The compositions were beautifully sung and one has become common in Carnatic music – "Sriman Narayana", in Bhouli, thanks to M.S.' rendering of this kriti.

The laurels she has won, all unsought, are many and varied. She received the Padma Bhushan in 1954, when the national awards were instituted, and the President's award for Carnatic music in 1956. She has received several honorary doctorates. She was the first woman artist to receive the Sangita Kalanidhi title from the Music Academy of Chennai. She received the Ramon Magsaysay award, usually referred to as the Asian Nobel Prize, in 1974. The Padma Vibhushan award from the President came in 1975 and the Bharat Ratna in 1998. In 1988, she received the "Kalidas Sanman" of the Madhya Pradesh Government.

T.S. and M.S. made it a habit to give all she received to charitable causes. It all began with Rajaji's request to M.S. to give five benefit recitals for the Kasturba Memorial Fund in 1944. From then on, not only the proceeds of her concerts, but also the considerable sums representing royalties on her gramophone records and tapes, have gone to charitable and worthwhile causes. The major beneficiaries include the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam, the Ramakrishna Math, the Nanak Foundation, the Subramanya Bharathi memorial at Ettayapuram, the Hindu temple in Flushing, New York, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the Kamakshi temple at Kanchi, the Sankara Nethralaya, the Cancer Institute and the Voluntary Health Services, all in Chennai, the Kamban Kazhagam, the Music Academy and the Sri Sri Sri Mahalakshmi Mathru Bhuteswarar Trust, which is building the Kanchi Mahaswami Mani Mandapam at Orirukkai village near Kanchipuram.



N. RAM

If I were to attempt a critique of M.S.' music, I can sum it up in one word, "perfection". Her repertoire is immense and her rendering of any song in public is perfect, representing hours of dedicated effort. Her diction is a model of clarity. She learnt the correct pronunciation, and understood the meaning of every word. Her tonal purity is extraordinary. Her *raga alapana* is always musical and never too long. Her *neraval* and *swara prastara* are tuneful and crisp with complete mastery of *laya* Her bhajans can move the audience and touch hearts; she can induce in them a *paravasam* (ecstasy) because she is herself in such a state. She has sung bhajans in ten languages, each one of them an example of the highest standards of purity of diction and emotional content.

T.S. and M.S. together lived a life of Gandhian simplicity. (The Mahatma himself longed to hear her sing Ram Dhun and bhajans). They moved from the spacious acres of "Kalki Gardens" to a modest abode in Kotturpuram with the utmost ease. The VIPs were received here with the simple dignity that was the hallmark of this blessed couple. After T.S. passed away, M.S. was truly a woman bereft. Only her *bhakti* to T.S.' memory and to the Almighty has sustained her. She remains the same simple unaffected human being, with her gentle humanity and inborn grace.

M.S. is not in the best of health, but she keeps going with some physical therapy and medical attention. One can only hope that before long she is able to resume her singing, if not at public concerts, at least through the electronic media. Her music is a god-given gift. She must sing again! ■

C.V. Narasimhan, a former Indian Civil Service officer, was Under Secretary-General of the United Nations between 1956 and 1978.

Towards Seattle

The Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in the United States will provide an opportunity for poor countries, including India, to come together and fight for justice in trade-related matters.

BIPLAB DASGUPTA

THE Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is to be held at Seattle, Washington, from November 30 to December 31, presents both an opportunity and a danger. A great opportunity because if the poor countries of the world manage to form an effective trade alliance, do their homework well and bargain hard, they may succeed in rectifying at least to some extent the injustice that had been done to them during the 1994 Marrakesh agreement on TRIPs (Trade Related Aspects of the Intellectual Property Rights). On the other hand, should they fail to present a united front, there is a real and ominous possibility that whatever little remains of economic sovereignty in the TRIPs Agreement will be taken away by the rich countries. In the language of economics, it is a zero sum game: the poor countries cannot play for a draw: it is a win or lose situation.

The Indian side should have begun the preparation for this crucial meeting from the beginning of this year, at the latest. In February, when the Patents Bill incorporating exclusive marketing rights (EMR) was being debated in Parliament, the Left parties reminded the Government about the need to prepare for this task in time. However, so far virtually nothing has been done by way of preparation for a meeting that would decide, effectively, whether India, ranked among the poorest countries in the world, would ever be able to move out of the poverty trap and meet the very modest objective of advancing a few inches towards becoming a middle-level income country like South Korea or Taiwan in a few generations' time.

If the Government were sincere about protecting India's economic interests, it could have done one of the following: First, it could have made an attempt to evolve a national consensus on this vital issue either by way of a meeting of the Rajya Sabha or, at the least, by holding consultations with the Opposition parties. Had this been done and a national consensus arrived at, no matter which party or coalition came to power after the elections, the country would have been ready with an agenda for the new government to work on. Unfortunately, so far no White Paper or Position Paper has been released setting out the issues that the Government of India would wish to raise in this important world meeting, or around which it would seek to form a trade alliance with other poor countries. Since nothing has been done so far in this direction, the government that is to be formed in October, barely a month before this crucial conference, will hardly have the time to evolve a national consensus and act on it, not to speak of forging alliances with other poor countries.

The second route could have been to take advantage of the election campaign to initiate a national debate on this vital issue. In keeping with one of the well-established norms of parliamentary democracy, the government could have placed before the electorate its agenda for the Seattle meet and challenged other parties to place theirs, so that the people could comprehend the main issues and the various standpoints and then exercise their choice between the alternative positions, through the ballot box.

Rather than follow one of these two routes – of evolving a national consensus or of engaging in a national debate during the election campaign – the tendency has been to shy away from any discussion. And this is not the first time that a government has deliberately sought to keep the people in the dark about an issue that would profoundly influence their lives and those of also future generations. Both the Congress(I) and Bharatiya Janata Party-led governments adopted devious means over the past four and a half years to suppress information and to get one Patents Bill through Parliament with virtually no discussion.[1] Both the Congress(I) and the BJP opposed the proposal of the Left parties for an in-depth scrutiny by a parliamentary committee, assisted by experts, since they were motivated by their common desire not to let the people know or understand how their future was being mortgaged in order to appease the multinational companies domiciled in rich countries. In February, only four hours were allocated in the Rajya Sabha to discuss the Patents Bill incorporating exclusive marketing rights (EMR). The BJP and the Congress(I) did not find it necessary to field any speaker and relied on their joint voting strength to get the bill through.

In their common concern to avoid any meaningful dialogue on this sensitive issue they were helped by the obscure nature of the bill, which was loaded with legal, technical and scientific jargon making it virtually impossible for the uninitiated to comprehend what it was all about. Further, unlike a rise in the prices of, say vegetables, or the closure of a factory leading to unemployment, the impact of the global patents regime is not immediate. It is not known and understood that the global patents regime has irreversibly closed for India the option of ever becoming industrialised or even mildly developed.

The time constraint is serious for yet another reason. Even if one assumes that the new government is honest and sincere and is willing to rectify the injustices done at Marrakesh by raising the issues at Seattle, that cannot be done by India alone; it will have to be done by forming trade alliances with other less developed countries. Given its appallingly low share in world trade – 0.6 per cent, compared to 2.67 per cent at the time of Independence – India alone will not count for much. The rich countries take care to form alliances to augment their bargaining strength: for example, the

1. Biplab Dasgupta, "Patent Lies and Latent Danger – a study of the political economy of patent in India", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17-24 April, 1999, pp 979-993.

European Union (E.U.); the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) covering the U.S., Canada and Mexico; the Japanese connection with South-East Asia; organisations and institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the G-7; and the global trinity of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the WTO, which maintain year-round vigil to protect the interests of rich countries.

Among the poor countries too one finds similar regional trade alliances, such as the ten-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in South-East Asia, the Andean Pact, Central American Common Market (CACM), the Caribbean Community (Caricom), the Mercado Caomu del Sur (Mercosur) in Latin America, the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA), and the Union Douaniere et Economique de l'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC) in Africa. A major incentive for the formation of such alliances was that these were permitted, under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) rules, to extend to intra-region members additional concessions that were denied to other GATT members.

Where is the trade alliance that India belongs to? The most natural of such alliances could have been called the South Asian Common Market, comprising India and its immediate neighbours, countries that were once part of the British empire and share a common historical experience and common cultural roots. These countries also share many common economic interests; for example, they are concerned about the world prices of jute and tea and have opposed the patenting of basmati rice by an American company and the distribution of trade gains that would follow from the dismantling of the textile quotas with the conclusion of the infamous multi-fibre agreement (MFA) in 2005, to name a few. Such trade blocs, could have, by joining hands with other trade blocs in Asia, Africa and Latin America, effectively changed the world trade scenario and vastly improved the bargaining position of poor countries. So far, virtually nothing has been done to achieve this. Still, we have about three more months to work on such an alliance and put our diplomatic skills to test on economic issues. These days international diplomacy has more to do with the objective of furthering a country's economic interests than with the question of frontiers and war. It should not be the case that our soldiers would die in Kargil to protect our frontier against the infiltration of foreign soldiers and mercenaries while the managers of our economy sell the country to multinationals under what the government describes as "external compulsion". Often, the "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) argument is advanced as an excuse for not doing anything.

We already know from the way the 8th (Uruguay) Round of GATT negotiations operated (1986-1993) what is in store for Indian negotiators in the Seattle meeting. The three key players in the Uruguay negotiations were the U.S., Europe and Japan. They exchanged drafts among themselves and finalised everything and without bothering to seek the opinion of the poor countries. As the Jamaican Ambassador to GATT commented on the Dunkel Draft: "The draft package is reflective of the distribution of negotiating power and whether or not we are prepared to accept it as a reasonable basis for the further phase is academic."[2] Apart from these three, a fourth player who was sometimes consulted was the Cairns Group of 14 members, representing rich and middle-income countries specialising in agricultural exports and having close links with the G-7. These included Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Fiji, Hungary, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. These countries, accounting for one-tenth of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and manufacturing output and 30 percentage of the world's agricultural exports, made a much bigger impact than the much larger group of less developed countries.[3] If the rich countries ever wanted to consult the less developed countries, they talked to South Korea or Taiwan. The poor countries operated in the periphery, seldom consulted until the rich ones completed negotiations amongst themselves. As one commentator pointed out: "Whatever the skills of the negotiators from the South, for the most part they are like extras on the GATT stage; the show can't go on without them, but nobody is remotely interested in what they have to say."[4]

One major reason for the poor performance of the less developed countries in the negotiations, apart from their weak economic power and lack of unity, was the absence of specialised staff and advises. In the 1990 Brussels meeting during the Uruguay Round negotiations, Carla Hills, the U.S. Trade Representative, brought along 400 advisers, a number that exceeded the combined strength of all the sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American trade missions. The formidable intellectual strength of those 400 people was augmented by another 200 or so, who were lent to Hills by corporate giants such as American Express, Citibank and IBM, and agro-chemical conglomerates such as Pfizer, Monsanto, Cargill and Du Pont. They had the ability to examine an issue from all possible angles and then to project into their drafts U.S. interests under the guise of benefitting the entire humankind. Although 70 of the 108 countries in GATT negotiations were the less developed ones, they had no voice and they expressed their views – on the few occasions on which they did – "within a framework scripted by the major industrialised states".[5] It is hardly possible for India to bring together, as the U.S. did, such an array of skills or to match it in terms of the number of experts. But the least one would expect of a government is not to surrender without a fight, and to devote as much time and energy as possible to a proper homework. It seems likely that the Indian delegation will reach Seattle without having done adequate homework and without any significant skilled assistance, thanks to the criminal indifference, if not actual complicity with the multinationals, on the part of our government.

BROADLY speaking, five types of issues can be raised by the Indian delegation at the Seattle conference, all of which relate to the major changes brought about by the 1994 TRIPs Agreement at Marrakesh.

First, until the TRIPs Agreement, patents were a matter of national law.

2 Kevin Watkins, *Fixing the Rules: North South Issues in International Trade and GATT Uruguay Round*, Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1992, p 31.

3 Rod Typtes, "The Cairns Group Perspective", in K.A. Ingersent, A.J. Rayner, and R.C. Hine(eds.), *Agriculture in the Uruguay Round*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, pp 88-109.

4. Watkins, op. cit., p 37.

5. Raymond F. Hopkins, "Developing Countries in the Uruguay Round: Bargaining under uncertainty and inequality", in William P Avery (ed.) *World Agriculture and the GATT*, Lynn Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London, 1993. pp 143-163.

Each country formulated its own legislation taking into account its own national and human resources, national characteristics, the stage of development and history. Now, under TRIPs, each and every member-country of the WTO has to conform to an international patent regime and change its national law accordingly. The all-important question is: why this attempt to standardise and harp on conformity and make everything – in TRIPs and in some of the other proposals under discussion such as patents, labour standards, environmental standards, investment norms – uniform, when this is diametrically opposed to the norms laid down in the 1993 Convention on Bio-Diversity (CBD), which emphasises that life cannot be sustained without diversity. If 150 countries have signed TRIPs, 170 countries have signed the CBD, and an overwhelming majority have signed both without taking notice of the essential conflict between these two international documents in terms of prescription. The CBD, in its Article 16.5, asserts that intellectual property rights must not be in conflict with conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, a provision that has been totally ignored by those who composed the TRIPs Agreement. While in the case of agriculture, the higher yield of patented products induces the farmers to switch to these products from a more varied production pattern, the resulting narrowing of genetic base makes the economy and society more vulnerable to plant diseases and epidemics.[6] The emphasis on conformity in TRIPs and that on diversity in the CBD cannot be right at the same time; one or the other has to go.

Secondly, we can question this concern over "piracy" of intellectual property now when, historically, every developed country of today has at some time borrowed or copied technology from other countries in the course of its development. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong were among the last to adopt foreign technology on a large scale by way of what came to be known as "reverse engineering", but the developed European countries also did the same – to a larger extent in the case of Italy and to a smaller extent as in the case of U.K., while they were undergoing the process of industrialisation. The reason for the globalisation of the patent regime now is to make such copying impossible and thus to take away the option of reverse engineering. The result is that backward countries of today will remain backward and poor for ever as they will not have the option of copying and eventually developing their own technologies and thereafter selling those under their own brand names. They will be forced to depend permanently for technology on multinational companies, which control more than 80 per cent of world patents.

Thirdly, we can challenge the extension of the patent period to 20 years under TRIPs when there are strong arguments against doing so, and demand that it be revised downwards to four or five years in this age of fast changing technologies and emergence of new products. In the case of India, black-and-white and colour television sets, video cassette recorders, cable televison and multimedia came in quick succession – after every four or five years. Over the past 10 to 12 years, we have seen how 286 computers were replaced by the 386 ones, then by the 486 ones, and this in turn by the Pentium and its subsequent versions. We have also seen how the measure of the hard-disk capacity of computers has changed from kilobytes to megabytes and then to gigabytes, all within the last 10 years or so. In such a situation, a product becomes grossly out of date long before its patent period of 20 years expires. The only rationale behind lengthening the patent period to 20 years is to perpetuate the technological dependence of poor countries on multinationals.

Fourthly, we can challenge conceptually the decision to extend patenting to life forms in the TRIPs Agreement, and the consequent rush of multinational agri-business firms to scour the countryside of poor countries to collect, by means legal or illegal, plants and their germplasm. Such plant varieties are taken to their own countries and, after some tinkering, patented under their own names to establish themselves as their legal owners for the patent the period world over, and to take away from others, including indigenous Third World producers who would have been producing them for centuries, the right to produce them. This conference gives us the opportunity to establish safeguards against bio-piracy particularly of medicinal plants.

Fifthly, we can question how the U.S can exercise both the options, multilateral action through the WTO and unilateral action by way of "special 301" which is actually article 1303 of the U.S. Trade Act, which operates like Article 301, also known as Super 301. Under the law the U.S. Congress has passed on the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiation, in case of any conflict between the GATT-WTO rules and the U.S. law, the latter would prevail. We can insist that the U.S. should desist from such open and declared violation of GATT-WTO rules and that it should not flex its superpower muscles to force poor countries to do what it is itself not willing to do.

There are many other issues that can be raised, but these are major ones. In case Third World countries fail to unite and push these demands, some of the safeguards that still exist in the TRIPs Agreement are likely to be taken away. Under Articles 27.2 and 27.3 of the Marrakesh TRIPs Agreement, the countries may deny patent protection on a number of grounds – for reasons of public order, morality, or protecting human, animal or plant life, or protecting the environment. Protection can also be denied for inventions involving "diagnostic, therapeutic and surgical methods for the treatment of humans and animals, and plants and animals (other than micro-organisms) and biological process (other than microbiological processes) for their production".[7] Reference to public order and morality are wide enough to permit a significant amount of discretionary power to the governments. "Immorality" can mean obscenity, blasphemy, breach of peace, immoral activities and so on, while the French counterpart of "public order", "ordre public" is closer to "public policy" than to "public order". The U.K. used this provision to refuse twice a patent on a contraceptive device.[8] There is a serious risk that this provision would be taken away at Seattle unless the poor countries resolve to unite and fight. ■

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6. H William Lesser, *Equitable Patent Protection in the Developing World-Issues and Approaches*, Eubios Ethics Institute, Christchurch (New Zealand) and Sukuba (Japan), 1991, p 6.
7. UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), *Trade and Development Report, 1993*, UNCTAD, Geneva, 1994; *The Outcome of the Uruguay Round: An Initial Assessment*, UNCTAD, Geneva, 1994; Biplab Dasgupta, *Structural Adjustment, Global Trade and the New Political Economy of Development*, Sage-Vistaar (Delhi) and Zed Books (London), 1998, Chapter IV; Jeffrey J. Schott (assisted by Johanna W. Buurman), *The Uruguay Round*, Institute for International Economics, Washington DC, 1990.
8. Edward Armitage and Ivor Davis, 1994, *Patents and Morality in Perspective*, Common Law Institute of Intellectual Property, London.

Plebiscite on prejudice?

This is country's dirtiest, most personalised, election campaign. By launching it, the BJP has confronted India with a choice: for or against bigotry, pro- or anti-exclusivism, for or against sexism.

"ITALIAN opera singer", "cafe crooner", *"kaalmukhi"* (someone who brings ill-luck), "dirty widow", *"upri"* (interloper), "matric-pass" (college dropout), "Pope *ki cheli*" (The Pope's disciple), "Monica Lewinsky"... The vilest of abuse, the choicest of epithets. It is almost impossible to believe that our sensibilities could be so deadened as to make all this foul personal calumny and disgusting political slander seem like "normal" campaigning in a general election in a country that claims to be a more or less civilised democracy. It is even harder to imagine that someone as decent and infectiously polite as Manmohan Singh could "provoke" his rival to resort to downright obscenity, by challenging the professor to remove his turban and prove he is a true Sikh! The conclusion is inescapable. This is without doubt India's dirtiest, most personalised, vilest, campaign since elections in some form or other were organised in this country.

Even Atal Behari Vajpayee, supposedly the BJP's most gentle, moderate, "civilised" face, has stooped to the level of agitating the "foreign origins" issue after having solemnly promised any number of times that he would not do so. Not only did he say (Lucknow, August 27) that Sonia Gandhi should not hold high office, for the reason of her origin. He has also been a passive spectator to the delivery of foul personal attacks on her in meeting after election meeting. His belated, half-hearted, August 30 statement calling for "restraint" and gender-sensitivity in campaigning does little to redeem the damage.

BJP leaders like Vajpayee's most trusted Minister Pramod Mahajan, having taken their cue from the Prime Minister himself, have surpassed themselves in slander campaigns. Mahajan's outrageous comparison of Sonia Gandhi with Monica Lewinsky – doubly confirmed by his denial – is perhaps the most offensive assault on decency in public discourse which we have recently witnessed. It was quickly followed with George Fernandes' vituperative remarks on Sonia Gandhi on August 28 in Bellary. Fernandes reduced Gandhi's entire "contribution" to India as giving birth to her children, two amongst our population of one billion. Mahajan's and Fernandes' remarks have rightly excited strong condemnation from scholars, political leaders and feminists. There is every reason why they must be categorically condemned for their deep-seated male- supremacist prejudice.

First, it is utterly insulting to any civilised mind that Sonia Gandhi, who is a full-fledged Indian citizen, should be put in the same category as Monica Lewinsky, or Bill Clinton or Tony Blair – merely because of her foreign origin. It is even worse that she should be personally targeted for vilification in this gutter-level campaign at least partly because she happens to be a *woman,* and a *white woman* at that. It is hard to dissociate the strongly sexist innuendoes that are being deployed in this campaign from the fact of Sonia Gandhi's gender. This is itself part of a larger phenomenon – of women like Rabri Devi, Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi being singled out for particularly sharp sexist barbs.

It is almost impossible to believe that our sensibilities could be so deadened as to make all this foul personal calumny and disgusting political slander seem like "normal" campaigning.

(Even M.Karunanidhi has indulged in this, predicting that Sonia Gandhi and Jayalalitha's equation will be worse than the 13 month-long Vajpayee-Jayalalitha relationship because now both allies are women, who are bound to give each other a hard time.) Appellations like "crooner" and *"kaalmukhi"* (or their masculine equivalents) are not used against men. It is telling that Fernandes chose to diminish Sonia Gandhi to a mere bearer of children – a reproductive machine, a passive receptacle, without agency or personality. He did not do this even to Rajiv Gandhi, no favourite of his. Evidently, such insults are reserved for women alone.

However, there is a special "white" angle to the reviling of Sonia Gandhi. This derives from the widely prevalent middle class prejudice that white women typically have "loose morals", that they are quintessentially either saints (for example, Mother Teresa, Annie Besant or Meera Behn) or (more usually) sinners (Monica Lewinsky). This makes the latter fair game for all manner of sexist attacks. Such views are so common that even the Chief Minister of one of our most progressive States, Kerala, once poured scorn over the outrage that the rape of two white women in the State caused. What's all the fuss, he asked. For whites, rape is common, normal, it's like having a cup of tea.

The Sonia Gandhi-Lewinsky comparison was no aberration or accident. It captured a stereotype, the polar opposite of the *Bharatiya Naari*, the hallowed, artificially constructed "Indian" (read, Hindu) woman of pure character and unblemished personality. This sees the white, foreign, *mleccha* woman as sullied, spoiled, immoral, at best a sex object. We should feel offended at this not only because the president of India's oldest party is being equated with a former White House intern, nor so much because "Indian motherhood" is being slighted, but because the equation implicitly reviles Lewinsky (rather than the older, more pow-

■ BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

erful, more "responsible" Clinton) for having had a sexual relationship. This amounts to revictimising the victim. It is the kind of mindset that regards the rape victim as the guilty party – an "impure" woman who "must have done something" to bring that outcome about.

This mindset is typical of the Sangh Parivar. Indeed, a former president of the BJP's Mahila Morcha, Mridula Sinha, is on record as saying that wife-beating and domestic violence against women have "two sides": often the woman herself "provokes" it. The same attitude characterises the Parivar's adherence to the "Aryan" values of the Manusmriti, some of its leaders' defence of sati (they include former vice-president Vijayaraje Scindia and J.P. Mathur) and the demand repeatedly made by a number of VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) leaders that women be banned from reciting the Vedas or performing sacred rituals.

The present election campaign confronts us all with a stark choice, a choice imposed by the decision of the BJP-NDA to go for broke: to concentrate on issues of identity and "authenticity", rather than substance.

Beneath this gutter-level campaign, then, are deep-rooted sexist prejudices and hatreds characteristic of the Sangh Parivar's male-supremacist ideology. Clearly, this has rubbed off even on Fernandes. He now uses the same language as do such well-known Parivar ideologues as Arun Shourie – for example, terming all Congress members hijras (eunuchs); hijras are here contrasted to *real*, virile, strong, brave, males. All other sexual identities are considered inferior, low or unauthentic. The whole idea of womanhood here is suffused with male-chauvinism of the dirtiest variety, of the kind that "respectable" middle class *bhadralog* people are supposed to be too embarrassed to vent in public. The fact that the Mahajans and the Fernandeses no longer feel so restrained, and that they *know* they could speak in that vein in the presence of Vajpayee, is testimony to the debasement of our political discourse.

Some of these vile sentiments now being vented have a distinctly contrived quality about them. They appear manufactured. They represent very little spontaneity, and are calculated to create and fan prejudice and appeal to primordial identities. It is hard to believe that Fernandes really thinks that Sonia Gandhi's claim to being Indian is primarily predicated upon her wearing a sari and learning some Hindi, as he alleged. It is also difficult to believe that the attack on her comes from a mainly *personal*, as opposed to a *political*, assessment of her. This makes the BJP-NDA (National Democratic Alliance) campaign all the more reprehensible. At its heart is an attempt to tug at notions of national "loyalty" and put people on the defensive. Those who disagree with the government's handling of Kargil have been equated with Pakistan – by Vajpayee himself. This is grossly unfair. Indeed, this dirty campaign highlights the need for laws and norms against hate speech. We must drastically reduce our "tolerance" of hate speech.

Clearly, however, the worthies of the NDA think that all means are justified by the end they have set: defeat their secular Centre-Left opponents. Once you sever ends from means, anything can be rationalised. Indeed, why stop at verbal attacks? Even violent disruptions of the opponent's campaign are permissible.

Within this framework, politicising Kargil, communalising the armed forces (through "Sindhu Darshan", VHP leaders' visits to army hospitals and distribution of Ramacharitamanas, flooding the Defence Ministry with lotus-shaped *raakhis*) is permissible. As is character assassination of your opponents. Scoring low-level points in the manner of the small-town criminal lawyer can become a higher priority than grappling with substantive policy issues. Programmes can be relegated to the background. What matters is creating symbols, charging emotions, playing with identities, false or real.

The present election campaign confronts us all with a stark choice, a choice imposed by the decision of the BJP-NDA to go for broke: to concentrate on issues of identity and "authenticity", rather than substance. We are not being asked to decide which alternative policy course we favour, whose programmatic perspective we find more convincing, whose claim to provide decent, stable governance is more credible. We are not asked to choose candidates for what they *do*. Rather we are being asked to vote for who or what they *are* or claim to *be:* Indian or foreign, Hindu or otherwise, like us or against us. Their trade-marks, promoted through the clever marketing of images and icons, are calculated to play on "affinities", however irrational.

This gives this election a singular character. Only in 1984 were issues of identity – at that time, national "unity" and the grave "threat" to it highlighted through barbed-wire fences – played up in such a significant fashion. Their deliberate use in this campaign is even more cynical. They compel us to take a stand on prejudice: against false patriotism, manufactured nationalism, Kargilised identities. Therefore, we must refuse to set aside issues of real relevance – whether food security or education, or our right to minimum public services, and to be protected by the law of the land. Such issues must not be sacrificed at the altar of "national security" and macho symbols of "national strength", themselves divorced from flesh-and-blood people.

This depraved identity politics is not just a massive diversion of our attention from our needs and priorities. It is an assault on our sensibilities: we are being asked to cater to xenophobia, legitimise male supremacism, privilege narrow sub-identities, and suppress plurality. We can no longer be ordinary people going about their worldly business, or people committed to a larger project of humanisation and deepening of this democracy. We are asked to wear our Mera-Bharat-Mahan badges on our sleeves, and fool ourselves that our real problems are not about hunger, deprivation, inequality, corruption and bigotry within our borders. Rather, the problems are presented as caused by *them:* those monsters across the border.

In this sense, this election is a plebiscite on prejudice. True, it is an extremely complicated affair – with regional parties as well as national ones offering a range of black, white and (largely) grey options. The BJP's opponents are divided. The Congress is not playing its cards well. The Third Force has taken a knock with the vanishing of the Janata Dal. No one is presenting dazzling new, fresh alternatives. And yet, at its core, the choice is starkly simple. Either we succumb to the politics of false identities and manufactured "pride", and vote for the NDA. Or we reaffirm our real priorities, re-emphasise our true concerns as citizens, return to programmatic issues, and vote for secular, pluralist, democratic parties. At the end of the day, it *is* an either-or choice. ■

The looming shadow

Recent trade data confirm that the government's management of the external sector has made future balance of payments problems likely.

IN the 15 months that the BJP-led government has been in power, it has done perhaps more in terms of liberalising imports and furthering the interests of international capital, and done it faster, than any previous government. Indeed, its effective policy in this regard has been in marked contrast to its stated electioneering position, both in this election and the previous one. The party that once prided itself on its declared economic aim of "swadeshi" has been leading a government that has allowed a greater degree of import penetration, especially in the area of non-necessary consumer goods, than ever before in independent India.

This has largely occurred at the cost of domestic producers, in a whole gamut of manufacturing industries ranging from small-scale producers of marble and small consumption items to sugar manufacturers. And this in turn is likely to have had an unfavourable effect on employment in these sectors, which in turn will create negative multiplier effects.

However, there are other adverse consequences of the government's management of the external sector, quite apart from those relating to domestic economic activity and employment. The export-import policy has been associated with a widening of the trade deficit, an increase in non-oil imports into the country even during a period of industrial recession, and a major deceleration (even decline) in exports in dollar terms.

This is made amply evident in the data relating to external trade which have just been released by the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S). They indicate that the trade balance deteriorated substantially over 1998-99, largely because of the increase in non-oil imports, even though the ongoing recession in domestic manufacturing industry at that time meant that the requirement of raw material and intermediate imports was less. Subsequently the trade deficit has recovered slightly, largely because of the depressing effects of industrial recession, since the expansion in exports remains muted at best.

Thus, in the period April-July 1999, exports increased by only 4 per cent in dollar terms, compared to the same period of 1998. While this was still a slightly better performance than that of the previous year, when exports actually fell by 3 per cent, it is hardly much cause for celebration, especially as this rate of growth still remains below the estimated rate of growth of world exports during these months.

Several features of the trade pattern and the balance of payments are major causes for concern. The chances are high that after the elections the new government will have to take on quite soon the challenge of coping with yet another incipient balance of payments crisis.

Even more to the point, it still remains well below the average of $3 billion a month for export values that were achieved in 1997-98. So the export performance over the past 15 months has been such that it has not even recovered to the levels that were seen as barely adequate even two years ago.

Meanwhile, the only reason that the trade deficit has been kept within even manageable limits is the collapse in international oil prices, which has kept India's oil import bill low. Non-oil imports grew fairly rapidly until March 1998, suggesting that the import liberalisation measures undertaken over the 1990s had contributed to a surge in imports despite fairly depressed domestic demand for manufactured goods. Since then, however, the recession appears to have taken its toll in terms of a reduced rate of expansion of non-oil imports.

However, since April 1999 there has been a firming up of world oil prices, and this must have involved an increase in India's oil import bill. It is still not clear how much of the increase in imports over the period April-July is due to this factor, but this will certainly be a major source of concern for policy makers in future since it reduces the leeway for non-oil imports.

The large trade deficits have still not become a source of concern in the public perception because the current account deficit remains quite low. This is essentially due to the role played by worker's remittances from abroad, which have in fact shored up India's balance of payments throughout the 1990s. In 1998-99, Reserve Bank of India data show that transfer incomes from abroad, which are dominated by worker's remittances, financed more than 80 per cent of the trade deficit.

The role of all invisible payments has been less because the country loses some income to profit remittances by multinational companies. Last year these amounted to nearly another one-third of the trade deficit. It is also worth noting that transfer incomes from abroad in 1998-99 (as indeed, in every other year of this decade) have been more than all sources of capital inflow put togeth-

PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH

er, by more than 22 per cent.

When considering the role of capital inflows, another legacy of the economic policies of the decade, which have been so avidly followed and pushed by the BJP government also, has been the growing share of foreign direct investment (FDI), which has been in the form of purchase of shares in existing Indian companies rather than as greenfield investment. Even in 1995-96, the ratio of such investment to total FDI was only 1 per cent. By 1998-99, the BJP-led government had managed to raise this to 16 per cent, and guesstimates for the current year suggest that it is likely to be even higher and could reach as much as one-third. It is interesting that this should be part of the economic legacy of the party that earlier presented itself as the champion of Indian business.

These mergers and acquisitions are important not only because of any simplistic nationalist economic sentiment. They also imply a future drain of foreign exchange resources because of the repatriation of profits by such foreign purchasers, where there was no such outflow in the past. This is not an idle concern. In Brazil at the moment, there is a heated debate over this issue, because the outflow of such remitted profits has soared from $37 million to as much as $7 billion in just five years from 1993 to 1998, following a wave of such FDI in the form of mergers and acquisitions.

All this becomes particularly worrisome because the other sources of capital inflow into the country have proved to be extremely fragile at best. Both portfolio capital inflows and net short-term external commercial borrowing into the country turned negative in 1998-99. While the reduction of reliance on such highly volatile capital is to be welcomed, it should be remembered that this has happened not because of the sagacity of the Indian government, but because foreign investors have turned away from this emerging market. This suggests that it would be highly problematic to base a future growth strategy on reliance in such external capital inflows.

In sum, several features of the trade pattern and the balance of payments are major causes for concern. The chances are high that after the elections the new government will have to take on quite soon the challenge of coping with yet another incipient balance of payments crisis. It is a pity, therefore, that so few fresh ideas are evident in this regard from both the leading political combinations. ■

■ LETTERS

The Congress(I)

This has reference to the cover story "Into battle" (September 10). With the Congress(I) finding its prospects to be dim in Uttar Pradesh and deciding to contest as a junior partner in alliances in States such as Bihar and Tamil Nadu, it is unlikely that the party will get a majority on its own. The Congress(I) has started speaking of forming a coalition government in the event of the elections producing a hung Parliament. After the fall of the Vajpayee government, the Congress(I) was not able to form an alternative government because the leadership of Sonia Gandhi was not acceptable to some of the secular parties. As a candidate for the prime ministership Manmohan Singh may be more acceptable to parties across the political spectrum. So, if Sonia Gandhi is really interested in the future of the party and the welfare of the country and in upholding secularism, she should, at least at this late stage, support Manmohan Singh's candidature and confine herself to leading the party.

A. Jacob Sahayam
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

★ ★ ★

The cover story brings out all the facts about the current crisis facing the Sonia Gandhi-led Congress(I). The days of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi are over, and the Congress(I) is showing signs of being a spent force.

Instead of being on the offensive during the run-up to the parliamentary elections the party is expending a lot of time and energy defending a) its projection of Sonia Gandhi, a foreigner by birth, as the next Prime Minister of India; b) its attempts to sneak in Sonia as its candidate in Bellary in what you have correctly pointed out as a "hide and seek operation", inviting criticism from members of her own party; and c) its attempts to strike an alliance with Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD in Bihar, which has resulted in a revolt by party cadres in that State. Sharad Pawar, a political heavy-weight, left the Congress(I), weakening its hold in Maharashtra. Ironically, an alliance with Jayalalitha, the maverick Tamil Nadu politician, has further diminished the party's credibility, because of the corruption cases against her and her unprincipled role in bringing down the BJP-led government in collusion with the Congress(I).

In the final analysis, what works in India during election time is the sort of fuzzy logic used in the microprocessors of washing machines, and not the cold analytical stuff of your columns. Atal Behari Vajpayee's BJP-led alliance may win the elections not entirely because of the victory in Kargil, nor on account of the low inflation rate, not even because of his party's image of being less corrupt, but because of his oratorical skills and his frequent dalliance with mellifluous poetry in Hindi when he reaches out to the masses. Personal charisma does indeed matter and right now, Vajpayee's counts a lot more than Sonia's.

Kangayam R. Rangaswamy
Maryland Heights, U.S.

Narmada Valley

Arundhati Roy has done a commendable job in drawing attention to the struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan ("I felt that the valley needed a writer", August 27).

Her essay "The Greater Common Good" has made a lot of people understand the principle behind the struggle of the tribal people in the Narmada valley. She made a valid point when she said that the "Government has suddenly discovered the emotive power of thirst." Quenching the thirst of the people of Kutch and Saurashtra has been projected as a goal of the Sardar Sarovar project. If that was so, why were the dammed waters of Mahi and Sabarmati (the rivers closest to the two regions) not diverted to Ahmedabad, Mehsana and Kheda instead of Kutch and Saurashtra?

At the same time, the NBA and Arundhati Roy have not answered a crucial question: what alternative does the movement offer to farmers in need of water, if the struggle succeeds? Merely stating the obvious – that the water from this dam may still not reach the farmers – is not the answer. Or is the NBA (and Arundhati Roy) only limiting their concern to the threatened villages?

Shweta Moorthy
New Delhi

The English language

This has reference to William Safire's column, "The bandwidth of the e-speak" (August 27).

As the centuries passed, the English

anguage, both spoken and written came to be categorised as "Old English" and 'Middle English". Present-day English is called "Modern English".

Come 2000, with the advent of the lingo of the netizen, present-day English may come to be called "pre-millennium English".

The Encarta global dictionary, to be published in eight versions – with the collaboration of Microsoft – may reflect 'Millennium English".

K. Viswanathan

Chennai

Muhammad Ali

The book review ("In the fight for black freedom", August 27) by Nirmal Shekar was inspiring.

The story of Muhammad Ali's hardships and struggles is touching. His convictions as well as his momentous and emphatic decisions have a compelling significance. As today's "technocratic" world races towards a global village that is socially, culturally and economically monolithic efficiently wiping out all "unfit elements" (societies, ideas and systems regarded by it as backward and obsolete), it requires great courage to swim against the current. Ali deserves to be honoured.

By declaring that he has no quarrel with the Vietcong, he immediately identified himself with all the victims of colonialism and not just blacks.

In the history of the emancipation of oppressed people all over the world Ali has made a special contribution in his own way.

Kamrul Haque

Guwahati

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

The tribute to Nirad C. Chaudhuri ("The passing of an unknown Indian", August 27) was highly commendable for its style and objectivity.

I feel that Nirad babu paid the highest tribute to the Mahatma when he said that no Prophet was so completely identified with the Indian masses as he and that 'he was profoundly uneducated intellectually and lived in utter nakedness of spirit till his death." This is the state of a free soul, of the self-realised saint, seer and sage. What was unique about Gandhiji, however, was that, living as he did in that state of inner freedom, he worked tirelessly for the Independence of the country and for the emancipation of the Indian masses and shone as a beacon for seekers of truth everywhere.

The other remarks of Nirad babu about Gandhiji may be highly prejudiced, but Sukumar Muralidharan has exposed their hallowness with admirable restraint and power. Nirad babu worshipped the intellect and missed the dimension that transcends it.

K.V. Subrahmanyam

Ganeshpur, U.P.

Plantation workers

The article "A bitter harvest" (August 27) highlighted the plight of the workers of the Manjolai estate in Tamil Nadu. Their hardship can be traced to their poor income. All the managerial, supervisory, clerical, technical and medical staff of plantations are paid monthly salaries whereas the workers, who are the real backbone of the plantation industry, earn daily wages. The disparity between the salaried staff and the workers is enormous. Unless remedial action is taken to reduce this iniquity, it will be difficult to achieve industrial peace in the plantation sector.

During wage negotiations, plantation owners put forth the oft-repeated argument that the industry is unable to foot the wage bills. The Tea Board's figures for the year 1997-98 indicate that the total production of tea in India was 838 million kg, of which 660 million kg was locally consumed; that is, 80 per cent of the tea was sold in the local market. Only 20 per cent was exported.

At Coonoor, one kg of tea dust is sold between Rs.120 and Rs.180 at the retail outlets, depending on the grade and quality. Branded tea is sold at Rs.250 a kg at other places in the country. Tea is normally sold in auctions in different centres in the country and the trade is controlled, nationally and internationally, by a handful of monopoly companies. The lion's share is cornered by the intermediaries – brokers, agents, retailers and so on.

An average tea picker can collect, during the peak season 60 to 70 kg and even more, if the picker is young and energetic. During the lean season, which lasts for four to five months a year, the norm is 15 kg for a day's wage. Tea prices go up during the lean season because of the fall in the harvest. Five kg (maximum) of green tea leaf is required to make one kg of dust tea and no one needs to be in doubt about the profitability of the industry.

Tea producers, with the help of the government and the Tea Board, can sell their production in the local market and effectively check the operations of the middlemen, agents and brokers and thus pave the way for a better deal to the workers.

Many plantations do not implement properly the provisions of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951. This Act requires urgent revision to ensure that the workers get adequate health, housing, potable water and other facilities. Instances can be quoted where the owners of plantations have not paid wages for months on end, and one can imagine the difficulties of the poor workers.

More than one million workers, mostly from tribal communities and socially weaker sections, are directly employed in tea plantations all over India. One hopes that the owners of plantations will shed the age-old colonial concept of management and treat the workers as an integral part of the industry, recognise their contributions to the growth and development of the industry and banish poverty from their lives.

V. Nadesan

Plantation Workers' Industrial Training Institute

Gudalur

Neelan Thiruchelvam

Radhika Coomaraswamy's article on Neelan Thiruchelvam (August 27) was more refreshing than the anti-LTTE reports. While she condemns violence, she refrains from making sweeping generalisations about the perpetrator(s) of this murder. However, her support for moderation seems to offer little for the Tamils in Sri Lanka to advance their self-respect and dignity.

Neelan, I agree, was a brilliant lawyer, but he was an individual who basically echoed the sentiments of the Sri Lankan regime. Moderate Tamil leaders have a vision, but I am not sure that the Tamil people would like to be part of this vision.

P. Ramasamy

Department of Political Science

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Malaysia

Correction: In the Update article on M.S. Swaminathan (September 10), in the reference to *Time* magazine's choice of the major figures of 20th century Asia the number of those chosen was 20, not a hundred. Also, Jawaharlal Nehru did not figure among the 20 "most influential Asians of the 20th century": his name, with a photograph, only figured in a related article in the news magazine on "men who created and nurtured nations with a new-fangled skill called politics."

Police in the dock

Independent inquiries by non-governmental organisations and social action groups find that unwarranted and brutal police violence led to the July 23 massacre in Tirunelveli.

S. VISWANATHAN

A JUDICIAL inquiry ordered by the Tamil Nadu Government into police violence against a procession of tea estate workers in Tirunelveli on July 23, which claimed 17 lives (*Frontline*, August 13), is yet to take off. However, a number of non-governmental organisations and social action groups have conducted independent inquiries.

The Tamil Nadu unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) – Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, and the Writers and Thinkers Forum for Social Harmony (WTF), a human rights organisation in Madurai, sent separate fact-finding teams. Other groups jointly held a joint "a public inquest".

The "jury" of the "public inquest" comprised Justice H. Suresh, former Judge of the Bombay High Court; V.R. Lakshminarayanan, a former Director-General of Police, Tamil Nadu; V. Vasanthi Devi, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University in Tirunelveli; and V. Karuppan, a retired IAS officer. The organisers were the Human Rights Education and Protection Council, Tirunelveli; the Society for Community Organisation Trust, Madurai; the Society for Integrated Rural Development, Madurai; the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (Tamil Nadu chapter); Human Rights Foundation, Chennai; and the People's Watch – Tamil Nadu, Madurai.

The reports prepared by the PUCL, the AIDWA and the WTF provided detailed accounts of the police action, which they descibed as "unwarranted". An interim report of the public inquest said: "*Prima facie* evidence indicates that the police were brutal and callous in dispersing the crowd." According to the interim report, the crowd was surrounded by the police on three sides and the only way the people could escape from the lathi-charge was by jumping into the river. "If the objective was to disperse the crowd near the Collector's office, there was no need for the police to chase them up to the river and continue to beat them even when they were jumping into river," the jury members observed.

The interim report said that there was evidence to believe that most of the deaths had resulted from police beating and not cases of drowning. Photographs placed before the jury showed the victims bleeding ante-mortem, owing to head and chest injuries. There were grievous injuries in other parts of their bodies. Post-mortem reports did not record the injuries suffered by the victims, the report said. It concluded: "This makes us doubt the veracity of the post-mortem reports."

(According to a government counter-affidavit filed in response to a writ petition by Puthiya Thamizhagam president Dr. K. Krishnaswamy, who has sought a second post-mortem, some of the bodies had only fish bites and minor aberrations and death in all cases was due to drowning. The petition is pending before the court.)

All the inquires brought to light the humiliation meted out to some women processionists at a police station in Tirunelveli hours after the police action on July 23 afternoon. They were illegally detained at the police station and stripped and abused by police personnel. They were let off after they gave the police a written assurance of good behaviour.

A press release signed by the "members of the jury of the public inquest" said that 40 persons, most of them eyewitnesses, had deposed on the first day of the inquest, August 19. Many witnesses were women. They alleged that they were "beaten and chased into the



P. SEETHARAMAN

CPI(M) district secretary V. Palani, who was injured in the July 23 incident, speaking at the public inquest in Tirunelveli.

river by the police and even stripped naked at the police station".

Vasanthi Devi told *Frontline* that there was a big response from the affected people, particularly women, at the public inquest. The organisers had invited officials to present their case on August 20, but no one turned up. Some local people who deposed on the second day said that processions organised by the Puthiya Tamizhagam usually turned violent. Some of them mentioned that women constables were teased by a section of the processionists. There was, however, no mention of such teasing in the press reports or in the first information reports (FIRs) filed by the police. Vasanthi Devi said: "What happened in Tirunelveli on July 23 was a heart-rending incident and a gruesome evidence of what is going on in our society."

THE PUCL team, led by its president Sudha Ramalingam, an advocate, visited Tirunelveli on August 8 and 9 and interviewed 18 eyewitnesses and 15 persons, including relatives of those killed in the incident. V. Palani, secretary of the Tirunelveli district committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), who was injured in the incident; District Collector K. Dhanavel; Commissioner of Police T.K. Rajendran; and legislators K. Krishnaswamy (Puthiya Tamizhagam) and Appavu (Tamil Maanila Congress) were among those interviewed.

The team observed that a common aspect of all the versions it heard was the idea that the problem was localised and could have been solved by "mature and balanced handling" by the police. "Even assuming that a section of the processionists indulged in some unwarranted activities which provoked the police to take some action, the large-scale lathi-charge, stone-throwing and chasing of people down the ramp wall of the road and up to and into the river cannot be justified," the team said.

The very fact that all the deaths occurred in the Thamiraparani river more than 100 metres away from the place where the procession was stopped, the team said, "clearly establishes that the police did not stop with dispersing the crowd".

Disagreeing with the official view that the deaths were only due to drowning, the team noted that at least two of the victims, A. Syed Abdul Rahman, 24, and Shah Nawaz, 20, were good swimmers. The only logical explanation for their death, the team said, was that they received head injuries at the hands of the police even after they jumped into the river. The team observed that stone-throwing by the police, "a wholly irresponsible behaviour", aggravated the situation.

The team made a pointed reference to the absence of the City Police Commissioner at the scene, although the administration had anticipated a large turnout and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly S. Balakrishnan was leading the procession, with some other legislators.

The PUCL team observed that a common aspect of all the versions it heard was the idea that the problem was localised and could have been solved by "mature and balanced handling" by the police.

The team said that the Deputy Commissioner of Police was the senior-most police official at the scene. "It is very clear that the lathi-charge and the stone-throwing by the police personnel started even as the Deputy Commissioner was talking to the leaders. According to him, he even physically prevented some of the constables who were close to him from beating up the people. Thus the absence of another senior officer on the spot is one of the major reasons for the incident," the team observed.

The team said that the lathi-charge had not been ordered by the senior-most police official present. "It is very clear that the police contingents present took the law into their own hands and were totally uncontrollable. Very clearly, the police did not behave like a disciplined force." The team dismissed the police version that their action was to protect the honour of the policewomen who were allegedly teased by some processionists.

The team said: "Since the offenders in this case are the police themselves, the investigation and the laying of charge-sheet against these personnel should be done by a Special Investigation Team constituted under Section 37 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993."

A SEVEN-MEMBER team of the Tamil Nadu unit of the AIDWA, led by its working president, Mythily Sivaraman, visited Tirunelveli on August 3 and 4 and met several persons, including members of the families of some victims. The AIDWA report said: "Unless the Collector and the DIG are transferred, an impartial inquiry into the police action is impossible." Citing the fact that the shops on the procession route had remained open, it said that the entire procession was peaceful.

Refuting the official version that the processionists triggered the violence by throwing stones at the police, the team observed that the women witnesses had told the team that there were heaps of stones inside the Collectorate and that the first stone came from policemen inside the Collectorate compound, even as the leaders of the procession pleaded with police officials to clear the way for their entry into the premises.

The team said that the only escape route was the river. It added that on being kicked by policemen, women rolled down into the riverbed through thorny bushes, and, hit on the heads, many fell into the river unconscious. The report alleged that the police snatched Vignesh, the 18-month-old son of Rathina Mary, and threw him into the river. The mother was chased and beaten. Both the child and the mother died.

The report said that policewomen stripped and humiliated a few women who swam to safety but were taken to the police station. Some women started bleeding after they were kicked in the abdomen. One woman lost three of her front teeth. The team said that the injured victims, who were admitted in the Government Hospital, were ridiculed and chided by the staff and they received scant attention. The AIDWA team also demanded a second post-mortem of the bodies.

DESCRIBING the police action as "an unprecedented brutal attack on an unarmed, innocent people", the WTF team led by A. Marx, which visited Tirunelveli on August 15 and 16, criticised the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Government's hard line towards Dalit processions. A substantial number of the Manjolai tea estate workers, who participated in the procession, were Dalits. Noting that the police had indulged in violence even after an official had ordered them not to attack the processionists, the team expressed concern over the growing indiscipline in police ranks. ■

Another victim in Orissa

The hate campaign against minorities in Orissa leads to one more killing, the victim this time being a Christian priest.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE sustained hate campaign against Christians in Orissa has assumed diabolic proportions with the killing of a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Arul Doss, by a mob of non-Christian fanatics at Jamabani, a remote village in Mayurbhanj district, on the night of September 1. This is the third such incident involving minorities in the State this year: Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons were burnt to death at Manoharpur on the night of January 22, and a Muslim trader, Sheikh Rehman, was killed at Padiabeda village in Mayurbhanj district on August 26. Fr. Arul Doss died in a mob attack on him and other Christians who were participating in festivities after a prayer meeting. (Jamabani is not far from the spot where Graham Staines and his sons were killed.)

The 35-year-old Fr. Doss, a native of Tamil Nadu, had been the priest of the Anandapur Roman Catholic church in Mayurbhanj district for the past five years. He had been visiting villages in the area since August 31.

Fr. Doss arrived at Jamabani on September 1 along with two other church workers, Darsan Birua and Kate Singh Khuntia, and organised a prayer meeting there the next day. According to some reports, they were watching a cultural programme after a prayer meeting when a group of 10 to 15 persons, who were armed with lathis, bows and arrows, attacked them. As the participants in the celebrations, including Fr. Doss, tried to escape, the attackers reportedly pierced his body with arrows. The attackers set fire to local church before leaving. Khuntia is in a critical condition.

Fr. Jose Thundiyil, a fellow priest, said that Fr. Doss used to make weekly visits to Jamabani. The journey involved a 32-km scooter ride followed by a 19-km trek. "He had been in our diocese for five years, and he was a very good missionary," Fr. Thundiyil said. "He led a simple life. He wanted to be with the poor all the time. He was not interested in conversions. He was keen on organising the poor people and educating them about their rights so that they could lead better lives," he added.

Condemning the killing, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee urged the Orissa Government to arrest immediately the perpetrators of the "heinous crime" and of previous such incidents, irrespective of their political or other forms of affiliation. "It is extremely distressing that such murderous attacks on representatives of the minority community should be taking place unchecked and with alarming regularity in Orissa," he said.

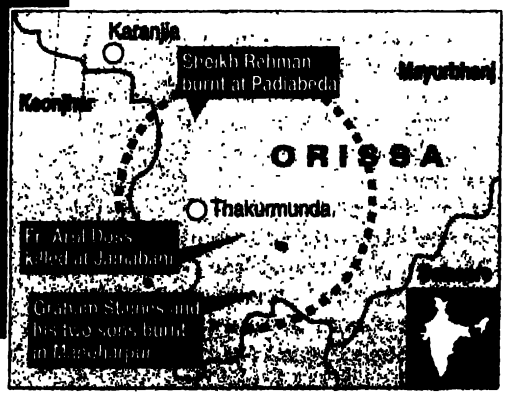
Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang blamed "non-secular forces" for the killing. The incident occurred in the "area of operation" of Dara Singh, who is wanted in connection with the murder of Graham Staines and his sons and of Sheikh Rehman. "Any killing on the eve of the elections can only be the handiwork of non-secular forces, aimed at creating confusion in the minds of voters," Gamang said.

On September 3, Opposition parties organised a Statewide bandh, calling for the Chief Minister's resignation in the light of the latest act of violence against members of minority communities.

The killing of Fr. Doss came barely a week after Dara Singh, the prime accused in the Staines murder case, allegedly killed Sheikh Rehman in Padiabeda. Dara Singh and his men allegedly chopped off Rehman's hands at a crowded market before burning him to death. The ghastly attack came as a shock to the State police and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), who have been searching for Dara Singh for months. One of Sheikh Rehman's neighbours, Madina Bibi,



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The spot where Sheikh Rehman, a trader, was burnt to death on August 26.

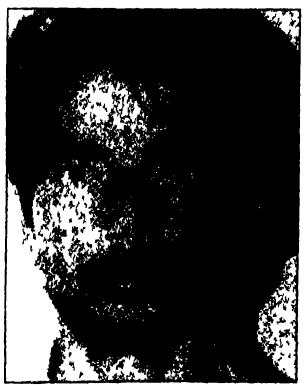


EASTERN PRESS AGENCY

The body of Fr. Arul Doss (inset), who was killed on the night of September 1, being taken for post-mortem.

alleged that Dara Singh had announced his intentions in advance. Padiabeda's 20-odd Muslim families, who are terrorised, made similar allegations. They said that Dara Singh had been visiting the area and that he had been spotted at the weekly markets. They wondered why the CBI and the State police had not arrested him. They alleged that Dara Singh had a history of attacking Muslim traders, especially cattle dealers.

The State Government was non-committal on whether Dara Singh was involved in the killing of Fr. Doss. "We will neither confirm nor deny it," State Home Secretary Ajit Tripathy said. However, police sources in Mayurbhanj said that the Jamabani attack had the hallmarks of Dara Singh's *modus operandi;* for instance, the way in which the victims were attacked and churches burnt. They said that Dara Singh's involvement could not be ruled out as the four organised attacks on Christians and Muslims that had taken place over the past eight months in the villages of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts in north Orissa had occurred within 30 km from Thakurmunda, which is believed to be his stronghold. Dara Singh, an alleged religious fanatic, is believed to be a Bajrang Dal activist who is on a "mission to take out the minorities". He carries a reward of Rs.5 lakhs on his head.



Dara Singh, who is believed to be involved in the killing of Fr. Arul Doss.

The Wadhwa Commission which inquired into the Staines murder case has stated in its report that Dara Singh did not act at the behest of any political organisation. This observation has, however, been rejected by many people who say that evidence indicates otherwise.

The National Council of Churches in India and associated Christian missions have called for a fresh inquiry into the Sangh Parivar's alleged links with Dara Singh. The NCCI president, K. Rajaratnam, and the India Missions Association's vice-chairman, Ebe Sunder Raj, said that the continued killings of members of minority communities necessitated a fresh probe with wider terms of reference that would implicate the abettors of the crime. They said that the Wadhwa Commission report was full of contradictions as an overwhelming number of affidavits and documents that were placed before the Commission pointed to Dara Singh's links with the Bajrang Dal/Bharatiya Janata Party/Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. They alleged that statements made by various Sangh Parivar leaders, which appeared indirectly to justify the killing, were further pointers to the involvement of the Bajrang Dal.

The CBI, which has identified Dara Singh as the prime suspect in the Staines case, is yet to track him down; he is believed to be operating from a dense forest in tribal-dominated north Orissa. The CBI has filed a charge-sheet against 18 accused in the Staines murder case. The charge-sheet, filed at the Designated Court of Justice E. Vasudev Rao in Bhubaneswar, sought permission to conduct further investigations and issue warrants against the absconders. Altogether, 46 persons are believed to have been involved in the killing: nine have been arrested; nine, including Dara Singh, have been mentioned as absconders; the others are yet to be identified. The CBI is reported to have conducted nearly 500 raids to arrest Dara Singh. Police sources conceded that the State Government had "washed its hands of" the Staines murder case by handing it over to the CBI in March. The number of raids conducted by the State police on Dara Singh's suspected hideouts in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts came down drastically. Dara Singh's decision to lie low for six months after the murder of Graham Staines misled the police into believing that he was "cornered" and that he may have taken refuge in Uttar Pradesh, his home State. "Just when we thought he was gone, he came out of nowhere and struck again," one official said.

Officials of the CBI said that Dara Singh had become a prominent figure in the area bordering Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts. His name entered the police records after he launched a series of attacks on Muslim cattle traders in the area. It has been alleged that villagers with whom Dara Singh shared his loot, harbour him.

Evidence collected by the CBI so far reveals that Dara Singh instigated his supporters by saying that Christian missionaries spent a lot of money trying to "convert poor tribal brothers and sisters". According to investigating officers, Dara Singh is both respected and feared by the local people. The CBI has decided to start booking cases against those who have been harbouring him. ■

Pioneer of Indian rocketry

Dr. S. Srinivasan, 1941 - 1999.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

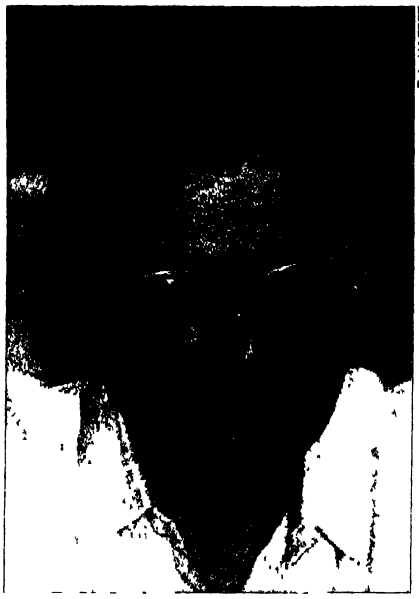
DR. S.SRINIVASAN, Director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Thiruvananthapuram, who died on September 1, was the pioneer of rocketry in India. He was the architect of the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Rohini sounding rockets, the Satellite Launch Vehicle, SLV-3, the Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) and the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), and was looking forward to the lift-off of the Geostationary Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) from Sriharikota next year. He was fully involved with the GSLV, which entails the application of the frontier technology using liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen. He was an expert in launch vehicle technology. Srinivasan was 58 and is survived by his wife, a daughter and a son.

Dr. Srinivasan was admitted to a hospital in Chennai on August 29 and underwent emergency heart surgery. He had undergone bypass surgery a decade ago. Hundreds of his colleagues from the VSSC and SHAR paid their respects to him in Chennai.

ISRO chairman Dr. K. Kasturirangan, who attended the funeral, told *Frontline:* "Dr. Srinivasan was an exceptional scientist. He was the pioneer of rocketry in India. He was the architect of Indian rocketry in more than one sense because in the design, configuration and implementation of a launch vehicle project – in all aspects – he was outstanding. He grew with ISRO, evolved with ISRO and gave the pride of place to ISRO in the comity of space-faring nations."

According to fellow-scientists and engineers, he was a visionary, working on the dream project of a technology demonstrator for a re-usable launch vehicle which would reduce the cost of access to space.

D. Narayana Moorthi, Programme Director, Launch Vehicle Programme Office, ISRO Headquarters, Bangalore, said that Dr. Srinivasan was wedded to technology. Moorthi said: "He was a technologist and a project manager, both rolled together."



T A HAFEEZ

BORN on April 14, 1941 in Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, Srinivasan took his B.E. degree in Electrical Engineering with honours from Annamalai University and M.E. in Aeronautical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He received his doctorate in Engineering Mechanics from Ohio State University, the U.S.

Srinivasan worked for Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bangalore as an aeronautical engineer. He joined ISRO in 1970. He was first involved in the development of hardware for the Rohini rockets, and from 1973 started working on the SLV. When A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, now Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister, was the Project Director of SLV-3 in 1980, Dr. Srinivasan was the Deputy Project Director. They formed a great team and the launch of SLV-3 in 1980 from SHAR was hugely successful; it deployed a 35-kg Rohini satellite in near-earth orbit. Then followed a series of SLV-3 flights. According to Rajaram Nagappa, Associate Director, VSSC, Dr. Srinivasan was instrumental in the design and development, qualification and realisation of the flight stages of the SLV-3.

Dr. Srinivasan was the Project Director of the PSLV in its formative stages. He became the Programme Director of the Integrated Launch Vehicle Programme in 1988 and contributed to the planning of the follow-on PSLVs, GSLVs and advanced vehicles. He was Director, SHAR, for a brief period, after which he became Director, VSSC, in 1994.

Nagappa said that after the first two ASLV flights failed, Dr. Srinivasan provided a re-configuration to the vehicle by adding fins and other features, giving controllability to the vehicle. The next two ASLV flights were successful.

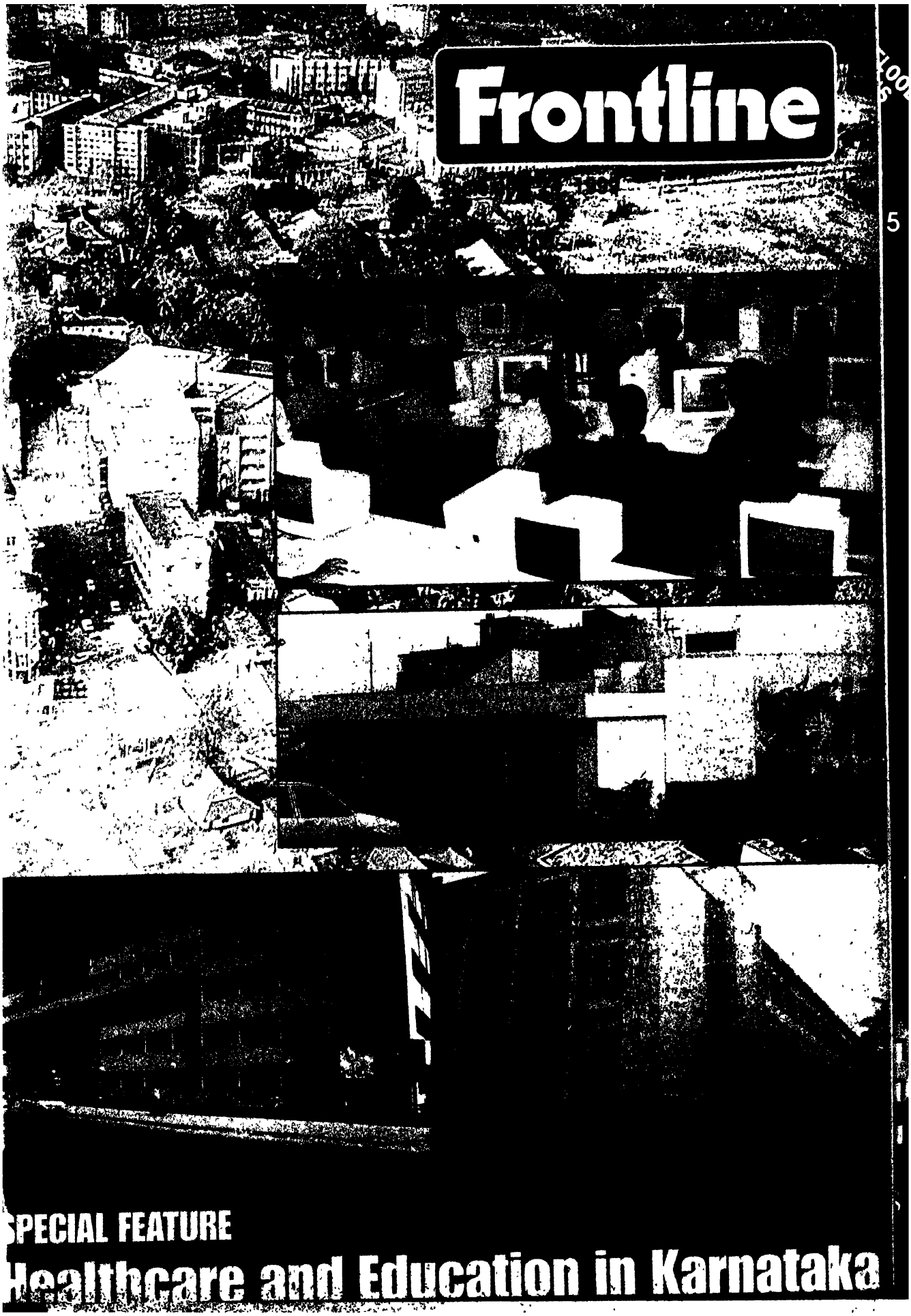
Narayana Moorthi said that Dr Srinivasan was responsible for the evolution of the PSLV from the drawing stage to its commercial launch on May 26, 1999 when it lifted three satellites – Indian Remote-Sensing Satellite (IRS), a German satellite and a South Korean spacecraft. According to Nagappa, even as Dr. Srinivasan gave shape to the PSLV's configuration, design and development, he simultaneously conceived, planned and established the facilities needed for the project. These included vehicle integration and checkout facilities at Valiamala and Thumba, Kerala, and at SHAR, Andhra Pradesh.

A characteristic trait of Dr. Srinivasan was that even as he was working on one project, he would scout around for future projects. He kept track of developments in space in other countries and decided what speciality ISRO should develop. Narayana Moorthi said, "He was thinking of a technology demonstrator for a re-usable launch vehicle."

In the assessment of G. Madhavan Nair, Director, Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre, ISRO, Dr. Srinivasan "was a master of vehicle technology. Besides, he was one person who could cover any aspect in the field. PSLV was his dream baby."

R.V. Perumal, Project Director, GSLV, said: "He was a builder. He was a man of grand ideas, which were substantially met. He was a good man to a fault."

There was all round praise about the human side of Dr. Srinivasan too. S. Ramakrishnan, Project Director, PSLV, said: "He was a positive person. He was a good leader." ■



SPECIAL FEATURE

Healthcare and Education in Karnataka

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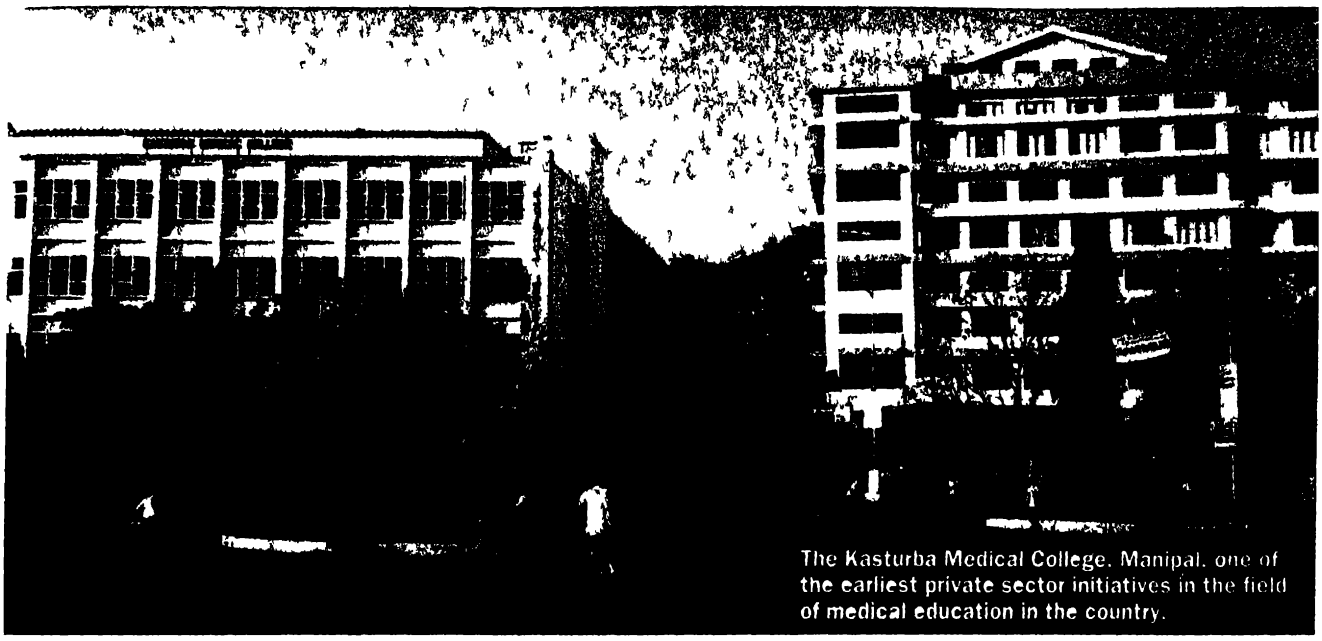
3 Candidates shortlisted on the basis of CAT ranks will be called for Group Discussion and Interview for final selection in Manipal during April/May 2000



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For more information kindly contact: The EEP Coordinator



The Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, one of the earliest private sector initiatives in the field of medical education in the country.

Academic capital

Karnataka led the way in the matter of private sector initiatives in quality medical education in the country. And the trend continues.

RAVI SHARMA

WHEN the late Dr Tonse Madhava Anantha Pai set up the Kasturba Medical College in Manipal in 1953, he could hardly have imagined that his home State of Karnataka would one day witness a boom in the field of private medical colleges In the last three decades, there has been a phenomenal growth in the number of privately managed and capitation fee-based medical colleges in the State With the tacit encouragement of a succession of Chief Ministers, from Devaraj Urs to S Bangarappa, religious institutions and philanthropists set up professional colleges to serve their communities and the public. Of Karnataka's 19 medical colleges, 16 are privately managed

Medical and dental colleges sprang up in almost every corner, particularly the urban and semi-urban centres Although there were numerous teething problems, the Karnataka experience showed that a capitation fee medical college was a sure money-spinner The trend of capitation fee colleges has been successfully copied in recent years in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and, to a lesser extent, in Tamil Nadu. Despite the competition, students from other parts of the country as well as from abroad flock to Karnataka for seats in medical and dental colleges

Until 1992, there were few hitches in starting a capitation fee college in Karnataka, given the cozy relations between politicians and prospective managements and the fact that the State Governments were the sanctioning authority All that managements needed to secure sanction was to approach the right politician

The spurt in capitation fee colleges sadly led to a dilution of standards Faced with a shortage of qualified and experienced staff and inadequate infrastructure, colleges functioned with makeshift arrangements, often without even the required quality in clinical material (especially in dentistry)

While the early pioneers such as T.M.A Pai had a vision that their colleges should impart quality education, entrepreneurs who came in later were motivated more by profit than by idealism Most managements set up colleges only as a commercial proposition

However, a series of Supreme Court orders, which put restrictions on the management quota seats, brought about order in the admission process. The Medical Council of India became the final sanctioning authority Even today, with managements entitled to 15 per cent of the seats, it is still possible to run a medical college profitably An added bonus is the clout that comes with running a professional college Funds for expansion and infrastructure must, however be carefully planned from sources other than capitation fees

Contrary to the general perception, privately managed medical colleges have not all been "money-making institutions They have provided thousands of students the opportunity to secure a professional education, given the limited number of government-run or aided institutions Without the capitation fees, it would have been impossible for colleges to put up the required infrastructure and build up impressive campuses

Even the Bangalore Medical College, one of the three government-run medical colleges in Karnataka that is still much sought after, was started by a group of leading private medical practioners It was taken over by the Government and developed

Two privately run medical colleges that have earned international recognition are the Kasturba Medical College in Manipal and the college by the same name in Mangalore. Founded by the late T M A

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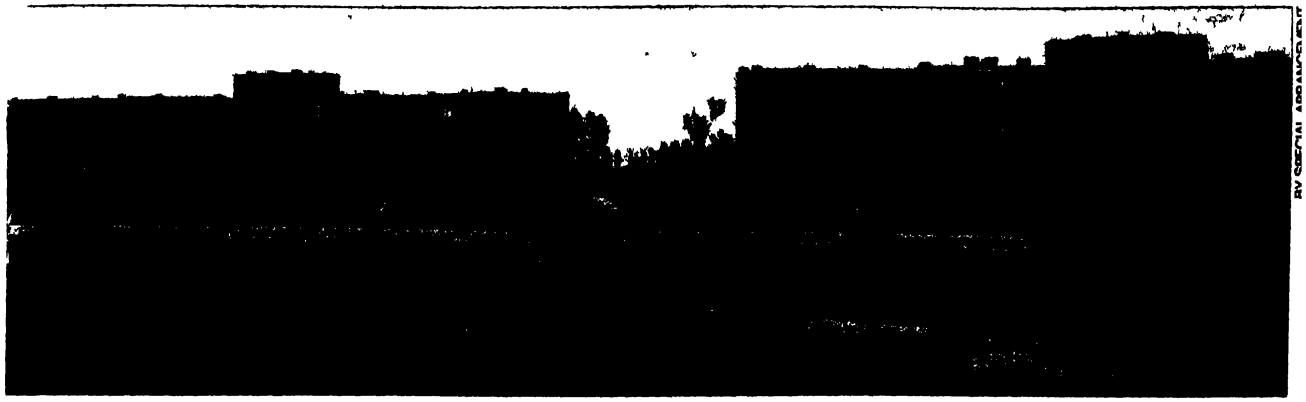
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ADMAS



On the campus of the International Medical University at Dar-es-Salam, Tanzania, promoted by the Vignan Educational Foundation, Bangalore.

Pai, who started the Academy of General Education in 1942 in Manipal, a hamlet 60 km from Mangalore, the colleges attract and nurture talented professionals. In 1993, the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) was granted the status of a Deemed University by the Government of India under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

According to Dr. Glenn G. Christo, Director (Planning), MAHE is on the verge of setting up campuses elsewhere in India and overseas. Christo said: "We applied to the Government of India and the UGC to set up the campuses. A subcommittee was set up to decide whether a deemed university like ours could have multi-campuses. It has now cleared the concept, and the decision has been conveyed to the Human Resource Development Ministry. The notification from the Ministry is expected any time now."

Initially MAHE will set up a campus in Jalandhar which will include a medical college, hospital, a school of nursing and paramedical training institute. It will also set up a post-graduate training centre in Bangalore, which will offer highly focussed specialised training in areas such as cardiac anaesthesia. Christo said: "Although a number of people have invited us to set up a campus, we are very selective before choosing a place. We would first like to look at the track record of the State government, the environment in the State and so on." He added: "You must understand that private medical education is expensive. Today though private initiative in medical education is well accepted by the public at large and even by the judiciary, it is still frowned upon by governments and politicians."

According to Christo, there are no vacancies in faculty positions at MAHE. The huge number of electives means that opportunities for students to go overseas are tremendous. "And the atmosphere on our campuses is cosmopolitan. There are over a hundred second-generation students studying medicine," he added.

From this academic year, MAHE has started distance education. Diploma courses in medical laboratory technology, radiography, medical records and nursing will be offered shortly. There are also plans to transform MAHE into India's first completely wired university. Its 240-hectare campus in Manipal has been chosen by the Software Technology Parks of India as one of its 15 information gateways. It is the only university in the country to have its own earth station.

Christo said that one of the requirements for a wired medical university would be a networking of 2,500 personal computers on the campus. He added: "We have 1,500. We are setting up a Hospital Information System (HIS) – where all details of a patient such as lab records, results, medical history and so on will go online. Admission to any of our hospitals, whether in Manipal, Sikkim or Goa could also be made online, just as the financial aspects will be. In academics, we will have a proprietary software system whereby a professor can interact through the network with students." The academy, along with the United States-based Healthscribe, is to start a medical transcription course in January.

MAHE'S pioneering efforts have facilitated the entry of other groups into medical education. The Nitte Education Trust, which was registered as a Tulu Linguistic Minority Trust in 1979, is another private initiative in education. Started by the late Kowdoor Sadananda Hegde, Supreme Court Judge and Lok Sabha Speaker, and his son N. Vinaya Hegde, the Trust's Medical Sciences Complex at Deralakatte, on the outskirts of Mangalore, houses the A.B. Shetty Memorial Institute of Dental Sciences and the Justice K.S. Hegde Medical College and Charitable Hospital.

Vinaya Hegde is critical of excessive government control in running private educational institutions. He said: "Too many laws and statutory requirements allow some people (close to the government) to manipulate the system. Too many laws also make the running of these institutions financially unviable. What is required is for the government to understand the way these institutions are run and then to work out transparent procedures, especially in financial matters. Today the money derived from educational institutions is not open for public audit. This has meant that many of them have become centres to collect and launder black money. While the government should have control on the financial aspects, it should leave the academic aspects to the trusts that run the institutions."

OTHER noteworthy trusts which run medical and paramedical colleges include the SDM Trust and the Rashtreeya Sikshana Samithi Trust. The Vignan Educational Foundation (VEF), which runs a dental college and 100-bed general hospital in Bangalore, was invited by the Government of Tanzania to set up and run dental, nursing, pharmacy and medical colleges as well as a multi-speciality, dental and medical hospitals in Dar-es-Salaam. In addition, paramedical, engineering and management courses were also to be offered. In short, the VEF was asked to set up a full-fledged university in Dar-es-



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Manipal provides fertile ground for a healthy interaction between the various disciplines, resulting in holistic solutions.

Among the first private educational enterprises to launch twinning programmes with foreign universities, Manipal's expertise has also been sought after to set up medical colleges abroad. Forays into the competitive world of Information Technology has been made by MAHE's Distance Education Wing, which offers Bachelors' and Masters' degrees in Information Technology.

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- ★ Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal
- ★ Manipal Institute of Technology, Sikkim
- ★ T. A. Pai Management Institute, Manipal
- ★ Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration, Manipal
- ★ Manipal Institute of Communication, Manipal
- ★ Vaikunta Baliga College of Law, Udupi
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ılaam. The International Medical and echnological University (IMTU), as this enture is to be called, was a further exam- ɔle of South-South cooperation.

Although the grand plan of a full- ledged university with multiple disci- ɔlines has not yet materialised, IMTU's medical college has started functioning on he 40-hectacre campus given by the Tanzanian government. It was inaugurat- ed by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral during his visit to Tanzania in September 1997.

Kasturi Subbarao, Managing Trustee, VEF, said: "For us it is a matter of pride that a foreign government called us to establish a university in their country. We were given autonomous status. Our first batch of medical students started class in January 1997. There were seven students, two Tanzanians and five Indians. Our third batch has 40 students who come from seven countries." Fees charged are $4,000 for a local candidate and Rs.2.5 lakhs for an Indian student. Hostel accommodation costs Rs.60,000 a year. The faculty is Indian and the medical degree offered by the IMTU is recognised by the Medical Council of Tanganayika.

Subbarao is bitter that "though it is a matter of pride for an Indian foundation to start a university abroad", neither the Government of India nor the Medical Council of India (MCI) has provided any support. The MCI is yet to recognise the medical degrees of the IMTU. Subbarao said: "The Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in its letter dated August 17, 1998, directed the Medical Council of India to recognise the degrees of IMTU under reciprocity. But it is yet to come. A two-member team, comprising an official from the Ministry and a representative of the Medical Council of India, will visit the IMTU medical college shortly. We hope recognition will come after this."

The medical course is also being offered by the IMTU in a twinning programme "for students who don't want to go to Dar-es-Salaam". The twinning programme is being offered at the moment from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, where 48 students are scheduled to take their first and second year examinations in India and the remaining in Dar-es-Salaam. The students, according to Subbarao, will also "have to go to Dar-es-Salaam for clinical training as and when required". The admission fees is Rs.2.5 lakhs. The IMTU also hopes to start its dental college from this academic year. ■

'The private sector has a role to play'

Interview with Dr. Ramdas M. Pai.

President of the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) **Dr. Ramdas M. Pai** is a firm believer in the Chinese proverb, 'If you give a person fish, you give him a meal; if you teach him to fish, you give him a meal for life.' Dr. Pai benignly watches over the fortunes of nearly 50 educational institutions and numerous hospitals run by the Manipal group. Other than a host of institutions in Manipal in southwest Karnataka, where the group's headquarters is located, the group has set up



RAVI SHARMA

institutions in other towns and cities in Karnataka, besides Sikkim, Goa, Nepal and Malayasia.

In an interview to **Ravi Sharma**, Dr. Pai said: "Education is of paramount importance if the country is to progress. And if society depends solely on the government to provide education, generations of students will be denied educational opportunities. The private sector has a role to play in higher education. The nation cannot afford to wait for the promises that politicians make." Excerpts:

▶ *Manipal, which is perhaps India's only university town, was a grand vision of your father Dr. Tonse Madhava Ananth Pai.*

The plan for the university town existed only in my father's mind. There were no drawings. In fact, his wish for a residential university in Manipal came true 14 years after his death.

▶ *How did he venture into this field in the 1940s?*

My father felt that only by educating the youth could society be transformed. He felt that people should invest in their children's education as they would in business or in real estate.

▶ *Was he a firm believer in a role for the private sector in education?*

Yes. Nowhere in the world is higher education subsidised. The government should give free education up to the high school level. Thereafter, its policies should create opportunities for higher or vocational education. Students who have secured the requisite marks but cannot afford the cost of education should be allowed to avail themselves of loans from banks, loans which will then be directly paid by the bank to the institution where the student has secured admission. Once students complete the course, they can repay the loan.

Let me give you a crude example. Hundreds of tuberculosis patients are dying and most, if not all of them, are poorer than the students in the government-run medical institutions. But it is the poor tax-payers, who can neither afford a cure for tuberculosis nor remain unemployed for long, who contribute to the government subsidies to educate each medical student. It costs the government between Rs.1.5 lakhs and Rs.2.5 lakhs a medical student a year. His education in the government-run institution is at the cost of the tax-payer (even the poor man), but only the student and his family benefit. Why should this happen?

▶ *What about economically poor students? Loans are difficult to secure and expensive...*

We in India are accustomed to everything coming free. So when I charge a fee, you feel that you are being exploited. But at the same time no person should be denied higher education because of his economic status. I have a suggestion. Today the Union and State Governments together spend Rs.20,000 crores (roughly 1.4 per cent of the GDP) on higher education subsidies. Let this money be invested as capi-

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al for, say, 10 years in a Human Resources Development Bank. This bank will then liberally offer loans to students who have secured seats on merit but cannot afford to pay.

▶ *You believe in self-financed higher education ...*

Yes. There is no point in the government subsidising higher education. It is not reaching the people it is meant to reach. Take the case of Upendra Nayak of Perkala, a village close to Manipal. The son of a betel-seller, he was a brilliant student at our school and college. He secured admission at the Regional Engineering College in Suratkal, but did not have the money to pay even the admission fees. So MAHE, then a capitation fee college, stepped in to give him a loan. When he finished the course, we said that if he joined our institution the entire loan would be written off. He was happy to do so. Later Upendra secured scholarships. First at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, where he did his M.Tech and then at a college in the United States. He came back and became a Director at the Institute of Oceanography in Goa. In the so-called government setup, Upendra would not have gone beyond selling betel leaves or being an attender. But we felt he had the potential and nurtured it.

▶ *You spoke of the poor tax-payer paying for the education of the economically better-off student. What else can be done?*

Cross-subsidise higher education. Since India has a wealth of technically trained manpower, we will have no trouble attracting students from abroad. If a third of the seats are filled by foreign students, it will subsidise the education of the remaining two-thirds. So no Indian student need pay high fees. India will also earn foreign exchange and since most foreign students are of Indian origin, by providing quality education we will be helping them come up in their adopted countries. It will be a win-win situation.

▶ *The judgment in the Unnikrishnan case put many managements of private institutions in a quandary.*

One of the Judges told me after he retired that all institutions were not like ours. He confessed that though the Union and State governments, the University Grants Commission and the Medical Council of India had the powers to curb malpractice, they did not. "Many a time, these people (private managements) were hand-in-glove with the supervising agencies auctioning seats. Could we remain silent spectators?" the judge asked.

What has been conveniently forgotten is that the judges (in the Unnikrishnan case) had mentioned that the government should offer a viable solution even in the case of free and payment seats. But the bureaucrats haven't done anything. The Supreme Court said that you can look into it (admissions). It is not for the Supreme Court to fix policy; it only did so because the government did not apply its mind, and we wanted an interim policy. The court also directed the Reserve Bank of India to formulate a loan and scholarship scheme. This has not come through either. The government is just not interested.

▶ *Recently the Karnataka Government issued an order saying that it could admit students to your medical institutions even though your colleges do not come under its purview. Why?*

The government says one thing and does another. Every one of these politicians says that seats should be given only on merit, but then call up for seats.

▶ *How has the deemed university status helped MAHE ?*

Deemed university status has allowed me to get out of the clutches of politicians.

▶ *Your university will shortly open campuses in other parts of India and maybe overseas as well. Do you foresee problems?*

Only if local governments create problems. Take Malaysia. When the Unnikrishnan judgment came, one of the points pertained to foreign students. (Malaysian Prime Minister) Mahathir Mohammed was very practical. He knew that around 35 per cent of the foreign students studying in Manipal were from Malaysia. So he told his aides to invite Dr. Pai to Malaysia and give him all the facilities (to start a college). I did not want to start (a college) there because we wouldn't get much benefit.

▶ *Financially...*

Financially, our costs go up. If I pay a professor Rs.40,000 a month here, there I will have to pay three to four times as much. All costs go up. So I thought the best thing is to have a twinning programme. First two years here and the rest there. When Mahathir contacted us, we didn't know if we were permitted to do so. Therefore I contacted the PMO (Prime Minister's Office) and the External Affairs Ministry. They were excited and said "Go ahead, only give us a copy of whatever you are signing." Mahathir then said that a Memorandum of Understanding would be signed between us and the Malaysian party at a function in the Maurya Hotel in Delhi. And they informed the Government of India. P.V. Narasimha Rao (then Prime Minister) said that as per protocol let the agreement be signed in Hyderabad House, in the presence of the Prime Ministers of India and Malaysia. It was given wide publicity.

But when the government fell and a new Human Resource Development Minister took over, we were asked whether we had the jurisdiction to operate in Malaysia. I told the HRD Secretary that this was a question that should be asked by Malaysia. I asked: "Why are you bothered? When Malaysia is willing to accept my degree, you must be proud and not question me." On the other hand, when I mentioned this to the Malaysian Health Minister, he said: "We will give you university status here (in Malaysia) itself, come."

The new (BJP) government turned 360 degrees (in their approach). They said you must go to 150 countries...

▶ *Are you planning to start university campuses overseas?*

A group in Saudi Arabia has invited me. There is another group in Dubai... we have already signed up. Under the present policy of the Government, if a friendly country invites us, we can go and start a college and award a degree. We would like to continue our twinning programme with Malaysia.

▶ *Even while you accuse managements of educational institutions of being hand-in-glove with politicians, you also call for more autonomy. How do you keep a check ...*

If anyone does any wrong, appoint an administrator. If any wrong is done, punish(the guilty) but create conditions where the government is pro-active. Here (at MAHE) things have happened in spite of the government.

▶ *Finally, what are the group's future plans in education?*

Australia, New Zealand and America feel that India is a big market. Because of the bureaucracy here, a large number of people (students) seek higher education, but do not get it. Mainly because of reservations. At present we are trying to consolidate. For example, the Punjab Government has invited me (to start a campus in Jalandhar) but because of the elections, I have not gone ahead. But I was impressed with Prakash Singh Badal's straightforward offer. A couple of other States have also invited me. I am going slow.

Overseas I am trying to do a little more because there are parties who are willing to invest. We will only provide the expertise, such as sending our best teachers. ■

Promising avenues

RAVI SHARMA

PRIVATE managements which until recently had restricted themselves to mainstream courses such as engineering, medical, nursing or dental courses have now begun to diversify. And the trend is to offer courses in communications and management.

The arrival of a large number of television channels has resulted in many youngsters opting for a course in media and related areas. Sensing the need, the Manipal Group two years ago launched the Manipal Institute of Communications (MIC) at Manipal. The first batch of 20 students has just completed their post-graduate course in mass communications. The students bring out their own weekly eight-page colour tabloid called 'AM Plus', which is distributed on Saturdays along with *Morning News*, a local English daily. The students also have the advantage of hands-on training at the offices of *Udayavani*, the Kannada daily by the Manipal group. Besides areas such as audio-visual, print, sound and multimedia, the MIC syllabus includes market research and corporate communications.

According to Prof. Leela Rao, Director (Academic), MIC, the institute prefers its present low-key image until it streamlines its operations. While the MIC's operations in the print media are well established, audio visual operations are getting finishing touches. Leela Rao said: "We are in the process of streamlining. We should have our own television studio by January." MIC had an advantage over conventional universities in that it could spend more money on infrastructure.

Besides theory, MIC provides hands-on industry level training. Said Leela Rao: "We try to impart a broader view of how the media functions. The right mix of practical skills and theory is what we want to impart. Students should be sensitive to social issues as well."





The T.A. Pai Management Institute, Manipal, one of the first management training institutions in the country in the private sector to be granted recognition by the All India Council for Technical Education. (Below) At the sound recording studio of the Manipal Institute of Communications.

RUN by a 15-member governing council, the T.A. Pai Management Institute (TAPMI), Manipal, offers a two-year Post Graduate Programme similar to that offered by the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). One of the first management colleges recognised by the All India Council for Technical Education (in 1986), it is today one of the few autonomous institutes whose programme has been awarded equivalence with the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree by the Association of Indian Universities.

Founded in 1983, the institute can accommodate 120 students. Admission is through a rigorous and objective selection process. According to Prof. D. Nagabrahmam, Director, the institute is different from others which offer similar

courses on three counts. He said: "First, we invest more on faculty development (there are 18 faculty members at the moment) than any other non-IIM institute. Secondly, we are continuously increasing – an average of two per year – the number of courses (90 at present), courses that are relevant to the market. For example, we were the first to have a compulsory paper in business ethics. Thirdly, there is a high degree of emphasis at TAPMI on investment in infrastructure such as library and information technology. Among management schools we have the biggest library in South India after IIM, Bangalore. Currently we invest Rs.20 lakhs a year on acquiring new publications for our library." Besides its MBA equivalent programmes and executive programmes, TAPMI undertakes research and consultancy. Said Nagabrahmam: "This not only helps the faculty to enhance their knowledge, it also motivates them to greater things."

Placement, according to the Director, has been excellent over the last five years, and outside the IIMs they have the best record. TAPMI will soon start a two-year Executive MBA programme in collaboration with the Essae Chandran Institute at Bangalore. Weekend classes will give working executives "the opportunity to develop their personal effectiveness, through a combination of group work, structured activities and faculty interaction." The Essae Chandran Institute, he said, was keen on expanding the existing tie-up to include a regular post-graduate programme. "That is how good our brand equity is."

A unique two-year Post Graduate Diploma in Management with an emphasis on family business is to be offered soon. Thirty seats will be reserved for students sponsored by family business houses. ■

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Technology and innovation in healthcare

RAVI SHARMA

CONTRARY to the widely held notion, Bangalore is yet to catch up, leave alone surpass, cities such as Mumbai, Chennai or Delhi in offering hi-tech medical facilities. Chennai is today the the Numero Uno in medical facilities, with Mumbai, once the leader, lagging behind.

Dr. Ajit Huilgol, a transplant surgeon and founder-member of the Karnataka Nephrology and Transplant Institute (KANTI), summed up Bangalore's status when he said: "We have not yet matched Chennai, Hyderabad or Mumbai. Bangalore started to offer super speciality services only in 1987." But that position is changing fast and gone are the days when patients with cardiac, cancer, orthopaedic or end-stage renal problems had to go to Chennai or Vellore. Treatment for such complicated medical problems is now available at hospitals both in the private and government sector in Bangalore. But problems exist.

As Dr. Philip Thomas, a transplant surgeon with the St. Johns Hospital, said: "It is not so much a problem of equipment. In fact, with liberalisation the market is flooded with equipment. The problem is lack of teamwork. There has been no effort to provide service as a team. For instance, in gastroenterology the facilities are very fractured. Patients still have to run around to secure the services of, say, a cardiac surgeon, radiologist, etc."

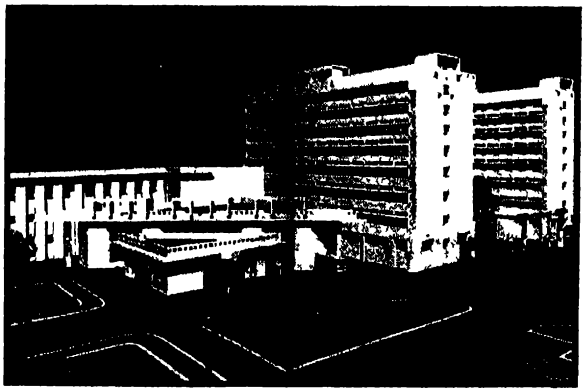
Doctors averred that in many areas such as critical care, medicine, haematalogy, liver transplant and emergency (trauma) care medicine, to name a few, Bangalore still lags behind. Said Thomas: "If your take critical care, not much is terms of quality work is being done at present. Specialised ICU trained doctors and nursing staff are too few. This is sad because when a person is on ventilation, his survival depends especially on the nurses who attend on him."

In Karnataka, the number of government medical institutions per lakh of the population fell marginally from 5.29 in 1960-61 to 5.13 in 1996-97. According to the Karnataka Human Development Report, 1999, "There has been some underfunding of hospitals at the secondary level, leading to deterioration in the quality of buildings and equipment, inadequate supply of drugs and gaps in staffing, especially in medical and skilled paramedical personnel. The overall quality of medical care requires improvement. Enhanced allocations to the health sector must be supported by reallocation of resources based on an assessment of the need and cost effectiveness of the different components of the health system."

At present the number of beds in government hospitals in Bangalore is 8,766 (43,868 in the whole of Karnataka), while

A State-of-the-art Heart Hospital

Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiology (SJIC), at Bangalore ranks amongst the largest heart hospitals in the country and over the years has earned a reputation of a reliable Cardiac Care Centre. **Over 8,00,000 out-patients and 1,00,000 inpatients have been treated here.** The Institute has an excellent team of doctors, nurses & paramedical staff, complemented by state-of-the-art equipment & facilities.



An exclusive Child Heart Care Centre has been established recently at the Institute, to combat the evergrowing incidences of Congenital Heart Diseases amongst Children.

SJIC has pioneered a policy which ensures that the poor and the needy have an access to expensive cardiac medical care and Cardiac surgery. In many cases, these expensive procedures & treatment have been made available at a very nominal cost or even free in deserving cases.

A new hospital complex of SJIC is being built on Bannerghatta Road, Bangalore. It will have state-of-the-art equipment and modern facilities and amenities. Five modern operation theatres, cath labs, diagnostic facilities, deluxe, semi-deluxe and general wards besides teaching and research facilities will form the nucleus of this new hospital Complex.

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in the private sector hospitals it is 15,988 (40,900 in the entire State).

According to doctors such Huilgol, patients from the south-[illegible] States come to Bangalore's speciality hospitals such as KANTI [illegible]ice services are cheaper here. A firm believer in the role of the [illegible]ivate sector in medical care, Huilgol said that patients were com-[illegible]g to his Institute not only from neighboring countries such as [illegible]ngladesh, Sri Lanka and Malaysia but also from countries as far [illegible]ay as Nigeria.

The medical team at KANTI, which includes nephrologist [illegible]r. S. Sundar and transplant surgeon Dr. S.G. Karunagaran, has [illegible]er a decade of experience in kidney transplants. It has so far conducted over 900 transplants (almost more than the total performed [illegible] all other centres in Karnataka). It boasts an impressive list of achievements: more multiple artery transplants than any other centre in Karnataka; the first in India to use the latest international formulation of Cyclosporine – NEORAL (the prime life-saving drug after kidney or other organ transplants), it has helped establish transplant centres at Jalandhar and Dhaka. The Nigerian Government recently invited KANTI to the country to help it establish a transplant centre in Lagos.

KANTI was also the first to perform a double kidney cadaver transplant in which both the kidneys were transplanted.

Cadaver transplant is an area where Bangalore has not done well. According to Sundar, the four-year old cadaver programme has not taken off because, "people care more for the dead than the living. It is difficult with a culture like ours. Even the record in cornea transplants is abysmal."

In the absence of a good cadaver transplant programme, unrelated donor transplants have taken precedence. Sundar, a proponent of related and unrelated kidney transplants, said: "The medicine is so good that unrelated transplants have a good chance of success."

AN area where Bangalore has very nearly caught up with the best is cardiac surgery. Hospitals such as the government-run Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiology (SJIC), the Manipal Heart Foundation and the Wockhardt Hospital and Heart Institute have done much to mitigate the suffering of cardiac patients.

SJIC has come as a boon to the economically weaker sections. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, it is comparable with the best private hospitals in providing heart care. Dr. N. Prabhudev, Director, SJIC, said: "We as a team are certainly better off than many of the private hospitals. We certainly are not in any way inferior to any of the best-run private hospitals." SJIC has started a Child Heart Care Centre, for children and new-born babies requiring neo-natal and paediatric cardiological intervention. It has entered into a tie-up with the U.S.-based Children Heartlink to treat rheumatic fever.

Between 1992 and March 1997, the Institute treated as many as 2,67,388 outpatients and 29,617 in patients. To help the economically needy, it has introduced innovative schemes such as Karuna Sindu, a voluntary donors' bank, and Hrudayavahini, a free vehicle service for discharged patients to be dropped at their homes.

Another beacon of hope on the Bangalore health scene is the 150-bed, multidisciplinary Mallya Hospital. Arguably Bangalore's best superspeciality hospital, it is an ISO 9002 company with the latest facilities in areas such as cardiology, 24 hour trauma care, nephrology, oncology, paediatrics, psychiatry, urology, andrology, dentistry and dermatology.

Said Commodore Indru Wadhwani (retd), president of Chaparral Health Services (which runs the hospital after taking it

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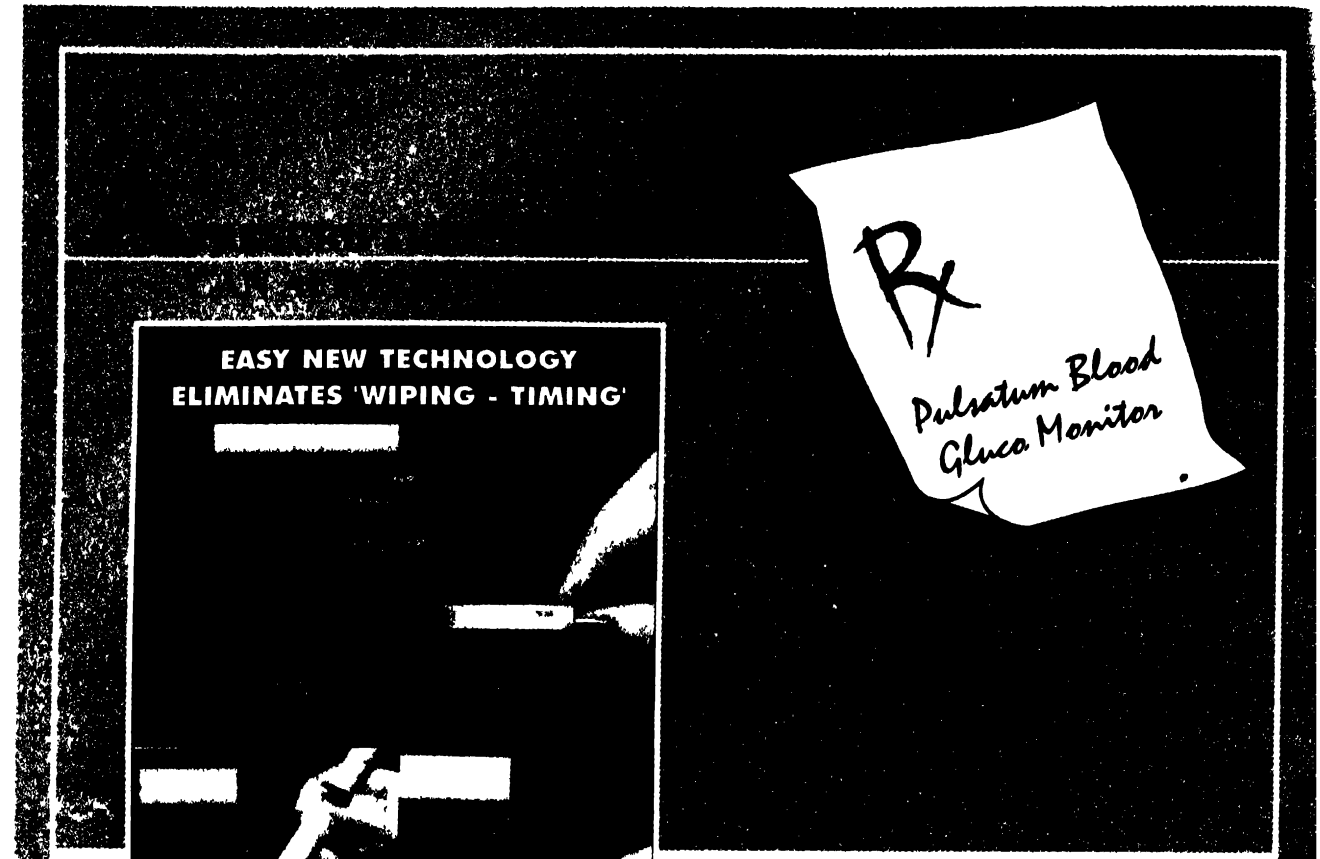
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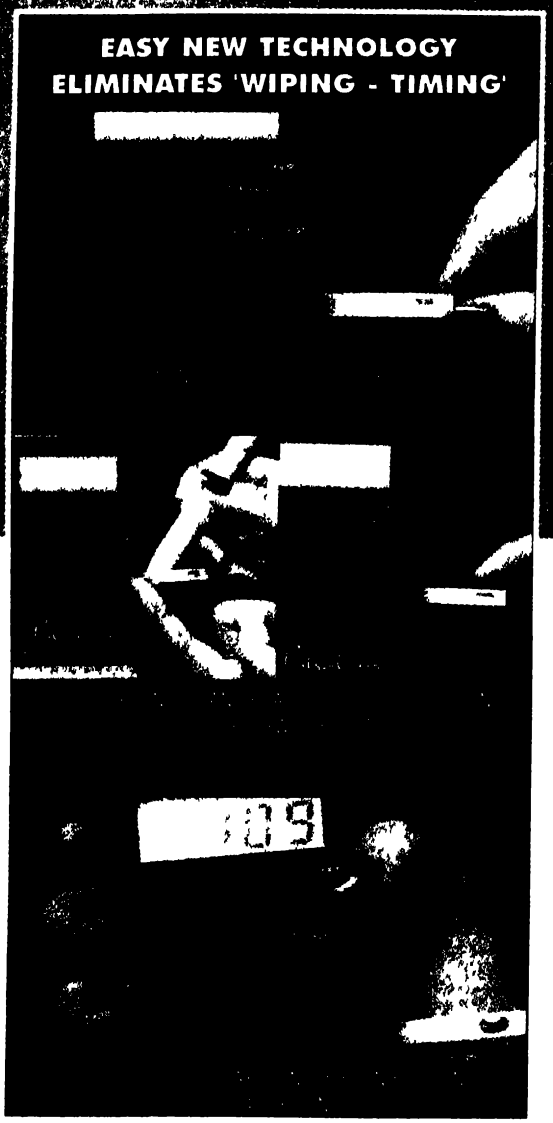
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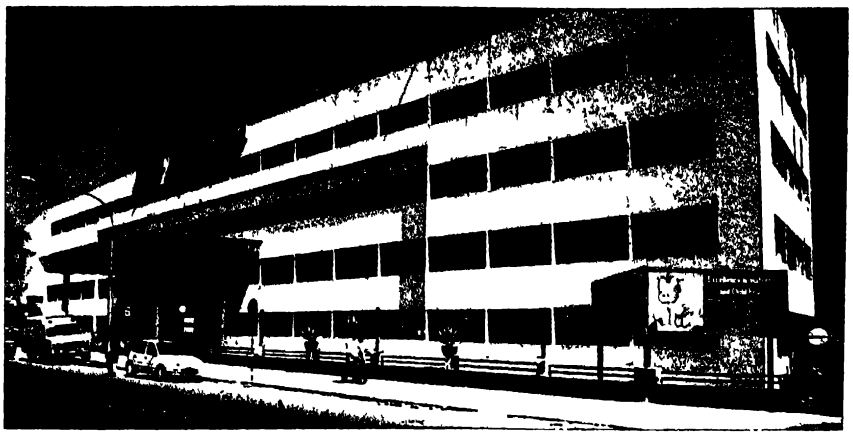
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The Mallya Hospital, Bangalore, a superspeciality hospital.



RAVI SHARMA

The Manipal Hospital, Bangalore.

ONE of the premier multi-diagnostic centres, Elbit Diagnostics, Bangalore, is a one-stop, cost-effective diagnostic centre which offers services such as magnetic resonance imaging, spiral CT, ultrasonography (with colour doppler), X-ray and image intensifier, echocardiography, stress test-tread mill, mammography with sterotactic biopsy, pathology, biochemistry and microbiology and Gamma camera lithotripsy.

Elbit Diagnostics recently added another state-of-the-art diagnostic modality – the DEXA high performance X-ray bone densitometry system, the first of its kind in Karnataka and the fourth in India. The system produces the most accurate results for evaluation of osteoporosis, a major bone disease afflicting women and the aged. According to M.P.Chary, chairman, Elbit Diagnostics, his centre is committed to bringing "the most advanced medical diagnostic equipment and services to Bangalore."

Elbit, which is a 50:50 venture between the Hyderabad based Concept Group which is chiefly in the food processing business and Elbit Medical Services of Israel, has within a short period made a name for itself though competition is tough. With Elbit Medical Services keen to pull out of the medical business (as part of its global restructuring), Concept Group is all set to take over the centre completely.

Aiding medical care are pharmaceutical companies such as Smithkline Beecham (SB). It recently shifted its offices to downtown Bangalore at a cost of Rs.18 crores, "just to be closer" to its customers. The company produces hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines, among a range of products. Paresh Chaudhry, Manager, corporate communications and marketing services, said: "We at SB operate under five key principles – customer care, innovation, integrity, people and performance. All our actions are underlined by these core issues. SB is a customer-driven company that produces products of superior value. Every minute 450 prescriptions are written for SB products worldwide and every hour $160,000 is spent by SB on research. And in the last ten years, 1.5 billion people have been protected from serious illnesses by SB vaccines."

SB is also equally committed to social issues. It recently tied up with the Spastics Society and founded the Creative Arts Centre.

While Bangalore has undoubtedly the best overall medical facilities, other towns in Karnataka also have well-equipped hospitals mostly run by the private sector. Their services are not limited to allopathy only. The SDM Ayurveda Hospital at Udipi is one such non-allopathy hospital. A unit of the Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Educational Trust, the 40-year-old hospital is a widely acclaimed centre for natural healing.

The Hospital, which houses a 300-bed facility, offers treatment covering almost the entire range of ayurvedic remedies.

SELF-HELP healthcare products are today available off the shelf. The adage 'prevention is better than cure' seems to have motivated the production of the country's first indigenously designed digital blood sugar monitor, which is of international quality. Designed jointly by the National Physical Laboratories, the Centre for Biochemical Technology (laboratories under the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) and the Department of Science and Technology, the monitor is manufactured and marketed by Pulsatum Health Care Pvt Ltd.

The monitor and the strips are economically priced, bringing them within the reach of patients. A company spokesman said, "Imported blood sugar monitors are expensive and there is quite often a shortage of strips." The Pulsatum Blood Gluco Monitor is available at 120 places across the country. ■

A different view of Kargil

While the Kargil issue is highlighted by politicians on both sides of the border, the average Pakistani thinks that it was merely part of the machinations by politicians to keep their own business going.

RASHEEDA BHAGAT
recently in Pakistan

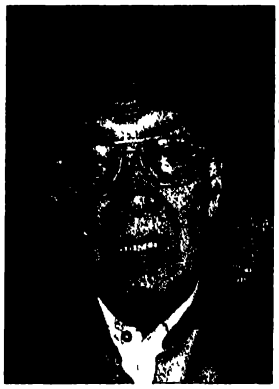
PAKISTAN'S Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz calls it an "over-reaction on India's part"; a retired Pakistani bureaucrat and a former consultant with the United Nations, Ghulam Khibria, calls it a "blunder on Pakistan's part"; a Karachi-based business executive, Akhtar K. Alavi, terms it an "election stunt". But the average citizen of Pakistan feels that the Kargil intrusion and India's response to it were something both the countries have been witnessing for years. My taxi driver in Islamabad said: "*Logo ko bewakoof banane ki baat hai* (The people on both sides are being taken for a ride). Neither your politicians nor ours, neither your army nor ours, is interested in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. *Unki tau dukan hi bandh ho jayegi* (It will put an end to their business)." .

The Foreign Minister denies that Kargil was a "planned operation" by Pakistan. His version is that following "some very aggressive patrolling by Indian troops along the empty space last October-November", the Pakistani troops moved closer to the Line of Control (LoC) to safeguard it. Taking advantage of this situation "the freedom fighters moved in and took up some positions". The LoC is never a quiet place, with firing taking place much of the time, but complaints from either side are normally sorted out.

This time too it would have been the same case but India suddenly "mobilised 50,000 troops, 70 to 80 planes, 20 gunships and large pieces of artillery to displace 500 people. It was plainly an over-reaction," Aziz said.

Even though Kargil has taken Indo-Pakistan relations to an all-time low, Aziz feels that some good might come out of it in the long run. Aziz added: "On both sides there is a realisation that we cannot go on. Look at the fragility and bitterness of our relationship. We shoot down a plane for no reason and tensions again go high. How can two such large countries, both nuclear powers, live in such tension and uncertainty? The relationship has to improve and it cannot improve unless we have negotiations and deal with Kashmir, which is a reality."

As usual there are diverse voices commenting on Indo-Pakistan relations. But one thing that strikes a visitor in Pakistan is the people's incredulity about the "mass hysteria whipped up by the Indian media" over Kargil. A senior diplomat in Pakistan's Foreign Office whom this correspondent met, said: "We were amazed to see the manner in which the Kargil issue was blown out of proportion in your media, especially the electronic media."



RASHEEDA BHAGAT

Sartaj Aziz, Foreign Minister of Pakistan.

Alleging that the Indian media seemed to have no space or time for anything other than "Pakistan-bashing all the time", he said: "To be honest with you, people in Pakistan started looking at Kargil only on June 21 after Pakistan had lost the World Cup (of cricket)." Certain that the "Hindutva government of India had influenced the media to write like that", he accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of creating "a new generation of enemies on either side of the border. We feel the whole hysteria is election-linked and it seems to have paid off too. We hear that pre-election surveys predict a comfortable victory for the BJP and its allies."

Conveying the same sentiment in softer tones, senior columnist Anees Jillani said: "Kargil was not looked upon as a war in Pakistan at all. It was only the Indian media which converted it into a war."

WHEN one tries to explain that not only the Government of India but also the people feel betrayed by Pakistan responding with Kargil to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's outstretched hand of friendship in Lahore, the response is mixed.

Akhtar K. Alavi, the general manager of Adamjee Insurance, Pakistan's largest insurance conglomerate, strikes a hawkish note when he declares grandly: "We gave you a bloody nose in Kargil; that is why it rankles." After we had taken the argument back and forth for a little while about who really got a bloody nose in the end and who was forced to withdraw, he made a point, which set one thinking.

His argument is that every time Pakistan enters into a squabble with India and its politicians are forced to accept a solution, such as the withdrawal in Kargil, facilitated by the intervention of the United States, there is a backlash from the fundamentalist lobbies in Pakistan. "Such things breed fundamentalism, extremism and fanaticism. And you can see it all around you. You are a woman and a journalist who has been travelling in Pakistan. You must have seen it... women all wrapped up in *hijab* (veil). I am not saying there is anything wrong in it, but more than the manner of dressing, it is manifested in people's thinking and behaviour."

Maintaining that Islam had become the "new global enemy", particularly for the West which found it a convenient whipping boy after the collapse of communism, Alavi added: "If they keep hammering all the time '*Musalman ko marenge*' (we'll kill the Muslim) then he will become a reactionary. Those in Pakistan who are educated, liberal and open-minded are now being pushed and put on the defensive."

One thing is certain. Every time there is... call it war, call it battle or call it skirmish... with India, voices in favour of better Indo-Pakistan ties, economic, cultural and political, tend to get silent. President of the Sindh Industrial Trade Estate, Majyd Aziz, a votary of speedy improvement in Indo-Pakistan trade relations, admitted that events such as Kargil compelled people like him to "keep a low profile".

Maintaining that every Pakistani who rented out video cassette of a Hindi movie did a Rs.10 business with India, he said: Kargil or no Kargil, traders from both sides find a way for trading. But the role of facilitation, which can be provided by both sides, gets pushed back by a Kargil. A lot of goods go through Dubai from both sides; I would call this official smuggling which denies both governments revenue."

Aziz was scheduled to lead a 70-member delegation of industrialists from Pakistan to India in the last week of April 1999, under the auspices of the Federation of Indian Exporters Organisation (FIEO). But the fall of the Vajpayee government meant a postponement of the programme and the developments in Kargil put a quick end to it. Businessmen like him who see a huge market in India and potential for collaboration, especially in areas such as Information Technology, are waiting for a new government to take over in New Delhi before meaningful Indo-Pakistan trade relations can resume and the much-talked about touted Indo-Pakistan Chamber of Commerce really takes off.

A Karachi-based businessman who visited Delhi in August – and was a regular invitee to Delhi's golf club during his stay in the capital – was amazed at the warmth and hospitality he got from businessmen in Delhi. "At the Delhi Customs I was made to wait unnecessarily for five minutes and I was truly amazed when the officer came and profusely apologised to me. I have decided never to come to India via Mumbai because Mumbai Customs people are always hostile to Pakistani passport holders," he said.

BESET with problems, not the least the economic crisis and the heavy foreign-debt, the Nawaz Sharif Government, despite its brute majority in the National Assembly, finds itself on the defensive as the opposition parties are getting organised against his ruling Pakistan Muslim League.

The Kashmir bogey has become extremely useful to successive governments in Pakistan which wanted to divert attention from domestic problems. The post-Kargil situation is no different. The line that the Pakistan government has tried hard to sell to the people is that Kargil was after all a result of the aspiration of the mujahideen, or the "freedom fighters of Kashmir", to get "justice for their Muslim brethren in the valley".

Of late the Government has taken a lot of flak from human rights and gender rights activists within and outside the country for allowing a barbaric concept like 'honour killings' to thrive. The essence of this concept is that if a woman in your family has compromised the family's 'honour' by either entering into a marriage of her choice or seeking/getting a divorce, or worse, by getting raped, you can kill her and even the courts will wink at the crime, as 'family honour' is involved. Such killings are prevalent more in the tribal areas but the sanction and support they get sometimes from even the urban elite is surprising.



RASHEEDA BHAGAT

Ghulam Khibria, a retired bureaucrat and a former U.N. consultant.



RASHEEDA BHAGAT

Akhtar K. Alavi, general manager of Adamjee Insurance.

On the overall gender or human rights front too, Pakistan does not have good record. In this background, it is with a lot of glee that Pakistan holds up the mirror unto India when it comes to violation of human rights in the valley. Forever challenging India to a plebiscite in Kashmir, the average Pakistani asks: If the people of Kashmir really want to stay with India, why do you need such a massive concentration of troops in the valley to "control the Kashmiri Muslims"? Or, if Pakistan is really fomenting terrorism in Kashmir, as India claims, how come it is able to succeed only in Kashmir, and not Rajasthan?

GHULAM KHIBRIA is a strident critic of all Pakistani regimes and has written books in which he argues that the country has been destroyed by its "privileged classes". It is with a lot of bitterness that he talks about those "like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah taking both India and Pakistan to the brink of disaster".

He bursts into tears as he says in a choked voice: "We should have been far, far ahead. Ahead of China, with the best among the developed nations of the world."

Attacking Nawaz Sharif as an "elected dictator" and accusing Vajpayee of "exploiting Kargil for electoral gains", he says that Pakistan committed a blunder in Kargil. "Because it is an amateur government they did the whole thing like amateurs. In Kargil they shouldn't have sent their own people. When there is guerilla warfare you shoot the enemy and run back. You went there and you were strangled. That was a bad military strategy."

Coming down heavily on the Sharif government for first being 'stupid' and then indulging in 'double talk', he wondered how any mature government, after saying our army is not involved, "honour its defence people over PTV for their involvement in Kargil? This shows they have no political foresight at all".

SURPRISINGLY enough, one found a lot of faith in Vajpayee in both Islamabad and Karachi. The Sangh Parivar would be stunned to know that many Pakistanis are praying for the return of a BJP government in India as they feel that a "Hindutva Prime Minister" will have better credentials back home to solve the Kashmir issue rather than a Congress Prime Minister who is bound to be slammed for "selling the country to Pakistan", in case of any deal over Kashmir.

However, Khibria has little faith in Vajpayee. "It will be very good if he displays any maturity. But even if he is mature, he is surrounded by very stupid people, just like Sharif. I was very happy when the Lahore Declaration was signed. But either directly or under some pressure, Sharif succumbed later."

While Khibria feels that Pakistan has all the right in the world to "go and assist the Kashmiri people fight for freedom if they don't want to stay with India", he is all for an early solution to the Kashmir issue. "Can't both India and Pakistan – one is 50 per cent illiterate and the second 90 per cent illiterate – realise how much of the taxpayer's money they are spending on defence?"

According to him, a workable solution on Kashmir would be to decide through dialogue that "Azad Kashmir in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir in India will be independent. Let them both form a confederation with both India and Pakistan looking after their foreign affairs and defence." ■

East Timor's agony

The disputed Indonesian province is rocked by violence before and after a referendum throws up an overwhelming popular mandate for total independence.

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Dili, East Timor

THE "popular consultation" in East Timor on August 30 under the auspices of the United Nations was nothing short of a unique exercise in constitutional engineering – a plebiscite in all but the name. It was aimed at determining the political future of a disputed province of a sovereign state and was carried out by the U.N. in conjunction with the security apparatus of the host country.

The U.N., in consultation with the Indonesian Government, provided the people of East Timor with an option to vote for total independence from Indonesia. Such a transition can take place only with the consent of the rest of Indonesia, and this implies challenges for both the U.N. and Jakarta.

As high as 78.5 per cent of the East Timorese electorate, numbering around 4.5 lakhs, voted for independence to their territory, a former colonial outpost of Portugal, which is now a province of Indonesia though not internationally recognised as one. The result was announced by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on September 4. However, in the following days, a cloud of uncertainty hung over the follow-up action to be taken by Indonesia – a state which is itself going through an indecisive phase of political transition – for the proper implementation of the mandate.

EXTENSIVE violence preceded the referendum. The United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) and the mostly-Western international observers blamed much of it on an armed pro-Indonesia militia. Unrest, bordering on a civil war, followed polling and escalated in the wake of the announcement of the result. (Only about 21 per cent of the East Timorese opted for wide-ranging autonomy under Indonesia's protective wings.)

However, the voting itself passed off in an atmosphere of near-perfect peace. But within hours of the closure of the polling, a local employee of UNAMET was murdered at an outlying spot, Atsabe in the Liquisa sector. UNAMET and international observers are of the opinion that it was the anti-independence militia that committed the crime. An investigation has been ordered into the killing.



DAVID LONGSTREATH/AP

A queue of voters outside a polling station in Dili. The referendum was largely an orderly exercise.

The peaceful conduct of polling was hailed by Jamsheed Marker, the U.N.'s Special Representative for East Timor (he was formerly Pakistan's Permanent Representative at the U.N.), as follows: "The eagle of liberty has spread its proud wings across East Timor." The perhaps unintended pun on the eagle, the all-American symbol, as also the imagery of Indonesia's emblem of Garuda, which belongs to the eagle family, was not lost on observers. No less substantive was Marker's studied commendation of the Indonesian military



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GAMMA LIAISON

A man killed in clashes between pro-government militia and pro-independence groups; faces of anger and aggression.

and civilian elite for ensuring peaceful voting.

A "positive report" submitted by Marker to the U.N. high command on the polling was, however, eclipsed by violence that followed it. On September 1, fires raged outside the UNAMET office in Dili as pro-Jakarta militiamen, suspected to be backed by the Indonesian Army, clashed with pro-independence fighters. At least two by-standers were killed in the incident. Even as UNAMET chief Ian Martin maintained that the outbreak of violence outside the U.N. compound in Dili on September 1 was not aimed at UNAMET, there was a flare-up of anti-U.N. sentiment.

This correspondent witnessed a clash between the pro-Indonesia militia and the pro-independence group outside the UNAMET premises. Journalists, including this correspondent, a U.N. military-security liaison officer and a few others were chased by the militia. On the eve of the polling, a militiaman riding a motorcycle reached for his weapon as soon as he was stopped for information. Sword-wielding pro-independence groups guarding street corners during nights was a common sight. Indonesian security forces constantly patrolled the streets. However, on the day of the clashes outside the UNAMET office, military personnel just watched the scene from inside their camp, which was nearby.

A roadside blockade of UNAMET personnel, including its international and local staff, at Atsabe on August 31 was lifted after joint intervention by a local Indonesian military commander and UNAMET's top security-liaison official, Ian Mills. However, soon after, attacks on UNAMET officials and pro-independence East Timorese intensified, with the announcement of the result on September 4 serving as a catalyst. UNAMET evacuated its staff from several centres outside Dili, while non-essential U.N. staff were airlifted outside East Timor by Australia, Indonesia's geopolitical neighbour, which has a strategic stake in this territory.

By September 6, independent estimates placed the number of persons killed since polling, including UNAMET's local staff, at between 25 and 150; scores are



MUCHTAR ZAKARIA/ AP

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie (left) with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Harmoko.

believed to have been killed during the campaign period. According to independent estimates the number of East Timorese killed since Indonesia's annexation of that territory in the mid-1970s number between one and two lakhs.

THE post-referendum uncertainties in East Timor have assumed novel diplomatic proportions. Indonesian President B. J. Habibie, who said that his Government would accept the East Timorese verdict, called upon his fellow-citizens to do likewise and asked the powerful Indonesian military to ensure peace in East Timor during that territory's transition to independence.

However, with Indonesia in a state of introspection following the East Timorese vote, especially in the context of suspicions among top political leaders and the military elite about UNAMET's "bias" towards the pro-independence sentiment in the province, the U.N. was forced, as on September 5, to promise that it would undertake a transparent exercise to prove that it was not being cavalier in dismissing allegations of irregularities in the polling process. In a sense, the U.N's move overshadowed the comment by U.S. President Bill Clinton that Indonesia should recognise that it had been beaten in a "fair and square" manner.

While Clinton, playing the role of global Santa Claus, commended the Habibie administration for having allowed the East Timor plebiscite to take place and for accepting the verdict, Habibie's critics in Indonesia believe that East Timor may well prove to be his Waterloo. (The country's presidential elections are scheduled for November.) Habibie's critics said that they were "aghast" at what they termed UNAMET's "bias" and at the possibility of a supposedly "independent" East Timor ending up as an "an annex" to some major power, perhaps Australia.

Australia's actions only served to strengthen their fears. Canberra suggested that a multilateral armed military force, comprising, among others, U.S. and Australian personnel, be stationed in East Timor as quickly as possible. This idea, however, flew in the face of Jakarta's insistence that its military would continue to bear the responsibility for security in East Timor until the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly, which is still being constituted, could review the verdict sometime in November and decide on whether to allow the territory to secede or not. Jakarta's arguments are in line with the tripartite agreement it signed with the U.N. and Portugal on East Timor's future – the very accord that allowed UNAMET to hold the plebiscite.



DAVID LONGSTREATH/AP

Detained East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao voting in Jakarta; election workers assigned by the U.N. count votes in Dili.

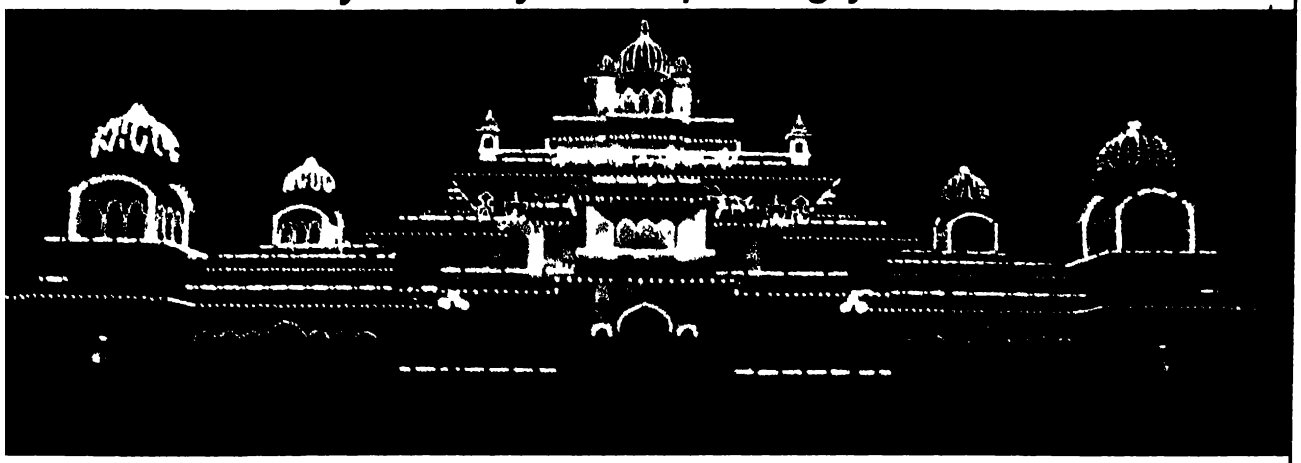


DAVID LONGSTREATH/AP

Some of the latest actions of the West have led Indonesia and other Third World countries to believe that the West may now be outlining a new concept – liberating those "suffering" from the alleged colonialism of those who have already been decolonised. In this context, the question of deploying a Western-led U.N peacekeeping force in the predominantly Roman Catholic East Timor, a disputed part of a Muslim-majority Indonesia, bristled with unprecedented complexities. It was also left to East Timorese leaders, including Xanana Gusmao, who is widely expected to be released from prison soon, Jose Ramos-Horta and Bishop Carlos Belo, to facilitate a smooth transition to independence by asserting their native roots and redefining their present image as allies of the West.

Two Indians were associated with the preparatory phase of the U.N's engagement in East Timor, although they did so in their personal capacities as experts and not as representatives of the Indian Government. Om Rathore, a police officer, was entrusted with the task of studying the deployment of international civilian police personnel and unarmed military consultants in East Timor for liaising with the Indonesian security forces during the mandate period of UNAMET. UNAMET's mandate has been extended until November-end. Also, Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee was commissioned by the U.N. agency to study the human rights situation ahead of the poll preparations, a task he accomplished to the satisfaction of the U.N. The overall presence of Indians or persons of Indian origin in UNAMET is limited. ■

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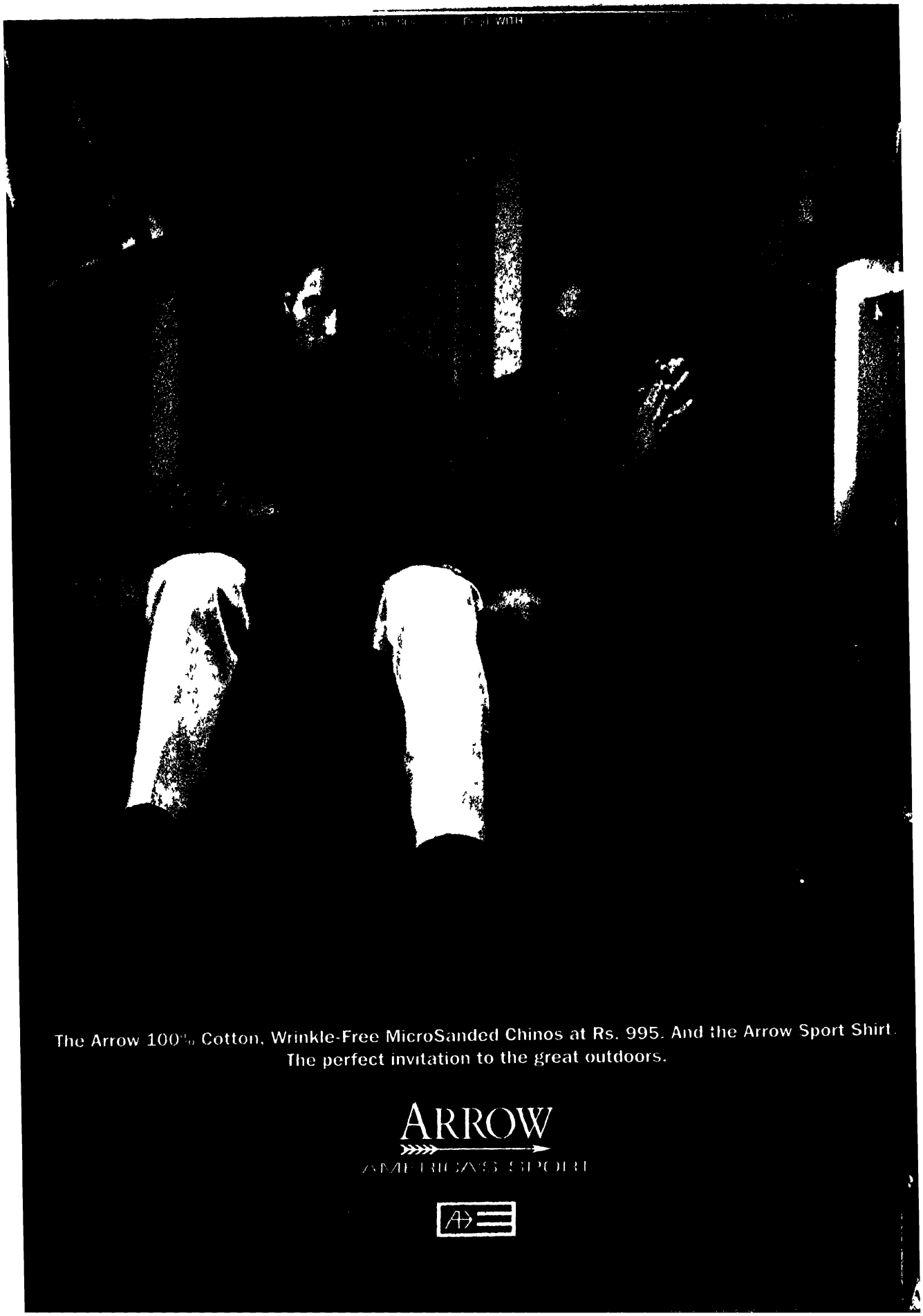
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GROWING UNEASE

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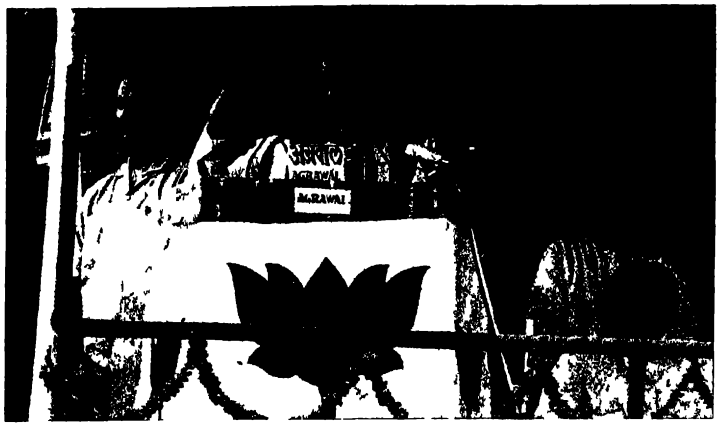
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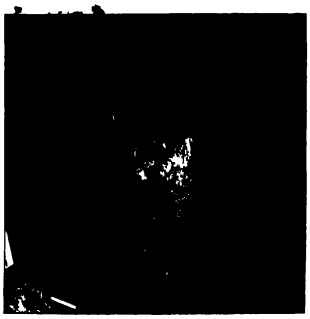
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POST-POLL ANALYSIS

***Frontline* will be presenting a fast track, indepth feature on "How India Voted" in the elections of 1999. The analysis, which will be done by Yogendra Yadav and a team of researchers of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), will comprise a detailed analysis of the election results and a post-poll-survey-based analysis of social patterns.**

– Editor, *Frontline*

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GROWING UNEASE

Midway through the elections, the BJP seems to have lost its decisive edge and bravado as it faces the prospect of losing ground in the pivotal State of Uttar Pradesh.



AKHILESH KUMAR

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in Lucknow and Faizabad

SINCE 1991 when it won 120 seats in the Lok Sabha as the champion of an unalloyed form of political sectarianism, the Bharatiya Janata Party has set much store by the two States of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. These two States accounted for 63 of the 120 seats it won in the 1991 elections, 79 of its 161 seats in 1996, and 87 of its 182 seats in 1998. There has undoubtedly been a slow process of diversification of the sources of the BJP's power at the Centre. But the dependence on these two States, which between them account for 125 seats in the Lok Sabha, still remains heavy.

Against this background, the curious loss of momentum and initiative on the part of the BJP, just when the polling process has shifted to these two pivotal States, should occasion some surprise. What had been forecast in early opinion polls as a triumphal romp for the BJP and its allies now seems more closely to resemble a hard slog in the home stretch. What should have been the most comfortable electoral majority for any ruling formation in 15 years could now turn into a wafer-thin margin, susceptible to every manner of disruption from the fractious alliance that the BJP has led into electoral battle.

The inherent imperfections of the craft of poll forecasting were evidently not given sufficient attention in the early predictions of a sweeping triumph for the BJP. In a context that witnesses a diversity of configurations in the States – from bipolar to multi-cornered contests – there is no credible methodology for accurately converting the vote percentages obtained from opinion polls into a forecast of seats won. This debility is especially acute since all the forecasts were premised upon a broad choice of national voter samples and did not pay sufficient attention to the minutiae of the various States.

Aside from these imperfections, the pollsters evidently did not factor the dis-



SUBIR ROY

(Facing page) In Varanasi, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee launches the Bharatiya Janata Party's election campaign in Uttar Pradesh. (Above) Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi addresses party leaders and workers at the headquarters of the State unit of the party in Lucknow. (Below) Voters queue up in Gopalpura village in Uttar Pradesh on September 18, during the third phase of polling. The fortunes of the BJP-led coalition will revolve on the electoral outcome in the State.



AMIT BHARGAVA AP

orienting effects of the "Kargil inflation" into their calculations. Conducted for the most part before polling actually began in an unprecedentedly long election schedule, surveys of voting behaviour were easily beguiled by the pervasive aura of national well-being that the Kargil victory created. But just as the euphoria of military victory exerted an undue influence over the early rounds of polling, its impact on the later rounds tended towards a progressive dilution. It just so happens that the latter three rounds of polling take in all the constituencies in U.P., and 26 of the 40 constituencies in M.P.

Ultimately, it is on the outcome in U.P. that the fortunes of the BJP-led coalition will revolve. Since single-party dom-

A violent turn in the third phase

V. VENKATESAN

MORE than half the electorate has voted by the end of the third phase of polling in the five-phase Lok Sabha elections, scheduled to end on October 3. The second phase on September 11 and the third phase on September 18 recorded moderate polling, with some major incidents of violence.

An estimated 56.22 per cent of the 15.23 crore voters in Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu voted in the second phase, which covered 123 constituencies. Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Karnataka were also completed in this phase. The first phase on September 5 had recorded a voter turnout of 58.17 per cent.

In the trouble-torn regions of Jammu and Kashmir, Jammu registered 45 per cent polling, Udhampur 35 per cent and Srinagar 11.96 per cent. Cross-border firing did not deter a significant number of voters in the State. Maharashtra's Minister of State for Revenue Udayan Raje Bhosle, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate for the Satara Assembly seat, was arrested in connection with the murder of a Nationalist Congress Party activist. The Election Commission (E.C.) ordered repolling in 80 booths (14 in Madhya Pradesh, two in Kerala, 22 in Andhra Pradesh, 19 in Tamil Nadu, three in Karnataka, and 20 in Rajasthan) after the second phase.

The BJP complained to the E.C. about "booth capturing" in Hyderabad, besides in Kota, Dausa and Jhalawar in Rajasthan. In the Siripur Assembly seat in Andhra Pradesh, polling was postponed after the Telugu Desam Party candidate, P. Purushottam Rao, was killed by suspected naxalites.

The third phase of polling covered 76 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Baramulla in Jammu and Kashmir. Polling also took place in 97 Assembly constituencies in Andhra Pradesh. Elections to the Hoshangabad and Vidisha Lok Sabha constituencies in Madhya Pradesh were postponed from September 18 to September 28 because of incessant rain and flooding.

The average voting in the third phase was 53 per cent. Electronic voting machines were used in four constituencies – Bhopal, Allahabad, Kanpur and Agra. Andhra Pradesh registered 61 per cent polling, followed by 57.5 per cent in Bihar, 51 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 45 per cent in Madhya Pradesh. Baramullah recorded a voter turnout of 27 per cent.

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh joined the polling process only in the third phase. Bihar witnessed massive violence, engineered by naxalites (story on page 27). A Congress(I) leader was stabbed to death in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh. Rastriya Rifles jawans killed two militants who had allegedly tried to intimidate voters in Baramullah.

The E.C. planned a month-long polling exercise in order to facilitate the movement of Central paramilitary forces from one State to another to ensure peaceful elections. However, critics said that the phased elections probably helped violent groups move from one place to another.

Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill, who had expressed satisfaction over the peaceful conduct of the first and second phases of polling, was at a loss to explain the violence that marked the third phase. He claimed that most deaths in Bihar were caused by landmine blasts and were linked to socio-ideological conflicts.

In response to a complaint from the BJP and the Samata Party that an excessive number of ballot papers had been printed



AIJAZ RAHI / AP

Relatives grieve over the body of Altaf Mir, who was allegedly shot dead by Army troops in Haigam village near Srinagar for refusing to vote on September 18.

inance of Indian democracy was shaken in 1967 and irretrievably shattered in 1989, several changes of regime have been witnessed in Delhi. In 1991, P.V. Narasimha Rao managed to put together a tenuous parliamentary majority – premised upon the goodwill of several parties that had greater reason to oppose the BJP than the Congress(I) – with only five seats from U.P. The United Front coalition that followed had a more substantial parliamentary representation of 19 from the State.

Except for these two interludes, U.P. has always been a decisive factor in any change of regime at the Centre. The transformation of the BJP from its role of Opposition in 1991, to short-lived power in 1996 and then a relatively more durable tenure in authority in 1998, has been underpinned by its ability to keep this pivotal State firmly in its corner.

Today, for the first time since it was famously thwarted by an alliance of the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the 1993 Assembly elections, the BJP faces the prospect of actually losing ground in U.P. These expectations have acquired an unmistakable aura of menace for the party's plans to ride back to power. Emergency measures have been initiated to retrieve ground that rapidly threatens to slip out from under the party in the Lok Sabha constituencies that go to the polls on September 25 and October 3. These include raising the pitch of the campaign in all the constituencies by drafting a number of the BJP's more prominent central leaders.

SEVERAL factors have converged to generate this turbulence in the last phase of the BJP's triumphal march. First, the social coalitions crafted in the crucible of the campaign for the temple at Ayodhya have begun to come apart. Secondly, the incumbency disadvantage is doubly compounded in the case of U.P., since the BJP has been in power at both the Centre and State levels. Public perceptions of sloppy performance by elected representatives are unlikely to be submerged in contrived projections of national glory acquired under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The amalgam of upper castes and backward classes that the BJP put together during the Ayodhya movement was always an unstable political combine. It only took a relatively uninterrupted occupancy of power – just under two years in this case – for all the inherent contradictions to sharpen. Today, the BJP is in mortal danger of losing the entire constituency of Lodh Rajputs, a numerically significant presence in a vast tract of central U.P. Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, himself a Lodh, has conspicuously absented himself from an active campaign role. His rift with the Rajput-Brahmin-Bania combine, which has always contested his dominance of the party in the State, now appears to have reached a breaking point.

A number of constituency-specific initiatives have been worked out by the BJP to combat this particular threat. Uma Bharti, the saffron clad politician of backward class extraction, is being despatched to U.P. to stem the tide of defections from the ranks that Sakshi Maharaj, another politician in the robes of mendicancy, has been orchestrating. Kalyan Singh himself is being cajoled to take up the campaign in pockets where he would have no reason to object to the choice of the party's nominees.

The extra campaign effort also includes a planned four-day tour of the State by Vajpayee just before the last phase of polling on October 3, on which day polling is scheduled to take place in 31 constituencies in the State. How far these would turn the tide remains a matter for speculation. When ground realities turn adverse it often is futile to expect salvation from forces on-high. The BJP may additionally have reasons to worry about the outcome in M.P.

SINCE plumbing the depths with only 31 per cent of the popular vote in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress(I) in M.P. has set itself on a steady path upwards. It obtained 39 per cent of the vote in 1998 and dramatically raised its share to the winning figure of 45 per cent in the November Assembly elections. Chief Minister Digvijay Singh has successfully placated all sources of dissension within the party and enjoys the kind of popular acceptance that could propel the party to a similarly strong showing. That would be a decisive setback to the BJP's ambitions of emerging with a clear-cut majority in Parliament.

The declarations of victory then were clearly premature. No longer are elections decided as a referendum on the personalities of contending political leaders. Nor indeed is the transient euphoria of military achievement an adequate substitute for the hard slog of providing a sense of direction to the task of administration at the Centre. Although it seems the most likely outcome of the 1999 elections is that the BJP and its allies would be given the first claim to the formation of a government at the Centre, few today would be prepared to swear that the second Vajpayee administration will be in any way more purposive or more durable than the first. ■

in Bihar, the E.C. despatched two special teams, one each to Calcutta and Patna, to verify allegations of large-scale printing and distribution of duplicate ballot papers. Quoting the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.), Samata Party president and Union Defence Minister George Fernandes alleged that 65,000 duplicate ballot papers meant for Barh and Nalanda (from where Samata Party leaders Nitish Kumar and George Fernandes were contesting) had been printed at the West Bengal government-owned Saraswathi Press in Calcutta. However, Fernandes' claim that the I.B. Director had confirmed his charges was denied by the Union Home Ministry. His indiscretion in dragging a senior official into the controversy for partisan ends was widely criticised.

The acting Governor of Bihar, Justice B.M. Lal, asked the E.C. to transfer civilian and police officials whose actions were suspect and to deploy adequate forces in sensitive areas. The acting Governor reportedly blamed the E.C. for not taking adequate measures to prevent the large-scale violence that took place on September 18. He also expressed dissatisfaction over Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishna-murthy's claim that there were no fake ballot boxes. Justice Lal is due to retire as the Chief Justice of the Patna High Court on October 6. Even Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee cast doubts about the E.C.'s role in the "fake ballot boxes" controversy.

Meanwhile, the BJP had a difficult time fielding a candidate in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir. Dr. Abdul Rehman Sheikh was named the BJP candidate to replace Ghulam Haider Noorani, who was killed in a landmine blast on September 7. Barely 24 hours after he was nominated, Sheikh's son was kidnapped and he refused to contest. Sheikh paid a hefty ransom for his son's release. The BJP then announced Showkat Hussein Wani, who was allegedly linked to the kidnapping, as its candidate in Anantnag. Showkat filed his nomination papers. Anantnag will go to the polls on October 4. ■

Changing scene

The presence of four strong political formations in the fray, and the likely shift in the voting patterns of the castes and communities forming their support bases, have made the electoral outcome highly unpredictable in Uttar Pradesh.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

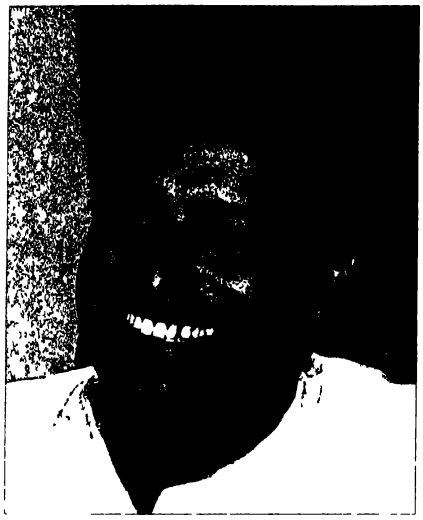
A CURIOUS air of detachment prevails in the Bharatiya Janata Party office in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh. Party volunteers sprawl indolently on mattresses laid out on the floor, not really seeking public attention with the fervour customary of an election season. Vinay Katiyar, the battering ram of the BJP's Ayodhya mobilisation, is out campaigning to regain the seat he lost in 1998 after successive triumphs in 1991 and 1996. But his party workers are unaware of his location and itinerary.

Just days earlier, Vishwa Hindu Parishad chieftain Ashok Singhal had been to Faizabad to campaign for his embattled protege. At two rather sparsely attended public meetings, he never once raised the issue of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. In the discourse of the VHP, Ayodhya had obviously been supplanted by Kargil as a symbol of resurgent Indian nationalism.

The palpable sense of indifference in the BJP camp is curious. By any reckoning, the party stands a good chance of regaining Faizabad, a seat of symbolic importance ever since it became the focus of the ritualistic politics of the Ayodhya movement. On basic arithmetical logic, it faces an Opposition that is splintered three ways, rather than two ways as in 1998. In obvious ire at being denied the ticket, Mitrasen Yadav who won the seat for the Samajwadi Party in 1998, is contesting as an independent candidate. Having won twice from Faizabad – the first time as a Communist Party of India candidate in 1991 – Mitrasen has a presence in certain pockets of the constituency. Moreover, he is impossible to ignore because of the energy and zeal he brings to his campaign and the various debts of honour he is known to call in at election time.

The Samajwadi Party ticket this time around has been given to Heeralal Yadav, a zilla parishad-level politician of limited horizons and unthreatening mien – attributes that make him an appropriate standard-bearer for party supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav. Should the two Yadav candidates split the 250,000 votes that the Samajwadi Party obtained in 1998, then Katiyar, who lost by fewer than 8,000 votes, should have an easy time. The Bahujan Samaj Party is also in the fray and is not expected to suffer serious diminution in the 19 per cent vote share it recorded in 1998.

Katiyar's problems emanate from a rather unforeseen quarter. After having virtually sat out two elections, the Congress(I) has returned to the contest in Faizabad with a new energy. Gone is the lack of purpose and direction so evident in 1996, when the Congress(I) gave the ticket to a local college teacher best known for his manic advocacy of the temple project at Ayodhya. Absent too is the indifference of 1998, when the Congress(I) ceded the seat to Ajit Singh's party, which did not have even a token presence in the region.



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Vinay Katiyar, the BJP candidate in Faizabad.

The Congress(I) this time has fielded Nirmal Khatri who came to prominence as the local legislator in 1980 and as the youngest member of the U.P. Ministry. He subsequently won the election to the Lok Sabha in 1984, but withdrew from active political engagement after a narrow loss in 1989 and an abject failure of initiative in his party over the BJP's pursuit of the Ayodhya project. A grand-nephew of Acharya Narendra Dev, Khatri brings the prestige of a respected political dynasty to the campaign. But he faces a long haul in pushing the Congress(I)'s tally of the popular vote up from the region of 2 per cent – where it has lingered in the last two general elections. As a member of a minuscule Khatri community, he cannot recruit caste loyalties to his cause. But his campaign managers expect a substantial number of votes to accrue on the strength of his aura and personality. The erosion of Katiyar's image and the deflation of the Ram temple as an issue are expected to contribute the rest. The energetic campaign mounted by the Congress(I) in Faizabad strongly conveys the impression of a party that senses a dramatic – and imminent – reversal of fortunes.

IN nearby Rae Bareli, the man who was partly responsible for initiating the Congress(I)'s fatal flirtation with Hindu communalism as Rajiv Gandhi's closest political confidant, affects an air of supreme confidence. Arun Nehru, Minister of State for Home Affairs in the Rajiv Gandhi administration and later a member of the V.P. Singh Cabinet, is today the standard-bearer for the BJP in a constituency he has won twice before for the Congress(I). He confronts Satish Sharma, a longtime Gandhi family intimate, fighting on the Congress(I) ticket. He is busy calling in old associations from the decade of the 1980s, when he represented Rae Bareli in Parliament.

Arun Nehru's confidence emanates from his reading that between 1980, when he first won with 68 per cent of the vote and 1998, when the Congress(I) logged 7 per cent, the party he once represented has suffered irreversible damage.

Ashok Singh, an old lieutenant of Arun Nehru's, had won Rae Bareli for the BJP in 1998. He switched loyalties to the Congress(I) when the current elections were called, in the evident belief that he would

be given the party ticket for the constituency. He has not taken well to Satish Sharma's late entry and is in a mood to wreak vengeance. In part, the implications can be seen in the conduct of his brother, Akhilesh Singh, a Congress(I) legislator from Rae Bareli known for his ferocious turf instinct.

On September 18, Arun Nehru notably conducted a successful election meeting at Amanwa. The village, 18 km from Rae Bareli, is known to be the operational base from which Akhilesh Singh launches all his intimidatory forays into adjoining areas to enforce compliance with his political diktat. In allowing Arun Nehru the relatively unfettered freedom to operate within his domain, he seemed to signal a more positive disposition towards the BJP.

The S.P. has put up Gajadhar Singh, a zilla parishad-level politician from the Rajput community. This offers the option of caste consolidation to Ashok Singh and his family of traditional feudal overlords. A shift of the Rajput vote to the S.P. could cause a serious upset. Fighting on the BJP ticket, Ashok Singh had in 1998 prevailed over his S.P. rival by just over 40,000 votes. This is evidently a margin that can easily be bridged, given the new configuration of caste loyalties.

Despite fielding a relatively high-profile candidate, the Congress(I) is not seen to be seriously in the race in Rae Bareli. Relative to Faizabad, the Congress(I) starts here with a lesser disadvantage. Its vote share in the last two elections has averaged about 8 per cent. But unlike the candidate in Faizabad, Satish Sharma has shown little inclination to go out and hustle up the votes. Though essentially seen as a contest between the BJP and the Congress(I), Rae Bareli could well be transformed into one between the S.P. and the BJP.

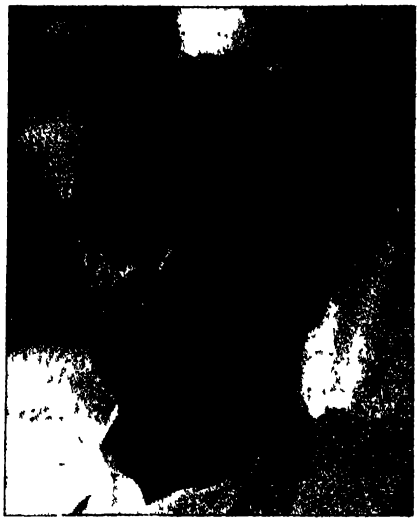
A CONGRESS(I) revival in U.P. – if such is indeed under way – is not going to be a spontaneous affair or one occasioned merely by dynastic charisma. In the western sector of the State, it is the strategic alliance with Ajit Singh's party that holds the key. And in other parts, it is premised on a credible effort to seek the votes, to bring back sections that have strayed away from their traditional allegiance to the party. Reassembling the Congress(I)'s traditional social coalitions also involves restoring the party's organisational network, bringing back the cadres who will keep the machinery working through the campaign and the polling process.

It is in these respects that Faizabad and Rae Bareli offer a study in contrasts. Aside from the town squares and main district roads, the Congress(I) seems to have little penetration in Rae Bareli. And its candidate is a person who is unfamiliar with the region and detached from its ethos and identity.

"There has been a disease within the Congress(I) over the last two decades," says Surendra Pratap Singh, member of the All India Congress(I) Committee and election agent for Nirmal Khatri in Faizabad. "Organisational work and cadre building," he says, "have come to a halt." The consequences have been apparent in the Congress(I)'s precipitate plunge from a dominant position in the 1980s to the parlous state of 1998. Dynastic charisma has never been a factor of significant moment in the State. Among all the States that went to the polls in two stages in 1991, U.P. manifested the smallest magnitude of a "sympathy vote" after the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. Each round of elections since then has brought the Congress(I) closer to extinction. Even a strategic alliance with the BSP in 1996 only brought it temporary succour. A large number of its elected legislators split to make common cause with the BJP early in 1998, in what seemed the death-blow to the party in the State.



Former Union Minister Arun Nehru, the BJP's standard-bearer in Rae Bareli.



SANDEEP SAXENA

Satish Sharma of the Congress(I), who is pitted against Arun Nehru.

In a sense, the 1998 elections marked the final denouement of the politics of convenience that the Congress(I) has always played in U.P. Failure to respond to the challenge of backward class mobility and political assertion in the 1960s was the first of the defaults. Inaugurating the politics of competitive communalism in the 1980s – opening the doors of the Babri Masjid to Hindu worship and overturning the ruling of the Supreme Court on maintenance for Muslim women – was the final and fatal error.

Uncertainty over which constituency to cultivate in U.P. was compounded by a sequence of disastrous alliances. Against the party's best interests, Rajiv Gandhi concluded a pact with Mulayam Singh Yadav in 1990. The consequence was the Congress(I)'s relegation to third position in the State in 1989 – behind the BJP and the still extant Janata Dal. It only took the complete conquest of the Janata Dal by Mulayam Singh to propel him to second position in U.P.'s political landscape. And the BSP meanwhile was whittling away the Congress(I)'s traditional base among Dalits, to emerge as the third really major player in the State by the 1993 Assembly elections.

Confronted with a challenge from the land-owning backward classes, Sampurnanand, one of the dominant faction leaders within the Congress(I) for much of the 1950s and 1960s, had forcefully endorsed "the continuation of the upper classes coalition in the Congress(I)". This, he argued, would ensure the party's "influence in rural areas".

The idea was clearly to cement the allegiance of Dalits and Muslims to this coalition of upper classes, to ensure continuing Congress(I) hegemony in the State. That strategy came a cropper when the Congress(I), in response to the demands of its upper caste constituencies, began stirring up the Ayodhya controversy in the mid-1980s. Muslims were progressively alienated and switched their loyalty to first V.P. Singh and then Mulayam Singh. Concurrently, Dalits were falling under the spell of the BSP, which promised them empowerment in a very direct way in local institutions, rather than the share in a sys-

tem of upper class patronage that the Congress(I) held out.

If the pattern of partisan loyalties that crystallised in the 1990s is to splinter in the Congress(I)'s favour, it would have to be at the expense of the S.P. In 1993, the S.P. had demonstrated, in alliance with the BSP, the ability to assemble sufficient numbers on the ground to overwhelm the BJP. But in subsequent years, it also demonstrated the manifest tendency to wreck this consolidation of forces in pursuit of its own narrow interests. The subsequent contests in 1996 and 1998 have shown that the S.P. is incapable of assembling the coalition of social forces that could actually empower the backward classes and Muslims. This provides an incentive to Muslims to turn to the Congress(I), which remains the only serious national alternative to the BJP.

This factor is offset by a fraying of the BJP's winning combination in U.P. – between the forward classes which traditionally provided the leadership cadres to the Congress(I) and the relatively less prosperous backward classes. An analysis of voting behaviour from the 1996 Assembly elections in U.P. reveals that the BJP won 76 per cent of the forward caste, 53 per cent of the "most backward caste" and 58 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe vote. The S.P. and its allies, in comparison, assembled their legislative strength on the basis of 67 per cent of the Muslim vote and 52 per cent of the "landed backward caste" vote. The alliance of the BSP and the Congress(I) won a significant share of the Muslim vote, but was essentially dependent for its sustenance on the Scheduled Castes, of whose vote it won no less than 73 per cent. Only 6.7 per cent of the forward castes voted for this alliance, which provides the basis for BSP leader Mayawati's assertion that her votes are transferable to the Congress(I), though not *vice versa*.

A marginal shift of the backward caste vote from the BJP to the S.P. could radically alter the balance of forces in U.P. But if this is accompanied by a shift of Muslim voters to the Congress(I), then the BJP's own strength may not be seriously impaired despite an erosion of its vote share. The possibilities are as diverse as the State of U.P. itself. The trend of the campaign shows that the Congress(I)'s gains will be patchy and contingent on a host of local circumstances. But the overarching probability of the BJP taking substantial losses in U.P., which provides almost a third of its parliamentary strength today, cannot be denied. ■

■ COVER STORY

Political paradoxes

In this election, the secular vote is more sharply divided in Uttar Pradesh than in previous elections, largely owing to the political resurgence of the Congress(I). Even so, the BJP appears likely to face an erosion in its support base and its tally of seats.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in Uttar Pradesh

THE electoral scene in the 85 Lok Sabha constituencies in Uttar Pradesh is somewhat paradoxical this time. In the two previous Lok Sabha elections, in 1996 and 1998, the split in the secular vote between the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) helped the Bharatiya Janata Party win a majority of the seats in the State. This time, the secular vote is bound to be more divided than before – particularly since a resurgent Congress(I) has forced a quadrangular contest in a sizable number of constituencies. Yet the BJP, which should ordinarily have benefited from such a division of the secular vote, may end up winning fewer seats than it did in 1998.



V SUDERSHAN

Chief Minister Kalyan Singh. The anti-incumbency mood towards the BJP-led coalition Government he heads in Uttar Pradesh is a crucial factor at play in this election.

This political situation, astonishing in many ways, has come about essentially on account of four factors. First, the strong anti-incumbency mood towards the Kalyan Singh-led BJP coalition Government in the State, which may prove to be the decisive factor in almost every constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Second, the shift in the votes of those belonging to the upper castes, particularly Brahmins, from the BJP to the Congress(I), and the growing support for the Congress(I) among Muslim minorities. Third, the denial of the ticket to former BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj and the resentment it has caused among large sections of the Lodh Rajput backward caste community, which traditionally supported the BJP. Fourth, the vote arithmetic factor that is bound to give an edge to the party that finished second in each constituency in the previous elections. Going by campaign trends, this will help either the S.P. or the BSP in at least 18 constituencies, and the BJP in seven constituencies.

The absence of a sense of euphoria over the "great Kargil victory", which the BJP appeared to be banking on, and the failure of the public to share in the BJP's appreciation of the "sterling leadership qualities" of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, are two other factors that are certain to work against the BJP.

The party that is expected to make the biggest and most dramatic gains from all this is the Congress(I). A party that had fared as badly as it did in 1998 – it did not win a single seat – can, of course, only improve its performance this time. To what extent the other political forces in the State, such as the S.P. and the BSP, can benefit from a possible erosion in the BJP's strength is a trifle unclear. For in those constituencies where the two parties had won in 1998, they may be affected by the "anti-incumbency" sentiment directed at the sitting MP. The Congress(I)'s blank

'Congress(I)'s stand has regained acceptance'

Interview with Salman Khurshid.

Salman Khurshid was appointed president of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress(I) a year and a half ago specifically to rejuvenate the party which had been virtually wiped out in the State. As the State Congress(I) faces its first election under his leadership, the impression within the party and outside is that he has achieved a fair amount of success in his mission. Indications from the campaign theatre are that the Congress(I)'s position has improved vastly in recent times: it is no longer the defunct and lustreless organisation it was during the previous elections. In fact, some observers rate the Congress(I) as the most active and dynamic party in the State today, and for this, Salman Khurshid deserves credit. **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** caught up with Khurshid first at his hometown of Farukhabad and later at Moradabad in the midst of his hectic campaigning. Excerpts from the interview:

▶ *It is widely acknowledged that the Congress(I) has revived itself in Uttar Pradesh in the past one year, but then there is also the view that the revival needs to be quantified. It is not difficult to revive an organisation that won no seat at all in the previous elections. How do you respond to these views?*

I agree that the revival of the party needs to be quantified. But seats in Parliament and the Assembly are not the only criteria for this. The growth in party units, cadre and membership has all gone into it. That is what has made the party very active on the campaign field. For me, however, the most important thing is that the party's viewpoint, the anti-communal, anti-casteist, secular and development-oriented agenda of the party has once again found acceptance with the people of the State. More and more people are realising that true stability and good governance can be provided only by the Congress(I). This in itself is a development for in the two previous elections, this vital national agenda had got completely subsumed by communal and caste politics.

▶ *What has caused this change?*

Obviously, the failure of caste and communal politics as represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Samajwadi Party. Both the parties drew sustenance from each other and in the process vitiated the social atmosphere in the State. These parties used the minorities and the backward classes as mere vote banks. All this is changing.

▶ *But even during the current campaign, the S.P. and the Bahujan Samaj Party have accused the Congress(I) of having been the first to practise communal and caste politics. According to them it was the Congress(I) that first treated the minorities and the backward classes as vote banks.*



SANDEEP SAXENA

"More and more people are realising that true stability and good governance can be provided only by the Congress(I)... In the two previous elections, this had got subsumed by communal and caste politics."

These arguments have no value in the present context as we see more and more people, including Dalits and minorities, freeing themselves from the clutches of these parties which have narrow political considerations. Even the upper castes have realised that the kind of Hindutva politics practised by the BJP is detrimental to the larger interests of the country. I am not saying that the Congress(I) has committed no mistake in the past. But in spite of everything, it is clear that only the Congress(I) can tread a truly secular, centrist path and provide stable governance. These parties' arguments have also to be seen in the background of their activities. Look at the S.P. It is no secret that the S.P. leadership has a tacit understanding with the BJP in this election. How else do you account for the fact that the BJP has fielded weak candidates in seats which are crucial for the S.P., such as Kannauj, Sambhal and Mainpuri, and the S.P's reciprocal action in some seats that are crucial for the BJP? As for the BSP, its record is not creditworthy: it has time and again joined hands with the BJP. Only the Congress(I) has steadfastly kept away from the communal forces.

▶ *Yet you tried to forge alliances with these parties*

We never wanted an alliance with the S P But we did try for an alliance with the BSP because we believe that this party, despite all its mistakes, can still play an important social role.

▶ *According to BJP leaders, all talk of the Congress(I)'s revival is baseless, and the most important issue that has influenced voters this time is whether to have a* swadeshi *or a* videshi *Prime Minister...*

The BJP has been trying to rake up this issue for the last two years without much success. The elections will show what the people think of this frivolous piece of sloganeering.

▶ *Finally, what will the Congress(I)'s revival in U.P. mean in terms of the number of seats it will win?*

I would not like to hazard a guess on this. Suffice it to say that the State Congress(I) will make a significant contribution to the formation of a national government.

▶ *A national government of the Congress(I) or that of a coalition?*

Wait and see. ■

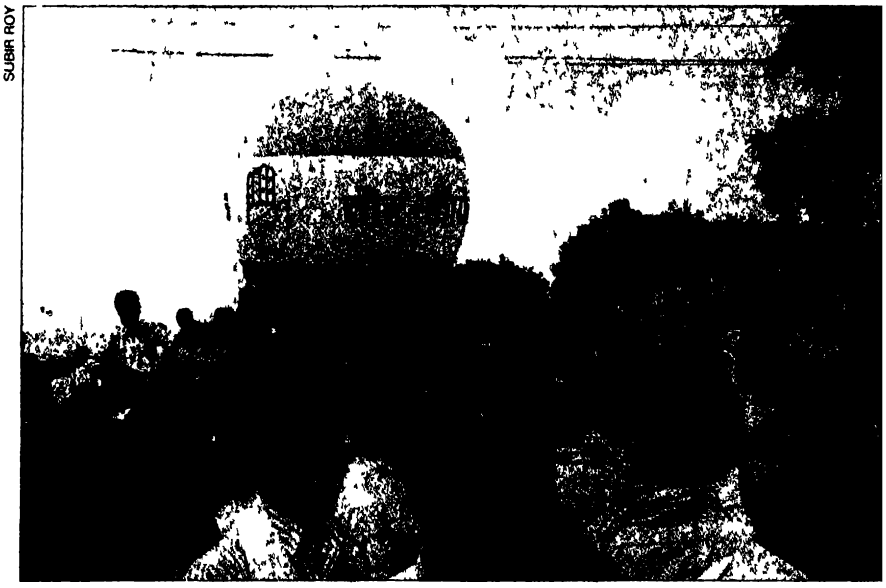
score-card in U.P. in 1998 means that it will face no such problem.

Undoubtedly, the Congress(I) is set to transform itself from the position of having been the only clear loser in the 1998 elections to being the only certain winner this time. In 1996 it won only five seats and secured 8.14 per cent of the popular vote in the State. In 1998, it lost all five seats, and its vote share slumped further to 6.02 per cent. In the view of political analysts, the Congress(I) in U.P. was the only major party to lose out on both counts. Both the BJP and the S.P. increased their seat and vote share; the BSP increased its vote share from 20.6 per cent to 20.9 per cent, although its seat share fell from six to four. Trends from across the State this time indicate that the Congress(I) is certain to increase its share of votes as well as seats.

The rejuvenation of the Congress(I) is evident most strikingly in the hill districts and parts of western and central Uttar Pradesh; the party is expected to do well in about 20 seats in these regions. The party is particularly well placed in the four constituencies in the hill districts. Led by veteran leader N.D. Tiwari, who is contesting from his traditional Nainital seat, the Congress(I) is putting up such a good show in the region that independent observers say that it may even make a clean sweep here.

In addition to the anti-incumbency mood against the State Government and the shift in the allegiance of Brahmins and other upper castes in favour of the Congress(I), two factors operate in this region. First, there is deep-rooted resentment against the Central Government for its failure to deliver on its promise to grant statehood to the hill districts. During the 1998 election campaign, the BJP had promised that a new state of Uttaranchal would be formed within 80 days of its assuming office. The people in the hill districts are incensed that this promise remains unfulfilled. The second factor that is likely to favour the Congress(I) is that its organisational base in the region is far superior to that of the S.P. and the BSP.

In Pratapgarh, former MP Ratna Singh, who is contesting for the third successive time, will benefit from the Congress(I)'s good organisational base. Similar is the situation in Shajahanpur, where former Congress(I) vice-president Jitendra Prasada is pitted against Union Minister Satyapal Singh Yadav of the BJP and Ram Murti Singh of the S.P. In Rampur, a strong grassroots-level support base coupled with the presence of a popular candidate – Begum Noorbhano, who finished second in 1998 – will work to the Congress(I)'s advantage. The BJP has fielded Mukthar Naqvi, Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, but Noorbhano's charisma and the shift of the votes of Muslims are expected to see her through this time.



SUBIR ROY

At a Congress(I) election rally. The party is expected to make substantial gains in the State this time.

In at least five other constituences in central Uttar Pradesh, the Congress(I) is likely to benefit from the emotive appeal of the Nehru-Gandhi family. Amethi and Rae Bareli are considered the pocketborough of the family; this time Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi is contesting from Amethi and Captain Satish Sharma from Rae Bareli. Similar political influences are at work in Sultanpur, Pratapgarh and Allahabad. The dynasty factor comes into play in Farukhabad too, where Louis Khurshid, grand daughter-in-law of former President Zakir Hussain and wife of State Congress(I) president Salman Khurshid, is in the fray.

Similarly, in six constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh, including the key seats of Meerut, Baghpat and Saharanpur, the Congress(I) is putting up a strong show in association with the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) led by Ajit Singh. In this region, Muslim voters have almost completely deserted the S.P., which they had backed solidly until now. The reason for this desertion seems to be the perception that the S.P. may not be able to defeat the BJP owing to its inability to strengthen its support base among communities other than the minorities.

Scores of Muslims whom *Frontline* spoke to in various parts of western Uttar Pradesh underlined this point. A group of Muslims in the Shajahanpur region in Meerut said that only Muslims seemed to be voting for the S.P. and that this was not enough to fulfil their primary objective of defeating the BJP. Echoing these sentiments, Dr. Tariqat Ali, an Ayurvedic physician in Daula village in Baghpat constituency, said: "Our votes were going waste. We do not want that to happen again."

In contrast, the Congress(I) and the RLD, both of which are witnessing an improvement in their political fortunes over their abysmal performance in 1998, are drawing support from a section of the upper castes, Gujjars and Jats, in addition to that of Muslims – a formidable support base as they take on the BJP. However, the Congress(I) has not won such widespread support in central and eastern Uttar Pradesh, even in constituencies where it has won in the past. As a result, doubts about its winnability have prevented an *en masse* transfer of Muslim votes.

Resentment triggered by the choice of candidates and the lack of proper organisational machinery have accentuated this deficiency. In Farukhabad, a section of the party activists are upset by the "imposition" of political debutant Louis Khurshid; in Rae Bareli, the nomination of Satish Sharma has led to some heartburn. Former BJP MP from Rae Bareli Ashok Singh, who has a strong base among the upper-caste Thakur community and who resigned from the BJP two months ago, was hoping to get the Congress(I) ticket from here. The high command's move to bring in Sharma, an "outsider",

'There is a plot to discredit the BJP'

Interview with Rajnath Singh.

Rajnath Singh, president of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party, brushes aside predictions that the party's tally in the State will come down in this election. In fact, he claims, the BJP and its allies will increase their strength and win at least the 60 seats it won in 1998. **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** spoke to Rajnath Singh on the issues confronting the party in the elections. Excerpts:

▶ *There is a widespread impression that the BJP is losing ground in Uttar Pradesh.*

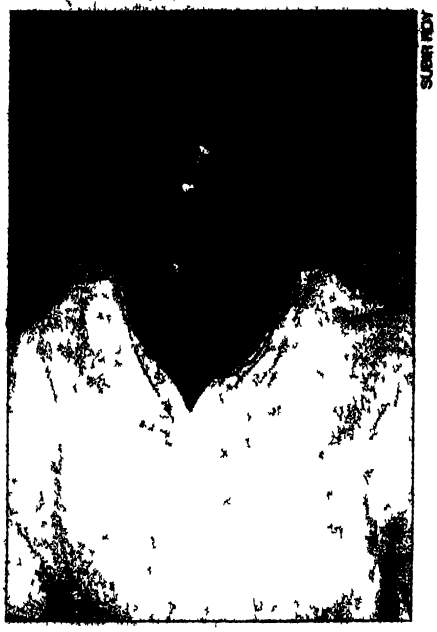
We have heard this repeatedly in the last three elections, but each time the party has improved its vote share as well as the number of seats. The same will be true this time as well. In fact, I am sure we will improve our position in areas where we were weak earlier.

▶ *But many observers believe that the anti-incumbency mood directed against the State Government led by Kalyan Singh is the most important factor at play in the State*

Look, any government that faces elections will experience the anti-incumbency factor. But it would be wrong to surmise that the anti-incumbency factor against the State Government is the most important factor in U.P. In my view, the one question that dominates the elections this time is: who should hold the Prime Minister's post - whether it should be in *swadeshi* hands or *videshi* hands? The question is agitating the people to a greater extent this time because this is the first election after India demonstrated its nuclear capability. A country that has the potential to produce atomic weapons cannot be ruled by people of foreign origin. It could have dangerous ramifications. The question is very sensitive and people realise its gravity. In this context, there is only one choice before the people of U.P., and that is Atal Behari Vajpayee, his party and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by him. People have seen Vajpayeeji's track record of several decades and they have trust in it. The same cannot be said of his opponents.

▶ *Do you feel that the record of the Kalyan Singh Government will have no impact at all?*

I am not saying that. In any election, some questions related to the State gov-



SUSHIL KODY

ernment concerned do come up. But that is not the dominant issue. In any case, the present Lok Sabha elections cannot be treated as a referendum on the Kalyan Singh Government.

▶ *But many BJP MLAs feel that the State Government's record has jeopardised the party's chances to such an extent that it might end up with less than 40 seats. They feel that many internal problems, such as the deficiencies of governance as well as the dissident campaign against the Chief Minister, have not been addressed. There are reports that in many constituencies rival groups in the party are working to ensure the defeat of the party candidate belonging to the other group.*

Ours is a democratic party which allows freedom of expression. MLAs have expressed their opinion about their concerns. That does not mean they are working against the party. All party workers and leaders are united in their endeavour to garner the maximum number of seats in Uttar Pradesh and ensure that Vajpayeeji returns as Prime Minister.

▶ *It has been said that Chief Minister Kalyan Singh has not been campaigning too keenly for the party's candidates?*

He has campaigned actively and extensively.

▶ *But he did not go to Aligarh, his home constituency, as also to important constituencies such as Kannauj, where Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav is contesting.*

It is clear that there is a conspiracy to discredit the BJP by highlighting non-existent internal problems. No leader can reach every nook and corner of the State. In any case, the Chief Minister knows that the party is strong in his home constituency.

▶ *There are also reports that the revolt of former party MP Sakshi Maharaj and his campaign favouring the S.P. were inspired by the Chief Minister, who belongs to the same community as the former MP.*

I cannot respond to rumours. In any case, the impact of the so-called revolt by Sakshi Maharaj is insignificant. It will have no negative effect on the party's prospects. ■

has angered Ashok Singh's supporters, who, by all indications, are backing the S.P. candidate, Gajendra Singh, a Thakur and a local politician.

Even in Allahabad, where the Congress(I)'s choice of candidate has not been questioned, the minorities are not quite ready to back the Congress(I) because the party is not seen as a winning prospect. The Congress(I) candidate, Rita Bahuguna, the city Mayor, has a good administrative track record, being the daughter of former Chief Minister H.N. Bahuguna, she has the support of sections of the upper castes. But her campaign is hampered by the absence of a Congress(I) organisational machinery, the campaign is being managed in large part by her mother Kamla Bahuguna, 75, who knows the constituency well

If Rita Bahuguna gets her act together, she can take credit for defeating two powerful candidates, Union Minister for Human Resource Development Murli Manohar Joshi of the BJP and former Deputy Chief Minister Reoti Raman Singh of the S.P But in order to be able



SUBIR ROY

A BJP rally in Lucknow on the day Vajpayee filed his nomination.

to do that, she needs to win over the support of the Muslims. Other seats where the party is putting up a good fight are Varanasi and Kanpur.

THE Congress(I)'s problem in areas other than western Uttar Pradesh and the hill districts is that the strong support it has among the minorities is not supplemented by a support base among other groups. And this is precisely the strength of the S.P. and the BSP in a large number of seats in Poorvanchal, Bundelkhand and Ruhelkhand. The S.P., which registered the biggest growth in terms of vote share in 1998 – it grew from 20.83 per cent in 1996 to 28.69 per cent in 1998 as compared to the BJP's increase from 33.43 per cent to 36 48 per cent – has constantly attracted new sections and communities to its fold.

Between 1996 and 1998 it added sizable sections of Thakurs to its traditional support base of Yadavs and Muslims. Party general secretary Amar Singh played on the feelings of resentment among this upper-caste community triggered by the short-lived BJP-BSP alliance of 1996-97. The party has fielded 19 Thakur candidates this time. The S.P. leadership further claims that it will benefit from the bitterness among Banias and a section of Brahmins against the State and Central governments. These claims are valid, at least in some areas of the State. In Kusmara and Kishni villages in Mainpuri district as well as in Etawah town, groups of Banias affirmed that they had shifted their loyalty from the BJP to the S.P. "Mulayam Singh Yadav keeps his word: he does not go back on his promise – as the BJP leaders do even after taking bribes," said Dinesh Chandra Aggarwal of Etawah.

According to senior S.P. leaders, seeing the party's ability to add to its support base, the Muslim community had felt encouraged to stay with the S.P., although a section of the minorities were unhappy over Mulayam Singh Yadav's failure to cooperate in the formation of an alternative government under Sonia Gandhi's leadership following the fall of the Vajpayee government. In Bahraich and Azamgarh constituencies, which were held by the BSP, it is believed that the accretion of support to the S.P. may persuade Muslims to back the S.P. this time. In constituencies such as Badaun, Mainpuri and Kannauj, where the Yadavs are the dominant community along with Muslims, the minorities will almost certainly support the S.P.

The S.P. suffered a series of jolts in the early stages of its campaign when 12 MLAs, including five belonging to the minority community, left the party. Many of them joined the Congress(I). The leadership claims to have made up for this loss by winning over leaders from other parties such as the BSP and the Congress(I) and by winning support from other caste groups. The S.P. has fielded six former BSP candidates, including Kamal Yusuf Malik, V.P. Nishad and Hari Prasad, who had in 1998 finished second in Domariaganj, Fatehpur and Robertsganj respectively. All three seats had been won by the BJP.

Despite resorting to such tactics, the S.P. will face a tough time retaining its seats in Jalesar, Mohanlalganj and Balrampur. The shifting of Muslim votes to either the Congress(I) or the BSP, and anti-incumbency sentiment at the constituency level, may pose problems. While the BSP is reportedly ahead in Jalesar, the BJP's chances seem to be bright in Mohanalalganj and Balrampur.

However, the S.P. hopes to benefit from the Sakshi Maharaj factor, which has effectively delivered to it the votes of a section of the backward castes – Lodh Rajputs. There is a significant presence of Lodh Rajputs in the 11 constituencies that lie between Mathura and Farukhabad; of these, the S.P. won only three in 1998. This time it hopes to wrest seven seats from the BJP. Whether these hopes will be realised is unclear, but it is evident that despite the loss of support of a section of Muslims to the Congress(I), the S.P. is still a force to reckon with in 35 to 40 constituencies. Even if it manages to win half of these, the party will be able to retain the 20 seats it won in 1998.

The BSP had in 1998 fielded a number of candidates from among the upper castes in order to gain the backing of these groups and add to its traditional support base among Dalits and Muslims. The enterprise did not succeed: the BSP's vote share increased only by 0.30 per cent, and the party's parliamentary strength came down by two seats. This time the party has decided to go it alone, hoping to secure the support of a substantial section of Muslim voters, who were believed to be deserting the S.P. The BSP has fielded 31 Muslim candidates, the most by any party. This strategy appears to be working in some constituencies such as Shahbad, Jalesar and Maharajganj, but not in others. In these three seats, the BSP candidates – Dawood Ahamed, Ramveer Upadhyaya and Talat Aziz – have taken the campaign scene by storm.

However, the BSP has always had a problem retaining seats. This time too the party faces a tough time in constituencies such as Bahraich and Azamgarh, where Arif Mohammed Khan and Akbar 'Dumpy' Ahmed respectively won in 1998.

Leaders of the BJP, including general secretary K.N. Govindacharya, say that in their estimation the BSP will finish second in the State, pushing the S.P. to the third place. The BJP had made a similar assessment in 1998 too.

The BSP hopes also to benefit from the "arithmetic factor" in at least 10 seats. Analysts estimate that this factor will come into play in seats where the S.P. or the BSP finished second behind the BJP in 1998 with a margin of less than 50,000 votes and the party that finished second (either the BSP or the S.P.) secured more than one lakh votes. These analysts believe that since both the parties draw their support from a similar voter-constituency (with the minorities playing a major role in their vote share), tactical voting by Muslims this time will help the party that finished second in 1998 to win this time. The BSP finished second in 13 such seats, and the S.P. in 10. Campaign trends in some of these seats, such as Shahbad, Aonla, Sitapur and Robertsganj, conform to this theory, but just how far it will be substantiated on a broader electoral plane remains to be seen.

Apart from all these factors, the BJP is handicapped by its cadres' lack of interest in electioneering, an entirely new experience for the saffron party. Leading the list of those whose sincerity in campaigning has been called into question is the Chief Minister, who has not toured Aligarh, his home constituency. Kalyan Singh, who is on record that the BJP high command has given a raw deal to the party workers from among the backward castes in the allocation of the party ticket in the State, is believed to be upset over the denial of the ticket to Sakshi Maharaj. (Kalyan Singh too belongs to the Lodh Rajput community.) BJP insiders alleged that the Chief Minister is tacitly supporting the S.P. in some seats and receiving reciprocal assistance in constituencies where candidates known to have his patronage are contesting.

Obviously, all this bodes ill for the BJP. According to Hariraj Singh Tyagi, a long-time associate of the late Socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, the churning within the BJP cadre shows that the rank and file is no longer ready to listen to the diktats of the leadership unquestioningly in the name of party discipline. He said: "The cadre wants its share in decision-making. That is the lesson the current campaign has given."

After the first round of polling on September 18, a section of the BJP leadership, including Govindacharya, had reportedly realised the difficulties in the party's campaign management and initiated measures to overcome potential setbacks. Just how far the BJP can succeed in checking the erosion in its support base and its seat tally will depend largely on the efficacy of these measures. ■

Mood for change

Some parts of Uttar Pradesh appear to articulate strongly in favour of Sonia Gandhi.

RASHEEDA BHAGAT
in Lucknow

> *"Jo bahu ko behen na maney, woh desh ko kya pehchane?"*
> (Those who don't regard a daughter-in-law as a sister, how will they understand the ethos of this country?)

BAHUA (daughter-in-law), *behen* (sister) and *beti* (daughter) are some of the terms of endearment used, referring to Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi, in the villages of the Rae Bareli-Amethi belt of Uttar Pradesh in recent weeks. Posters, banners, arches (on the day she filed her nomination papers at the Sultanpur district Collectorate in the Amethi parliamentary constituency) and graffiti on walls hailed her as the *behen*, *bahu* and *beti* of India. That was how people in the region responded to the Bharatiya Janata Party's personalised attacks against her.

For the people of Amethi, Sonia Gandhi's return to her late husband Rajiv Gandhi's constituency was a significant event. But there were signals from other regions in the State also of a renewed interest in the Congress(I). The State did not elect any candidate from the party to the last Lok Sabha.

The anti-incumbency factor was expected to affect the BJP's prospects. Besides, Chief Minister Kalyan Singh presided over a dissidence-ridden party unit. The average Muslim feels betrayed that 'Moulana' Mulayam Singh, leader of the Samajwadi Party (S.P.), prevented the formation of a non-BJP government at the Centre after the fall of the Vajpayee government in April.

The battle between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Karan Singh of the Congress(I) in Lucknow has generated much interest. Ramnath Mishra, a casual labourer, said: "Now this contest will have

SUBIR ROY



Priyanka Vadhra's hands-on style of campaigning has had a tremendous impact in Amethi.

Amethi's pride

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

"WHEN the first family of Amethi returns, can we stick to recent loyalties?" Rajjan Lal's voice held an accusatory tone as he hurled this question at this correspondent, standing amidst a group of villagers in Jagadishpur in Amethi constituency.

What provoked this rhetorical comment on the permanence of some political loyalties was a question why Rajjan Lal had left Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Sanjay Singh's camp overnight after Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi's candidature had been announced from Amethi. Rajjan Lal had campaigned for Sanjay Singh in the 1998 elections and was set to solicit votes for him this time too. But all that changed once it became clear that Sonia Gandhi would contest from Amethi.

Of course, Rajjan Lal and his family were a trifle upset that Sonia Gandhi had contested from Bellary in Karnataka too. To them, this was indicative of "a sense of distrust that madam had", a symptom of her doubts about the political loyalty of the constituency that had long been assiduously nursed by her husband and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. But far from holding it against her, Rajjan Lal and others said that they would work doubly hard to reassure Sonia Gandhi that their loyalty to the "first family of Amethi" was not fickle.

There are hundreds of Rajjan Lals across the length and breadth of Amethi these days – in Tiloi, Salon, Gauriganj or Jagadishpur. The very people who had rejected Captain Satish Sharma, the Congress(I) candidate, in 1998 are now flocking back to the Congress(I).

For Mukul Sharma of Tiloi, this had a ready explanation. Following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, Amethi fell on hard times. For a while, Captain Sharma nursed the constituency, but his political sights were fixed on far-away Delhi, and all development activity in Amethi stopped after a few years. "Amethi," said Mukul Sharma, "became a ghost of what it was during Rajiv Gandhi's time." Between 1995 and 1998, the people of Amethi virtually became "fed up" of politicians, he said. Looking for "a change", they switched their loyalty to Sanjay Singh, who in 1998 became the first Bharatiya Janata Party candidate to be elected from here.

Today, however, Mukul Sharma, like Rajjan Lal, has turned away from Sanjay Singh. "Not for any fault of Sanjay Singh's," says Mukul Sharma. In fact, he adds, Sanjay Singh did look after the constituency – "but nobody can match the Gandhi-Nehru family's contribution."

All that the people of Amethi seem to want at this moment is a darshan of Sonia Gandhi and her daughter

SUBIR ROY



With son Rahul beside her, Sonia Gandhi files her nomination in Amethi; Sanjay Singh, the BJP candidate, savours a moment of media attention.

SUBIR ROY



Priyanka, who virtually took over the campaign since September 15. Priyanka holds roadside meetings and stops by at wayside dhabas to have jalebis and chai with the local people. Her grace and the easy manner in which she interacts with them often leaves them beaming with joy.

The Congress(I)'s campaign is based principally on whipping up an atmosphere of nostalgia for Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and their contributions to Amethi. Issues of national concern, which are raised in other constituencies, find no articulation here.

On his part, Sanjay Singh is fighting a hard battle, moving from village to village with his wife Amita and meeting village pradhans. At these meetings, Sanjay Singh tells them that he is aware that they had reposed great hopes in him last time, and that he had endeavoured to fulfil their aspirations. "I will continue to be the son of our soil, unlike those who come visiting you once in a year and who have showed that they do not have enough trust in you," Sanjay Singh says.

Occasionally, he invokes Atal Behari Vajpayee's name and sings paeans to the "able Prime Minister who saved the country from the grave dangers posed by the Kargil crisis". But the impact of this campaign is nowhere near as evocative as the response during the 1998 campaign when he raised the issue of the "apathy and corruption of Captain Satish Sharma".

Sanjay Singh won in 1998 by a margin of 23,000 votes; his campaign managers know that he faces a far more formidable opponent in Sonia Gandhi. In 1998, Mohammed Naim, the Bahujan Samaj Party candidate who finished third, had secured 1.50 lakh votes, partly on the strength of the party's support among Muslims. There has subsequently been a massive shift of support of Muslims from both the Samajwadi Party and the BSP towards the Congress(I), and Sonia Gandhi should find the going easy.

Also in the fray in Amethi are Mohammad Jamil of the S.P., a popular local leader, and Paras Nath Maurya of the BSP. Muslims account for 13 per cent of Amethi's population, and Dalits for 20 per cent; yet these two parties are not expected to [illegible]

some life. *Karan Singh tau Vajpayee se bhi bade Hindu hain* (he is a greater Hindu than even Vajpayee)."

In fact, Amethi had started to celebrate Sonia Gandhi's victory rather early. District Congress Committee chief Ravi Shanker said: "If there is no large-scale rigging by the BJP, she will win by a margin which will create a global record." Voters in Amethi have waited for Sonia Gandhi for several years, he said.

Erstwhile Congress(I) MP Captain Satish Sharma, who was elected from Amethi in 1996, was seen as having neglected the constituency. Sanjay Singh of the BJP was also perceived in a similar way. "Forget his doing anything at all to help the poor people of Amethi. The kind of sins Sanjay Singh has committed... cannot be forgiven by either God or the people of Amethi," said a farm labourer, Shiv Shankar. "*Aaj tak sahi Thakur unke ghar ka paani bhi nahi peetey* (till today the real Thakurs do not even drink water in his house)", he added with disdain.

Ram Aasrey Pande, a Congress(I) supporter, said: "*Janata ko maarna peetna aur bandh karwana* (getting people beaten up and thrown behind bars) was his speciality. Amethi needs a mother who can care for its battered people and Soniaji will definitely play this role. But we do hope she will retain this constituency and give up Bellary, which she will certainly win, because the margin here will be much, much higher."

The people of Amethi heaved a sigh of relief that the candidate they had defeated in the 1998 elections, Captain Satish Sharma, was not back there. An angry Amethi voter asked: "What did he do for Amethi as Petroleum Minister except give petrol agencies to some people?" In the neighbouring constituency of Rae Bareli, from where he contested this time, there was some unhappiness over his nomination but it was camouflaged because Sonia Gandhi's daughter Priyanka Vadhra was there to campaign for him.

Indira Gandhi's memory remains alive in Rae Bareli. Almost all people in their thirties and beyond fondly recalled the manner in which she had developed and nurtured her constituency. Even though people may not be euphoric about Satish Sharma's candidacy, they were furious with the BJP regime, and the anti-incumbency factor was the strongest there.

Dinesh Singh, a former machine operator in Modi Carpets in Kathwara, recalled the days of the Indira regime when several factories, including the one he has worked, were started in the constituency.

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"But it is now sick and lying closed for more than seven years. No government is interested in reviving it. Now take the BJP candidate, Arun Nehru. Rae Bareli elected him to the Lok Sabha twice. I remember the times his daughter used to shake our hands and offer us *ghee mei tali hui badam* (almonds fried in ghee). But once he became an MP and we approached her with our problems, she asked us 'Who are you?'".

A group of people gathered at a tea shop in the village joined the discussion. Another resident of the village, Ajit Singh, said: "*Sarkar hamare paiye par ghoomti hei, magar hum shikayat nahi kar sakte. Zyada shikayat karney ki koshish kee to bandh kar detey hei, ya goli bhi maar detey hei* (The government survives on our might, but we cannot raise our problems with it. If we complain too much, we can be thrown behind bars or even shot dead)."

ALMOST everywhere in Uttar Pradesh, the mood is one of disenchantment with the political leadership. In the cluster of villages barely 35 km from Lucknow, water is the biggest problem. Dubbing the Kalyan Singh government "anti-farmer", Ram Lal, a small farmer in Brahmadaspur village in the Mohanlal Gunj constituency, was also angry with the previous MP from his constituency, Rina Chowdhary. He said: "She has done nothing for the constituency, nor has any other politician bothered about our plight. We have no water for our fields and you can see for yourself the dry canal which runs through these villages." To water their fields, they are at the mercy of the rich farmers, who charge Rs.40 an hour to hire out their pumpsets. He said: "For one acre, we require about six hours of usage every day."

A white-bearded Bhoola Lal seethed at the "hollow promises" made by politicians. He said: "Even today we have no electricity in our village. The electric poles came about eight years ago. Now even the poles have started disintegrating."

Even in the capital, Lucknow, people talk only of water shortages, damaged roads and battered drainage systems. "Now this is a VVIP constituency which has returned a Prime Minister to the Lok Sabha. If the ruling party can treat Lucknow, the State capital, so shabbily, imagine the fate of rural U.P." said Saleem, a taxi driver.

He was certain that Muslims in the State would not vote for the BJP. "They are unhappy with Mulayam Singh too, and are likely to vote for the Congress(I) in large numbers, but only in those constituencies where it has strong candidates who can defeat the BJP. Where the Congress(I) has weak candidates, they will vote for the Bahujan Samaj Party and even the S.P., but the criterion will be the ability to stop the BJP."

Nehaluddin Ahamed, president of the All India Muslims Forum, also believed that this was the likely scenario as far as Muslims were concerned. But he was unhappy that "*azadi ke pachaas saal ke baad bhi hum is party ya us party ko rokney ki hi baat kar rahey hain* (50 years after Independence, we are still talking about stopping this party or that from coming to power). The problem was that Muslims were a divided lot and hence being taken for a ride by all parties." His contention was that Muslims should "stop running away from politics" and aim for political power "which was necessary for educational and economic emancipation".

State Urban Development Minister Lalji Tandon dismissed the perception of an anti-incumbency factor. Infighting in the BJP State unit, he claimed, "exists only in the media". On the BJP's prospects in the State, he said: "We will do as well, if not better than last time."

Confident that Muslims would shift their allegiance from the S.P. to the Congress(I) or even the BSP, he said: "Let them go to the Congress(I). This will teach a politician like Mulayam Singh, who has spread so much communalism in U.P., that communalism is very short-lived."

"The BJP," he declared, "has never sought votes in the name of religion." When reminded that the party sought votes in the name of Ram, he said: "The issue of Ram is not communal. That is a cultural issue."

Lalji Tandon claimed that those Muslims who have broken free from the mindset of the Nehruvian era, which was replicated so successfully by the "so-called secular parties" that they were seen as the saviours of Indian Muslims, would support the BJP this time. His claim did not sound outrageous given that a Lucknow-based Muslim journalist said that politicians like Mulayam Singh have fooled Muslims in the State long enough and were ineffective in stopping the demolition of the Babri Masjid. He asked: "*Aap agar hamey zaalim se bacha nahi sakte to hum usi zaalim se hath mila lenge. Aakhir andhey ko do aankhen chahiye aur politicians ko vote.* (If you can't save us from our tormentors, we'll join hands with them. After all a blind man needs vision, and politicians need votes). So we will give our votes to them." ■

The battle in Lucknow

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

ON September 16, two days after Dr. Karan Singh filed his nomination as the Congress(I) candidate in Lucknow, where Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is contesting, the Bharatiya Janata Party effected a significant change in its campaign machinery for the constituency. Former Delhi Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana was brought in place of senior State leader and Urban Development Minister Lalji Tandon as the chief campaign manager to the Prime Minister.

By no yardstick was this change motivated by an assessment that Karan Singh was posing a major challenge to Vajpayee. BJP general secretary K.N. Govindacharya said that his party's assessment of Karan Singh's candidature was that "but for the theatrics of matching Vajpayee *shloka* for *shloka* and *shair* for *shair*, the Congress(I) cannot hope to gain anything from this contest." However, the BJP leadership did have other things to worry about: complacency, and doubts about the sincerity of a section of party workers in campaigning for Vajpayee.

By all indications, Tandon was seen as one of those who might give room for overconfidence; the far more serious suspicion related, however, to leaders who were perceived to be close to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh. The fact that Kalyan Singh was not seen to be taking an active part in the BJP's campaign in general had heightened these apprehensions.

In 1998, Vajpayee won from Lucknow by a majority of 2.16 lakh votes. According to Rajesh Pandey, Member of the Legislative Council and the media manager of Vajpayee's campaign in Lucknow, "the effort this time is to give him a bigger margin, one fit for a Prime Minister who had led the country bravely through troubled times."

The principal themes in the BJP's campaign rhetoric are: Kargil, Vajpayee's indispensability as an "able Prime Minister" at this juncture in India's history, and his political expert-

SUBIR ROY



Vajpayee files his nomination in Lucknow, with (from right) Kalyan Singh, Rajnath Singh and Arun Jaitley; Congress(I) candidate Dr. Karan Singh offers *chaddar* at Shah Mina in Lucknow before launching his campaign.

SUBIR ROY



ence, posited against Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi's inexperience.

The poor state of the "Prime Minister's constituency" has also become a campaign issue. The condition of roads and other civic amenities is appalling, and the state of the public health system is no better. These deficiencies have been highlighted, more so because a large portion of the allocation for the improvement of civic amenities, under one of funds earmarked for members of Parliament, was not utilised and has lapsed.

The two other Opposition parties, the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), too have seized on this Bhagawati Singh is the S.P. candidate and Ishar-ul-Haq, the BSP candidate.

The Congress(I), on its part, has taken on the BJP on every issue it has raised, including the one relating to Vajpayee's "experience" and Sonia Gandhi's "inexperience". Karan Singh claims that he himself is far more experienced than Vajpayee, having become a Union Minister at the age of 36. Refuting the BJP's claim that Sonia Gandhi was ill-equipped for governance, he asserts that Sonia Gandhi will govern wisely and well, and will have an able group of accomplished advisers from within the Congress(I) itself.

The intensity of the Congress(I)'s campaign has forced the BJP to rake up non-issues – Karan Singh's status as an "outsider" to the constituency. The BJP has also levelled allegations relating to his role in the reported moves to provide greater autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir. The S.P. and the BSP have raised the issue of Karan Singh's association with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as one of its founder-members. This campaign is not entirely without effect in a constituency where 24 per cent of the 16 lakh eligible voters are Muslims. Many leaders of Muslim organisations have demanded that Karan Singh clarify his position *vis-a-vis* the VHP; the Congress (I) candidate has denied any association with the Sangh Parivar organisation.

Undoubtedly, after Karan Singh entered the fray, the contest in Lucknow has become interesting; however, in the background of the Congress(I)'s performance in the 1998 election, it might not dramatically change the final outcome. The then Congress(I) candidate Ranjeet Singh finished fourth with 38,636 votes; illustratively, Vajpayee polled 4.31 lakh votes. The Congress(I) has miles to go, and Karan Singh's candidature by itself is insufficient to spring electoral miracles. ■

Failed alliances

By rejecting an electoral alliance, the S.P. and the BSP have lost a fine opportunity to augment their respective support bases to make a lasting political impact.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

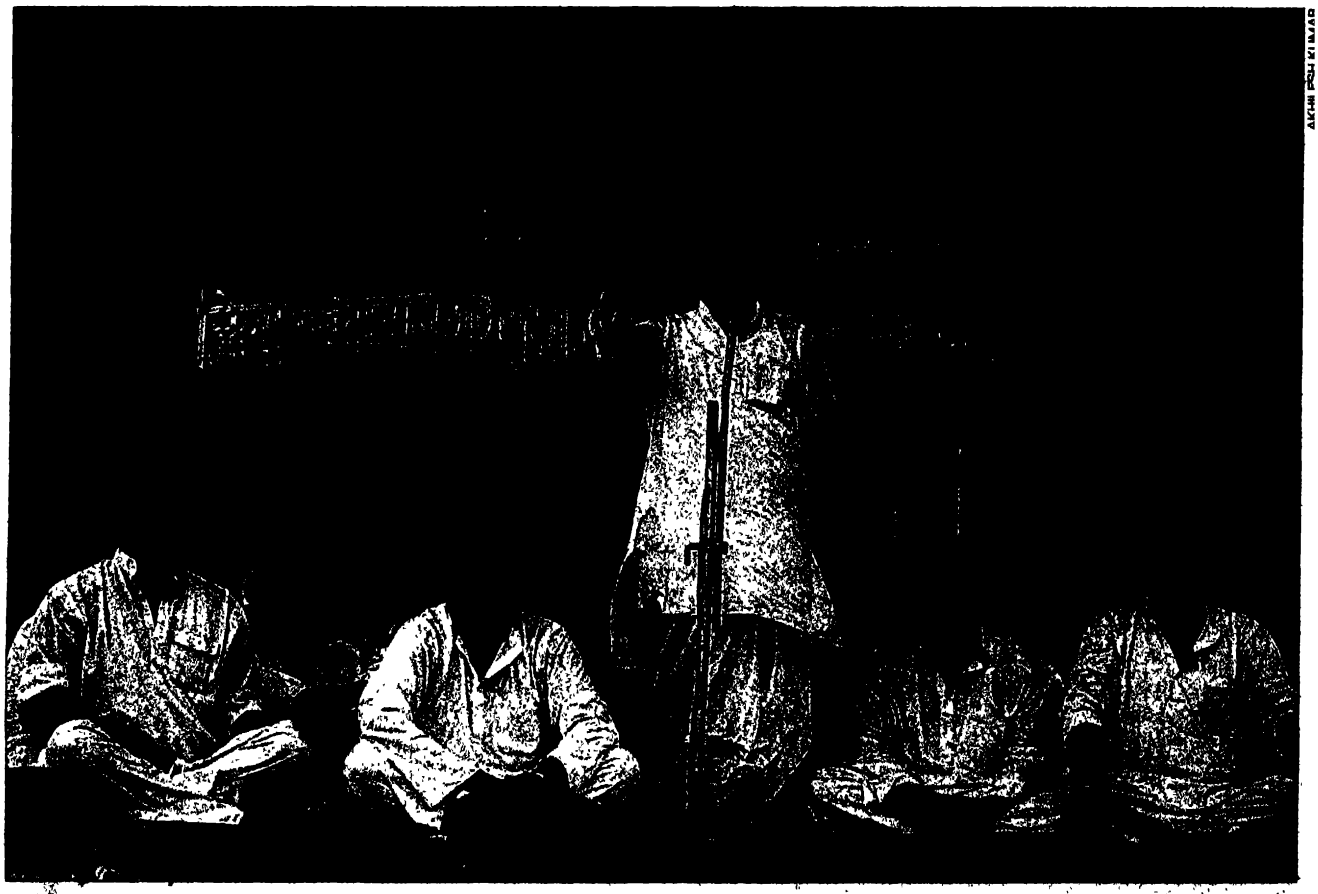
HAD an idea mooted by some friends of Samajwadi Party (S.P.) president Mulayam Singh Yadav and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Kanshi Ram in June been accepted, the electoral fortunes of both the parties would have been strikingly different. It would have changed the very character of the 13th Lok Sabha with the S.P.-BSP combine emerging as the most formidable force from Uttar Pradesh, capable of tilting the balance of power.

The proposal was to revive the S.P.-BSP alliance of 1993 in Uttar Pradesh in order to form a combine of Dalits, Yadavs, Muslims, a section of Thakurs and Other Backward Classes. The combination would have easily polled 45 per cent of the total votes and won more than 70 of the 85 seats in the State, which has the maximum number of constituencies in the country.

Favouring the prospect, Kanshi Ram is reported to have said that "the result the combine would bring in would alter the face of the 13th Lok Sabha". For it was unlikely that any political formation would have formed a government without it. This would give a powerful boost to Mulayam Singh Yadav's oft-repeated theory that India is too pluralistic socially and politically to submit to the bipolar politics of the Congress(I) and the BJP variety. The expected impact of the alliance also matched Kanshi Ram's larger political design of creating instability in the country's political system. According to the BSP chief, "frequent elections and unstable governments suited the Bahujan Samaj Party as it has no value for stability that perpetuates the vested interests of the upper castes and classes."

Beyond the ideological perspective, the alliance suited the parties organisationally too. The S.P. and the BSP are largely confined to Uttar Pradesh, with pockets of influence in other States. Had the alliance been forged, its leaders could have concentrated their energies on one State and made a political impact at the national level.

More important, the alliance would have checked the scale of the shift in the BSP's Dalit vote base and the S.P.'s Muslim support base towards the



Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav addresses a meeting in Ghazipur.

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Congress(I). Dalits affiliated to the BSP, other than Chamars and Pasis, were shifting their loyalties to the Congress(I) in Uttar Pradesh though not on the same scale as in Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The consolidation of Dalit and Muslim votes by the two parties would have, in turn, stopped the movement of Brahmins towards the Congress(I) from the BJP. As a result, the revival of the Congress(I) in the State would have slowed down. This would have then compelled the Congress(I) to depend on the combine to regain its political supremacy at the Centre.

The idea sounded politically prudent and the two strategists started working out the details. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Kanshi Ram communicated with each other through intermediaries. The exercise continued until early July and then fizzled out. The reason was that former Chief Minister and BSP vice-president, Mayawati, was against any association with the S.P. leadership.

Informed sources in the BSP say that Mayawati has not forgiven the S.P. for the assault on her by its activists at a State guest house in June 1995. She cited the episode as the most humiliating experience in her life. Further, she argued that the present elections provided the BSP with the best opportunity to fortify its Muslim vote base and emerge as the champion of the forces of social justice in the State. Her contention was that Muslim voters, already disillusioned with the S.P., perceived the BSP as the party with the potential to defeat the BJP. Hence, it could improve its tally on its own. It was on the basis of the same premise that Mayawati ruled out an electoral understanding with the Congress(I) at a later stage.

Although Kanshi Ram was reportedly not pleased with Mayawati's stand, he submitted to her line of argument as she virtually controls the party machinery on account of her special status as a two-time Chief Minister.

Both the parties withdrew from the effort and began to search for alternatives. Having fallen out with its former allies, such as the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on the question of supporting a minority Congress(I) government following the fall of the Vajpayee Ministry, the S.P. tried to form a new third front consisting of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. This effort also failed. The alliance with the NCP and the RPI was confined to Maharashtra, where the S.P. has been allotted two Lok Sabha seats and 15 Assembly seats. The S.P. was ready to allot three seats to the NCP in Uttar Pradesh, two of them in the hill districts where the S.P. has no mass base. The offer of a third seat, Varanasi, was withdrawn after the S.P. rejected the choice of the candidate. The S.P. wanted the NCP general secretary, Devendra Dwivedi, to contest, as the candidature of its secretary Vijay Dubey was not acceptable. As Dwivedi refused to comply, the whole seat-sharing exercise was called off.

IT is debatable whether the failure to forge such an understanding will affect the S.P.'s future in U.P. politics. In its hurry to add new castes and communities to its vote bank and thus stay buoyant in the caste-oriented politics of the State, the S.P. seems to have struck a mind-boggling understanding with a section of the backward caste group in the State BJP, led by none other than Chief Minister Kalyan Singh. Although Mulayam Singh Yadav and Kalyan Singh have officially denied any such an understanding, campaign trends from at least 15 constituencies in the State point in this direction.

This understanding stemmed from the humiliation suffered by Kalyan Singh at the hands of the BJP national leadership, particularly Vajpayee, during the selection of candidates. Kalyan Singh wanted many of his nominees, including his son Rajveer Singh and close associate Urmila Rajput, to be given the ticket. Not only were the names not considered, the national leadership denied the ticket to the sitting MP from Farukhabad, Sakshi Maharaj, who belongs to the Lodh Rajput caste. It is this rebuff (Kalyan Singh is also a Lodh Rajput) that seems to have triggered the covert understanding with the S.P.

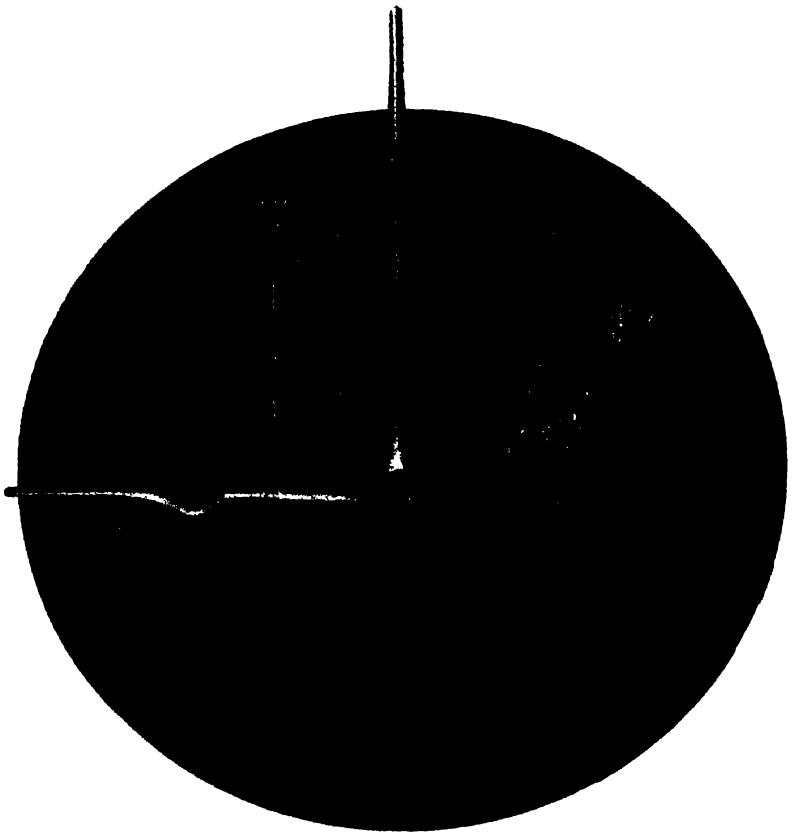
Manifestations of this adjustment were visible in Sakshi Maharaj's extensive campaign for the S.P. candidates in the Lodh Rajput belt of Mathura and Farukhabad (this area accounts for 11 parliamentary seats and includes Kalyan Singh's home town of Aligarh) and in Kalyan Singh's refusal to canvass in the region for the BJP candidates. Sakshi Maharaj has been campaigning under the banner of the Lodh Swabhiman Sabha. Interestingly, this organisation has attracted members of the community attached to other political parties, including the Congress(I) and the BSP.

The refrain from members of a crowd that was waiting to hear Sakshi Maharaj for more than three hours at Thariya village in Fatehpur district was that both Kalyan



BSP leaders Kanshi Ram and Mayawati at an election rally in Ambedkarnagar.

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Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav were their leaders. Rajnath Singh, one of the vocal members of the pro-Kalyan Singh group, told *Frontline* that the backward caste-upper caste struggle in the party that intensified in 1989 was far from over. "The upper castes in the BJP and the Congress(I) are trying to undercut backward caste politicians. The denial of the ticket to Sakshi Maharaj is an indication of this. The backward castes cannot allow this to happen."

This sentiment was evident in scores of Lodh Rajput villages that this correspondent visited in the Mathura-Farukhabad belt. Two days before campaigning closed for the September 18 elections in the Lodh-dominated Pashnipura village, a group of BJP workers had abandoned electioneering and started playing cards even as the party candidate, Ram Baksh Verma, tried to catch their attention. Explaining their indifference, Malhan Singh a local BJP office-bearer, said that they were committed to Sakshi Maharaj. Discounting the fact that the replaced candidate was also a Lodh, Malhan Singh branded him a "*kaagaz ke phool*" (paper flower).

According to BJP insiders belonging to the anti-Kalyan Singh group, the Chief Minister and Sakshi Maharaj are helping the S.P. in most of the seats the party is contesting. In a *quid pro quo*, the S.P. has fielded weak candidates in seats such as Faizabad and Hamirpur, from where Kalyan Singh loyalists, such as Vinay Katiyar and Gangacharan Rajput, are contesting. In Faizabad, the S.P. has replaced its sitting MP, Mitrasen Yadav, with Heeralal Yadav, who is an unknown entity.

While the support of Sakshi Maharaj and his associates does seem to boost the backward caste base of the S.P., there is also the danger that this might alienate Muslim voters from the party, particularly because leaders such as Sakshi Maharaj have been identified with the Ayodhya Ram Mandir movement. However, the S.P. leadership tries to present the revolt of Sakshi Maharaj as proof of trouble within the Sangh Parivar that would ultimately benefit the secular forces as it would lead to a split in the State BJP. What turn events will take is not clear, but it is evident that Mulayam Singh Yadav, the "great gambler of the Gangetic plains", is once again gambling with his political career. Outwardly, he exudes confidence and claims that the S.P. will win at least 50 seats.

A SIMILAR air of confidence is evident in the BSP camp despite the absence of any creative alliances. The party's best performance was in 1996 when it won six seats and polled 20.6 per cent of the total votes. Among the national parties, the BSP, with 4.8 per cent of the votes, occupies the fourth place in terms of vote share, behind the BJP, the Congress(I) and the CPI(M). Kanshi Ram told *Frontline* that he aimed at a five-fold increase in the seats tally and an increase in the vote share in order to move up to the third place. "This would enable the launch of the BSP in future battles," he said.

Sections of the BSP and the S.P. believe that both the leaders will have to work out some kind of an understanding after the elections, particularly in the context of the backward caste churning within the BJP as well as the resurgence of the Congress(I), which is an equal threat to both the parties.

Sections of the BSP are of the view that but for Mayawati's refusal to form alliances, the party could have performed better. Party insiders say that the differences over the question of seat-sharing between Kanshi Ram and Mayawati had surfaced in April itself when the Vajpayee government faced a vote of confidence. Arguing that the BJP was a bigger danger to the BSP, Kanshi Ram showed keenness to enter into a short-term alliance with the Congress(I) or the S.P. His manoeuvres relating to the vote of confidence, which ultimately led to the fall of the government, point to this move.

On the other hand, Mayawati's priority was to save the BJP government, either by voting for it or by abstaining from voting. Her proximity to Uttar Pradesh BJP leader Lalji Tandon, who is in turn close to Vajpayee, is said to have inspired this position. However, she had to conform to Kanshi Ram's line and lead the five-member BSP group in the Lok Sabha to vote against the government. The BSP chief had then successfully initiated a discussion to strike a deal with Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. Kanshi Ram, along with Sharad Pawar, then Leader of the Congress (I) in the Lok Sabha, worked out a deal that involved pulling down the Kalyan Singh Government and making Mayawati the Chief Minister with the support of the Congress(I) and the S.P.

Congress(I) leaders and Kanshi Ram apparently saw the "Uttar Pradesh operation" as the forerunner to the formation of a national alliance. However, the situation changed within a few days. The Congress(I) refused to accept the idea of a coalition government at the Centre and Mulayam Singh Yadav asserted that he would not allow a "foreigner" to become Prime Minister. In the process, the possibility of toppling Kalyan Singh receded. Mayawati has struck back by ruling out any alliance.

Kanshi Ram's persistence with the idea of a coalition with the Congress(I) came in the background of the collapse of both the "Uttar Pradesh operation" and the proposed alliance with the S.P. He tried to revive the deal that involves making Mayawati the Chief Minister and made it clear that he would part with only 25 seats in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress(I), which had initially made tall claims, steadily altered its demands and was even ready to accept what was offered by the BSP.

What finally brought the negotiations to an end was a rider that the Congress(I) attached any agreement. This was that the alliance should not be confined to Uttar Pradesh but should include Madhya Pradesh. Clearly, the Congress(I) wanted to make maximum gains from the potential of the BSP leadership to transfer its votes in any direction it deemed fit.

This proposal, however, was not acceptable to the BSP, partly because its Madhya Pradesh unit felt betrayed by the Congress(I) in the November Assembly elections. The BSP had supported the Congress(I) in more than half the seats on the basis of an understanding that a leader from a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe would be considered for the position of either Chief Minister or Deputy Chief Minister. After the elections, the Congress(I) failed to keep its promise.

Kanshi Ram has chosen a moderate path compared to Mulayam Singh Yadav's almost adventurist course. Sections of the BSP and the S.P. believe that both the leaders will have to work out some kind of an understanding after the elections, particularly in the context of the backward caste churning within the BJP as well as the resurgence of the Congress(I), which is an equal threat to both the parties. ■



KALYAN CHAUDHURI

UNLIKE in 1998, the major political parties in Bihar are polarised into two alliances in the 13th Lok Sabha elections.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led by Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies, are locked in straight contests in all the 54 seats.

Prominent features of the 1998 elections in Bihar were fractured alliances and multi-cornered contests. The United Front led by the Janata Dal, and the Left parties broke up over seat-sharing. The Janata Dal contested 36 constituencies as it could not resolve its differences with the Samajwadi Party and the Left parties. The Left parties deserted Laloo Prasad for his involvement in the fodder scam. But this move, instead of harming the RJD, caused setbacks to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Congress(I) and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Soren) made a mockery of their alliance with the ruling RJD. While a defiant Congress(I) contested 21 seats after Laloo Prasad unilaterally allotted it eight seats, seat-sharing talks with the JMM(S) collapsed. The Jharkhand parties – the JMM(S) and the Jharkhand People's Party – have merged on the eve of the elections. The JMM(S) is to contest all the 14 seats in south Bihar.

Bihar is the only State in the country other than Uttar Pradesh where the elections are being conducted in three phases, on September 18 and 25 and October 3. The Election Commission (E.C.) had taken precautions to prevent a breakdown of law and order, but the first phase of polling on September 18 in 19 constituencies witnessed a wave of violence (see box).

The prominent candidates include Laloo Prasad Yadav and Sharad Yadav in Madhepura, Ram Vilas Paswan in Hajipur, Nitish Kumar in Arah, George Fernandes in Nalanda, Babulal Marandi in Dumka and Kanti Singh in Bikramganj.

The banned ultra-Left organisation, the Marxist Communist Centre (MCC), which is engaged in an armed struggle in central Bihar and parts of south Bihar, had called upon voters to boycott the elections, describing all political parties as "'fountainheads of exploiters". The MCC decided to resist the election wherever it was strong. Landmine blasts and shoot-outs triggered by the MCC and the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (Party Unity), now known as the People's War Group, in order to enforce a similar call during the last elections, took





RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav addressing a gathering. (Below) Samata Party leaders Nitish Kumar and George Fernandes and Janata Dal (United) leaders Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan during electioneering in Bihar.

a heavy toll Thirty-seven people, including 17 policemen, were then killed in central and south Bihar



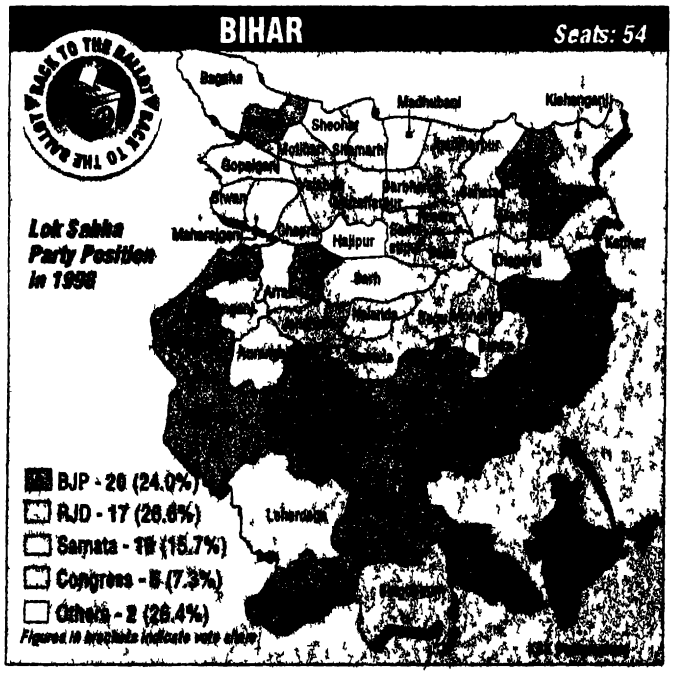
VIKRAM KUMAR/ AP

Voters belonging to lower castes raise a protest on being prevented from voting in Gaya on September 18.

THE act of the Janata Dal (United) led by Sharad Yadav in joining forces with the Samata Party and enter the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has clearly upset Laloo Prasad Yadav s vote bank the most and lent a new dimension to electoral politics in the State A pall of gloom descended on the RJD camp when in early August the Janata Dal(U)-Samata Party-Lok Shakti merger was formalised The RJD leaders had expected Sharad Yadav to support Laloo Prasad, but Ram Vilas Paswan and Nitish Kumar, founder of the Samata Party in Bihar, pulled off a coup in persuading Sharad Yadav to join the unity bandwagon

The Janata Dal(U)-Samata Party alliance could alter caste-based electoral equations, particularly in north Bihar, which is considered Laloo Prasad's fortress The RJD-Congress(I)-Rashtriya Janata Party combine won 23 of the 54 seats in 1998 primarily because of a division of votes between the Janata Dal and the BJP-Samata Party combine In 14 of the 23 constituencies, the RJD-Congress(I) alliance would have lost had the BJP-Samata Party group and the Janata Dal fielded candidates together The defeat of Sharad Yadav in Madhepur by Laloo Prasad by more than 52,000 votes was as a result of split in votes The Samata Party candidate garnered 60,000 votes, and the anti-Laloo Prasad votes went to the Samata Party Other seats that the Congress(I)-RJD combine won owing to a split in the anti-Laloo Prasad votes included Vaishali, Samastipur, Katihar, Sitamarhi, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Munger and Saharsa The BJP-Samata Party team broke the RJD chief's stranglehold over south and central Bihar, winning 30 seats This time the RJP chief, Ananda Mohan Singh, has himself allied with the BJP

Laloo Prasad Yadav received a jolt when his efforts to pull off a total alliance with the Left parties failed Unhappy with the RJD's decision to allot only three seats to it, the CPI raised the banner of revolt and decided to contest six more seats The Congress(I), with which the RJD entered into a pact in 1998, was initially unhappy, but the RJD managed to keep it happy by conceding to it 14 seats, one more than the number promised Reacting to the CPI's decision to contest nine constituencies, the RJD supremo declared that his party would put up candidates in the three seats earmarked for the CPI The RJD's agreement with the CPI(M) is complete with the latter expressing satisfaction with the two seats allotted to it The Marxist Coordination Committee of Arun Roy is also happy with the offer of one seat to it However, with the exit of the CPI from the alliance, Laloo Prasad has lost a potential ally and his last-ditch attempt to win over the CPI(M-L) failed



The seat-sharing agreement between the BJP and Janata Dal(U) is complete, The BJP has decided to contest 29 seats, three less than in the previous elections, and the Janata Dal(U) will contest 25. In 1998, the BJP contested 32 seats and the Samata Party 22. The BJP has conceded Sitamarhi, Siwan and Balia to the Janata Dal(U).

The NDA claims to be on a good wicket. Its constituents claim that they will increase their tally from 30 to 40 seats. They hope to secure the additional 10 seats in north Bihar. The BJP, which has so far drawn its strength from the Jharkhand area of south Bihar, has taken its bat-

A wave of extremist violence

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

Violent elections and invariably there is bloodshed in certain parts of the country. Despite the Election Commission's cautious decision to hold elections in three phases in Bihar in order to avert violence, extremist organisations struck in several parts of south and central Bihar on September 18, when the first phase of polling took place in 191 Lok Sabha constituencies. In landmine blasts and shootouts triggered by naxalites to enforce their call to boycott the elections, 38 persons were killed and 60 injured seriously. The dead included 31 members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Bihar Military Police (BMP), other policemen, two magistrates and two poll officials. Violence is expected also in 20 of the 35 constituencies in northern and central Bihar which will go to the polls on September 25 and October 3. The State registered 57.5 per cent voting on September 18.

The banned naxalite outfits, mainly the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity, now known as the People's War Group, turned virtually half of south Bihar into a treacherous minefield: landmines had been planted in most of the routes leading to the polling booths in the four south Bihar districts of Rohtas, Hazaribagh, Chatra and Palamau. The rapidity with which the blasts occurred unnerved the State administration. The Government said that the violence was due to stepped up naxalite activities, especially in the forests of Palamau and Hazaribagh. "We anticipated trouble, but not on the scale and the difficult to detect," said Home Secretary Laxman Parseya [illegible]

1996 in several south Bihar. Thirty-seven persons including 17 policemen, were killed in bomb explosions and shootouts. The extremists also targeted campaign vehicles and those of the security personnel, destroying 24 of them.

Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill said: "The [illegible] in Bihar become active on the eve of every election. This time they seem to have made a serious effort. There has been a great deal of violence in Bihar owing to social and ideological factors. Its polling in the



Victims of election-related violence in Johanabad on September 18.

South would depend on the details of the damage from the affected polling areas."

This is the first time that the MCC and the PWG have used powerful landmines to disrupt the poll process. Ten security personnel, including eight CRPF jawans, one assistant sub-inspector and a constable were killed when landmines planted by the extremists in the south Bihar district, tore apart their vehicles. Fourteen CRPF jawans and policemen were shot dead by MCC [illegible] Chando Anchal in Palamau [illegible] were returning after [illegible] who were hid- [illegible] forest of Chando, [illegible] carrying the per- [illegible] followed by a [illegible] in Hazaribagh. [illegible] men were killed. [illegible] Minister Yashwant [illegible] from this con- [illegible] Sinha is on the [illegible]

another person [illegible] in a blast at Barid, while two [illegible], including a policeman, were killed in a blast at Chainpa in Sasaram in central Bihar. Cadres were also reported from Jehanabad and Aurangabad in central Bihar. In a spirit of defiance that stretched from dawn to dusk, [illegible] incidents took place in Hazaribagh.

The violence was not totally unexpected. The MCC and the PWG have been distributing handbills over since the election dates were announced, threatening the voters with "dire consequences" if they participated in the process. The PWG, in a press release issued recently to Patna-based newspapers, claimed that it had raised "guerilla squads" for deployment in various places to enforce the boycott call. The ultra-Left organisations are reported to have asked their zonal committees "to unmask the double face" of the political parties and their leaders. On September 1, the MCC attacked the Nawadih block in Giridih parliamentary constituency and looted five rifles from the security men posted there.

There has been an upswing [illegible] in extremist-related incidents in south and central Bihar since 1994. According to official records, the police registered three cases of violence by the naxalites on police stations in 1994. The number of such cases rose to 15 in 1995. Twelve cases were reported in 1995, while 11 police stations were attacked in 1996. A total of 191 raids by the extremists have been officially registered between 1994 and 1996. In which 424 persons have [illegible]

tle into north Bihar, where the RJD's Muslim-Yadav formula has kept Laloo Prasad in the saddle. The BJP hopes that with Ram Vilas Paswan and Sharad Yadav on its side, it would be able to consolidate the support of the backward classes as well as the Koeris and Kurmis who favoured the Samata Party in the last elections. Incidentally, Nitish Kumar is a Kurmi.

The Janata Dal (U) is optimistic about a decisive result in its favour in north Bihar, which would alter the fate of the six persons who were members of the 12th Lok Sabha from the region. In 1998, the combined votes of the Janata Dal and the Samata Party here was more than the number of votes polled by the RJD.

However, it is unlikely that Dalits will back the BJP and its allies this time. The other backward classes are likely to dump the Janata Dal. In 1998, the Janata Dal won one seat and the RJD 17, indicating a clear shift in the pattern of support from the Janata Dal to the RJD.

DESPITE having spent time in jail in connection with the Rs.954-crore fodder scam and two attempts by the Centre to dismiss the Rabri Devi Government, Laloo Prasad has survived politically. This is primarily because of his support base comprising Muslims and Yadavs. They constitute about 27 per cent of Bihar's voters. The support of this section and that of OBCs and Dalits made Laloo Prasad formidable in the State where the caste factor plays a decisive role. However, in the current elections, the RJD could face an adverse turn, for, the Janata Dal(U), which has several Yadav leaders such as Sharad Yadav, Devendra Yadav, Nawal Kishore Rai and Dinesh Chandra Yadav, has allied itself with the NDA.

IN Bihar, which is polarised between pro- and anti-Laloo Prasad forces, the third front is of little significance. The third force here is made up of former Congress(I) Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra's Bharatiya Jan Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party of Sharad Pawar and BJP rebel Tarakant Jha's Bihar Vikash Party. This group has fielded 32 candidates across the State. However, it is not likely to make any impact except in Mithilanchal, where both Mishra and Jha wield some influence.

With neither the Yadav nor the minority voters expected to behave differently from the last elections, the Dalit vote is crucial and the two alliances have gone all out to [illegible] this section of the voters. ■



KALYAN CHAUDHURI

WEST BENGAL will witness three-cornered contests in all the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies that go to the polls on October 3. The three main political formations are the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led ruling Left Front, the Trinamul Congress-Bharatiya Janata Party combine and the Congress(I). With the sole aim of cutting into the Congress(I)'s vote share, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has fielded six candidates. It does not hope to win any seat, though.

For over two decades, the Left Front reigned supreme in State politics, but the situation changed somewhat following the emergence of the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine. The current election may well see some close finishes and interesting twists. By now the Left Front has realised perhaps better than any other party – as a political opponent, the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine is not to be equated with the Congress(I), which it has consistently beaten. The beleaguered Congress(I) has been unable to throw a stiff challenge to the Marxists since the latter assumed power, especially in Lok Sabha elections – except in 1984. That year, riding a sympathy wave following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Congress(I) won 16 seats, the highest since 1977.

The 1998 elections saw the marginalisation of the Congress(I) yet again, but the Trinamul Congress and the BJP together won eight seats – the former seven and the latter one. The Congress(I) won Malda, where A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury retained the seat for the third time in a row. Meanwhile, the Left Front repeated its 1996 performance by sending 33 MPs to the Lok Sabha. While the CPI(M) won 24 seats, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) won four, the CPI three and the Forward Bloc (F.B.) two.

The CPI(M) remains the frontrunner and is all set to walk away with a bigger chunk of seats this time. Its chief advantage is its wide organisational network, particularly in the rural areas, and a vast cadre force. Being the leading ruling party in the State is also a matter of advantage for it: no anti-incumbency factor is at play here.

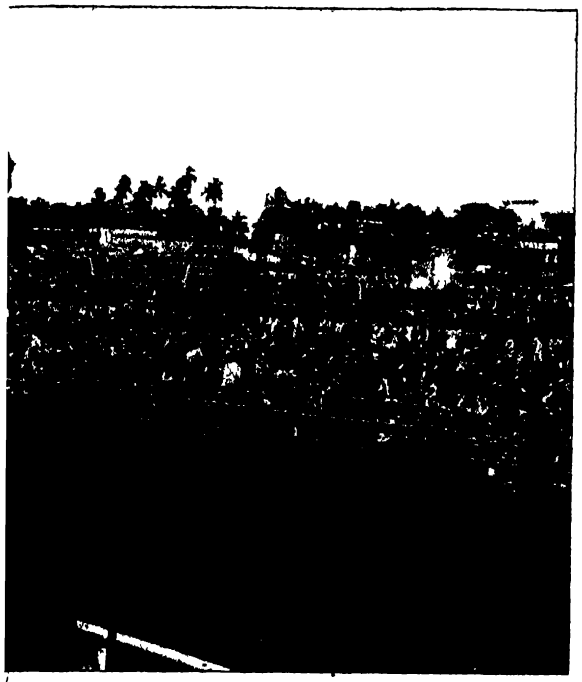


Chief Minister Jyoti Basu addressing an election rally at Lalbagh near Behrampur in Murshidabad district.

But the mighty CPI(M) is not without its share of problems. Factionalism has crept into the ranks. Though the party leadership managed to bring about some sort of a unity ahead of the elections, the malaise has sunk deep enough to cause discomfort to the leadership. Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, addressing a meeting of party workers on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Muzaffar Ahmed, one of the founders of the Communist Party of India, criticised comrades who encouraged factionalism. "It is unfortunate that a section of our comrades are indulging in groupism after being defeated in organisational elections. One should keep in mind that those who lose in the party's organisational elections are not our enemies. They are very much in the party," he said.

Another problem is posed by the differences among the Left Front's constituents. The F.B. and the RSP have defied the CPI(M) and the CPI to chart out independent political lines at the national level, the crux of which is equidistance from both the Congress(I) and the BJP. The F.B. and the RSP have recently moderated their stance in this regard slightly, but their basic differences with the CPI(M) and the CPI on the issue persist.

HOWEVER, the CPI(M) seems to be way ahead of its main political rivals mainly because of its well-oiled poll



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

machinery and its prudent management of the electoral scene. In 1998, the Left Front suffered a setback in Calcutta and its surrounding areas although it kept its votes together in the rural heartland, which accounts for a major chunk of seats.

The CPI(M) launched its campaign as soon as the election dates were announced. Although some senior members of the previous Lok Sabha were replaced, there was no wrangling over nominations. The CPI(M) is contesting 33 seats, the same number as in 1998. The RSP is contesting four seats, the CPI three and the F.B. two.

The Left Front has dropped nine candidates who contested last time. Two of those whose names have not been included this time – Ananda Pathak and Ajay Mukherjee, both belonging to the CPI(M) – won the Darjeeling and Krishnagar seats respectively. Left Front candidates who were defeated in the previous elections have been denied the ticket. The CPI(M) has fielded new faces in Jadavpur, Dum Dum and Malda, and in three Calcutta constituencies. In South Calcutta, CPI(M) candidate Subhankar Chakroborti, Vice-Chancellor of the Rabindra Bharati University, is facing Mamata Banerjee, who defeated Prasanta Sur of the CPI(M) by a huge margin in 1998. In Jadavpur, Kanti Ganguli, the CPI(M)'s Mayor-in-Council, has replaced Malini Bhattacharya, who was defeated by the Trinamul Congress' Krishna Bose in 1998.

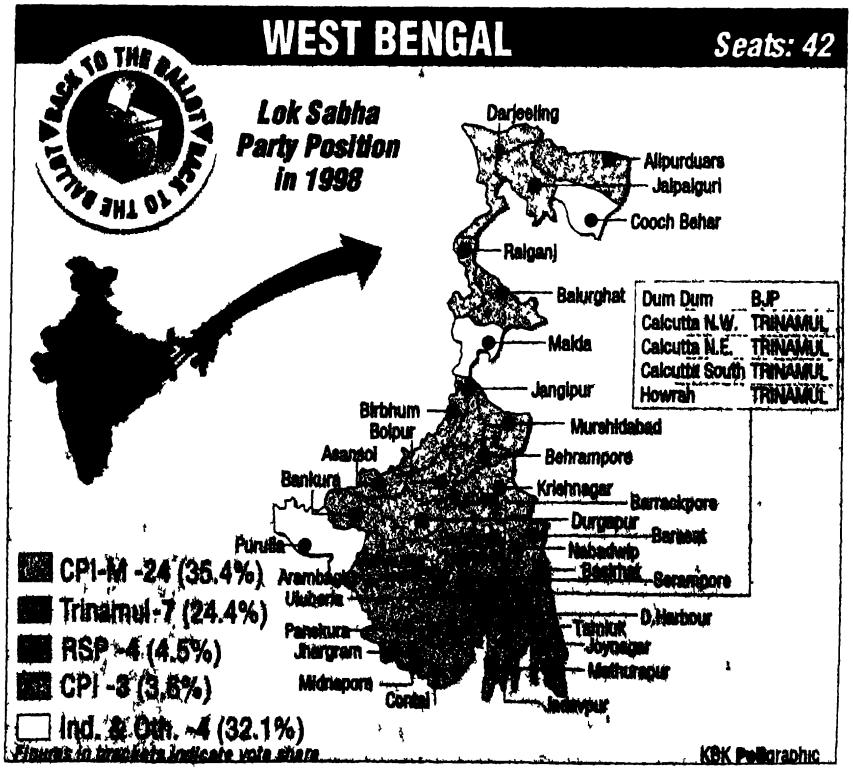
Octogenarian Marxist leader Jyoti Basu is the Left Front's main campaigner. After addressing a huge rally in Calcutta on September 5, he undertook a tour of the districts. As per the Election Commission's directive, he travelled by train or by car.

On the role of his party in Indian politics, Basu told *Frontline* that the Left parties were trying to instal a secular government at the Centre. That is why the CPI(M) wished to strengthen its base particularly in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Basu said that from the reports he received from the first round of elections, a hung Parliament was in prospect. Hence the Left parties will have to pick and choose its options.

STICKING to its electoral understanding, the Trinamul Congress is contesting 29 seats, leaving 13 seats to the BJP. A number of new names, including retired bureaucrats, figure in the Trinamul Congress' list. The BJP has renominated most of its candidates from the 1998 round. They include State party president Tapan Sikdar and vice-president Muzaffar Khan. Sikdar, the party's lone winner last time, defeated CPI(M) veteran Nirmal Chatterjee in Dum Dum.

For Mamata Banerjee, the biggest challenge lies in translating the apparent popular support for her into votes. She has had little time to hone the fledgling party into an effective organisational force that can challenge the CPI(M) comprehensively. The Trinamul Congress was the first party to announce its full list of candidates. But its wrangling with the BJP over the Bankura seat remains unresolved. The BJP nominated its veteran leader Sukumar Banerjee here, but Mamata Banerjee announced her unconditional support to the CPI(M) rebel Natabar Bagdi, MLA, in the constituency. Bagdi is contesting as an independent candidate. Thereupon, the BJP leadership approached Atal Behari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani with a request to dissuade her from supporting the CPI(M) rebel. But neither Vajpayee nor Advani would intervene. The BJP then withdrew the candidature of Sukumar Banerjee shortly after Mamata Banerjee announced that she would join the Vajpayee Cabinet if the BJP and its allies win the elections.

Despite her acknowledged crowd-pulling ability, this round of elections will prove to be a big test for Mamata Banerjee. For it will determine whether her reach goes beyond the urban areas to the countryside. Of the seven seats the Trinamul





SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee at a campaign stop. She is contesting from Calcutta South.

Congress won in 1998, four are in Calcutta. Mamata Banerjee's problem is that she has to carry the burden of her own party's campaign and also aid the BJP. The BJP would seem to have fewer worries here as a party, but its real challenge lies in its acceptance by the masses.

It is the faction-ridden Congress(I), which was enfeebled by Mamata Banerjee's revolt in 1998, that has come out the weakest in terms of poll preparedness, and it remains too demoralised to offer any effective challenge. The steady exodus of senior Congress(I) leaders and MLAs such as Pankaj Banerjee and Sadhan Pandey, former Member of Parliament Debi Pal, State president of the Indian National Trade Union Congress and former Congress(I) Minister Subrata Mukherjee to the Trinamul Congress, has further weakened the organisation.

The Congress(I), which won 36.2 and 40.09 per cent of the total votes polled in 1991 and 1996 respectively, cut a sorry figure in 1998 when it secured only about 15.2 per cent. This time, its voting percentage is expected to drop further. In 1998, elections, the Trinamul Congress and the BJP polled 24.43 and 10.19 per cent of the votes respectively. The Left Front got 46.83 per cent, nearly three percentage points less than in 1996.

An analysis of the previous results indicates that the Trinamul Congress had done well in the urban and industrial belts, but not in rural Bengal. In the urban constituencies, covering about 64 Assembly segments, it got about 46.39 per cent votes as against 39.34 per cent polled by the Left Front. In the industrial belt, covering about 80 Assembly segments, the Trinamul Congress and the Left Front polled 40.49 and 43.18 per cent respectively. In the rural belt, covering nearly 200 Assembly segments, the Left Front was far ahead. It secured about 49.42 per cent of the votes, while its main opponent polled about 30.62 per cent.

Nearly 15 per cent of the votes are seemingly still in the Congress(I) kitty, and any fresh gains by the Trinamul Congress could only mean a further division of anti-Left votes. The Left Front may gain from this division in right bloc votes to maintain its upper hand. ■



KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE Biju Janata Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance appears to be in a comfortable position in Orissa, where elections to the 21 Lok Sabha seats will be held on September 25 (10 seats) and October 3. With the Janata Dal (United) deciding to stay out of the contest following an exodus by its leaders and legislators to the BJD, it is a straight fight between the BJD-BJP alliance and the Congress(I). The State unit of the Janata Dal(U), which was on the verge of being disbanded almost as soon as it was formed, has, however, resolved to participate in the Assembly elections which are due in the next few months.

In the 1998 elections, between the allies, the BJD won nine out of the 12 seats it contested, and the BJP seven out of nine. The BJP won mostly from the tribal-dominated western and northern Orissa. The two parties are contesting the same number of seats this time. Among the 10 constituencies in which the Congress(I) and the combine were in a straight contest, the Congress(I) won only in two.

In its 22-point election manifesto, the BJD agreed with the National Agenda for Governance announced by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the national level. The manifesto promises special category status for the State. BJD president Naveen Patnaik and senior BJP leader Prashant Nanda said that they had no difficulty in reaching an accord as their common objective was to defeat the Congress(I). The leaders also announced that they would fight the Assembly polls jointly.

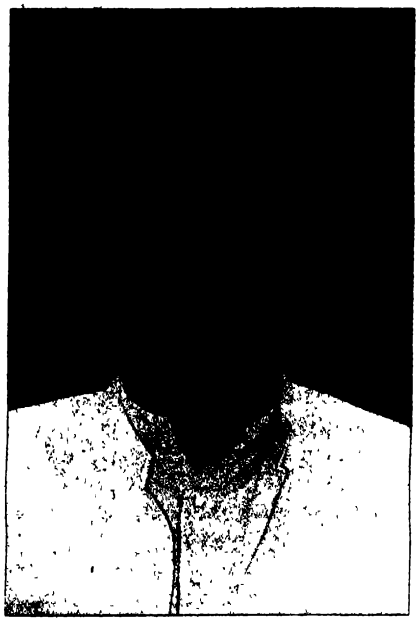
Naveen Patnaik said that the people had realised that the alliance was the only alternative to the "corrupt" Congress(I). Alleging that the ruling party's failure on all fronts had resulted in total lawlessness and a heavy financial burden on the exchequer, he pointed out that the Congress(I) did not keep its promise to provide 20 lakh jobs to the youth.

THE Congress(I), which won 17 parliamentary seats in 1996, suffered in March 1998 as a result of an anti-incumbency wave and won just five seats. Only twice in the past had the party fared badly in the State: in 1977 when it won four seats and in 1989 when it won three. The downfall of the Congress(I) began with the formation of the BJD four months before the 1998 elections as a consequence of a split in the Janata Dal. Several pollsters had then predicted a virtual sweep by the Congress(I) in the elections, arguing that the Congress(I) would benefit from a split in the Opposition vote. The Congress(I) leaders were at a loss to explain the reversal they experienced.

The Janata Dal, enfeebled by the split in the party, suffered one of its worst electoral debacles in 1998; it did not win a single seat in the State. The party's star candidate, former Union Minister



Jayanti Patnaik, Congress(I) candidate.



Naveen Patnaik, BJD leader.

SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Srikant Jena, finished third in Kendrapara. This key coastal constituency has been considered to be a safe seat for the Janata Dal.

Fearing dissidence, the BJD chief decided to play it safe by renominating all the nine members of the previous Lok Sabha and even three others who were defeated in the elections. At one point, Naveen Patnaik toyed with the idea of denying the ticket to candidates loyal to the rebel faction led by Bijoy Mahapatra. There was speculation that he would not renominate Prabhat Samantaray and Tathagat Satpathy who had been elected from Kendrapara and Dhenkanal respectively. Patnaik had suspended Samantaray and Satpathy, but had later reinstated them when the rebels challenged his leadership last year.

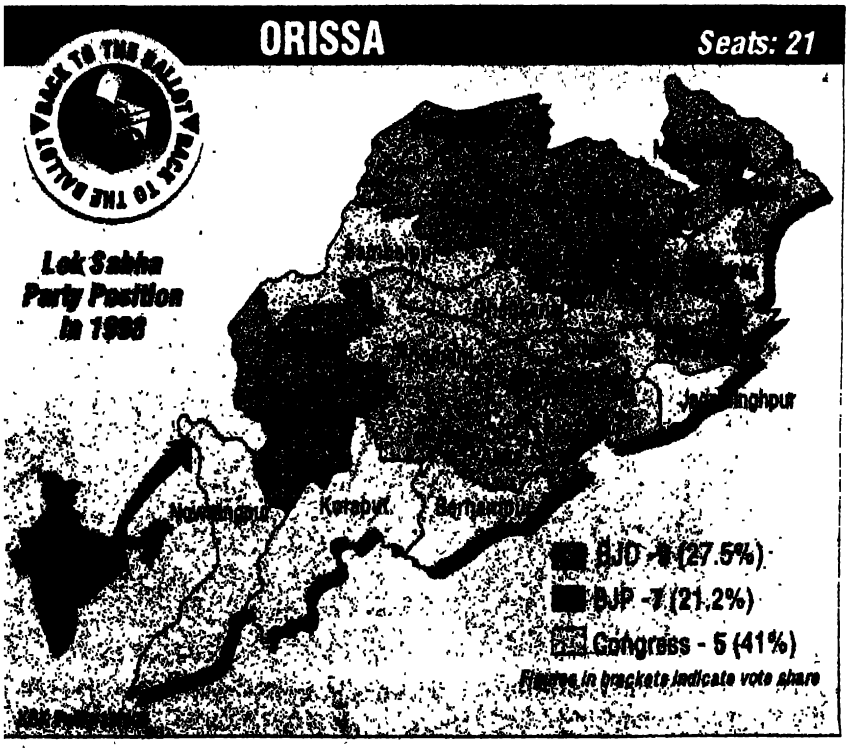
At the meeting of the party's political affairs committee called to finalise the list of candidates, Bijoy Mahapatra, chairman of the committee, staged a walk-out protesting against objections raised to the nomination of some of the former MPs. Mahapatra refused to chair the meeting and authorised the party president to finalise the list. Pressure from the rebel group forced Naveen Patnaik to renominate Samantaray and Satpathy. Naveen Patnaik had reportedly promised to allot two seats to the Janata Dal (U), a partner of the NDA, but could not keep his commitment.

The Congress(I) is contesting 20 constituencies. The party has fielded four women candidates and changed its nominees in four constituencies. It has extended support to the Communist Party of India nominee, Dutikrushna Panda, in Aska where Naveen Patnaik is contesting.

Prominent Congress(I) candidates include former Union Minister K.P. Singh Deo in Dhenkanal, Hemanand Biswal in Deogarh, Bhakta Charan Das in Kalahandi and Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang's wife, Hema Gamang, in Koraput. State Congress(I) president Biswal, who had a short stint as Chief Minister, is contesting parliamentary elections for the first time. Hema Gamang is also a first-time nominee. Two new Congress(I) candidates are Chandrashekhar Majhi for Nawrangpur and Yashwant Singh Laguri for Keonjhar. Majhi replaced Khagapati Pradhani, who declined to contest on health grounds. Pradhani was elected from Nawrangpur for eight consecutive terms. The BJP has fielded Union Minister of State for Surface Transport, Debendra Pradhan, in Deogarh.

The contest in Dhenkanal is attracting interest owing to the presence of Rudra Narayan Pani, a BJP rebel, in the fray. Political observers feel that Pani's presence is likely to help the Congress(I) candidate, Singh Deo, who was defeated by Tathagat Satpathy in 1998.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which has won the Bhubaneswar seat three times, is not contesting this time. CPI(M) State secretary Janardan Pati told *Frontline* that the decision was taken after consulting its allies, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the CPI. Pati admitted that his party had lost ground in Bhubaneswar. The veteran CPI(M) leader, Sivaji Patnaik, who was elected from Bhubaneswar in three previous elections, was defeated in 1998. Although the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Janata Dal (S) have not announced any understanding with the Congress(I), it is reported that they may well work for the Congress(I) in order to defeat the BJD-BJP combine. ■



Reports from other States featured separately.

Polls and opinions

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court forces the Election Commission to withdraw its ban on the publication in the media of the results of opinion polls and exit polls during a specified time-frame during the election process.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
V. VENKATESAN
in New Delhi

SHORTLY after withdrawing the "guidelines" that it had issued banning the publication of opinion polls and exit polls in the media while the country went through its month-long electoral exercise, the Election Commission issued a statement indicating that the questions it had raised still awaited a final resolution. "The substantive issue of opinion and exit polls in a poor and half-literate society, having multi-party democracy," said the Commission, "still remains to be debated by the country and by the new Parliament, in a calm, post-election atmosphere."

The statement, issued on September 14, was a virtual admission that the power of "superintendence, direction and control" that Article 324 of the Constitution confers on the Election Commission provides it only a limited jurisdiction. Its precise scope remains to be defined and codified through legislation. But in a situation of ambiguity, the Commission is not at liberty to take pre-emptive action that may enlarge the scope of its powers.

The Commission's statement seems to suggest an intention to bring these matters to the attention of the newly constituted Parliament for appropriate legislation. That would, if it happens, mark a long-overdue initiative. The "guidelines" issued by the Commission on August 20, just two weeks prior to the opening of the polls in an unprecedentedly long election schedule, were a reiteration of a set of principles that it spelt out in January 1998. They had elicited a legal challenge then, principally from the Editor of *Frontline*, N. Ram, which remained unsettled. In moving a writ petition before the Supreme Court on September 10, 1999, the Commission sought judicial sustenance for its view that the guidelines it had successively issued were tenable under the law. In a context of undefined executive powers, the intention was to hold non-compliance with the Commission's directives equivalent to contempt of court.

Since 1998, the Election Commission has tended to view the exercise of opinion polls and exit polls with considerable scepticism and misgiving. "The dissemination of such results of opinion polls receives wide publicity and coverage in the print and electronic media and such dissemination, particularly on the eve of polls, has the potential to influence the electors when they are in the mental process of making up of their minds to vote or not to vote for a certain political party or a candidate," the Commission had reasoned in its guidelines.

On exit polls, the Commission claimed that "publication of (the) result of any exit poll, in the intervening period when the poll in any of the States or Union Territories or constituencies is yet to be taken, is likely to affect the unbiased exercise of franchise by the elector, one way or the other." The Commission referred to restrictions on the dissemination of such poll results, particularly in Canada, France and Italy, where such controls have legal backing. In citing these analogies, the Commission did not seem quite willing to grapple with the manifest absence of a legal basis under Indian law for its guidelines.

What made the guidelines especially irksome from the point of view of the media was the prolonged period of their application. The publication of opinion and exit poll results in the print or electronic media was to be banned from 48 hours prior to the closing of polls in the first round of voting (September 5) till



RAJEEV BHATT

Chief Election Commissioner Dr. M.S. Gill with Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishnamurthy.

half an hour after the closing of polls in the last round (October 3).

Expectedly, certain media organisations proved less than mindful of the Commission's directives. This prompted the writ petition of September 10, which the Supreme Court bench consisting of Chief Justice A.S. Anand, Justice K.T. Thomas and Justice M. Srinivasan chose to refer to a Constitution Bench. In making this reference, Chief Justice Anand also ordered that papers pertaining to all the related petitions be circulated before the Constitution Bench. This brought to the foreground of judicial attention a set of petitions that had been filed in 1998. These included petitions filed by *Frontline* and its Editor, N. Ram, and the Tamil weekly *Nakkeeran* and its Editor, R. Rajagopal, apart from a petition filed by S.N. Tiwari, an individual from Rajasthan.

The Commission's petition specifically mentioned the Union Government, *The Times of India* and Jain TV as respondents. But the Commission suffered an early setback when the Union Government made clear its inability to implement the guidelines.

A Constitution Bench comprising Justices S.P. Bharucha, B.N. Kripal, V.N. Khare, S.M.H. Quadri and D.P. Mohapatra took up the matter on September 14. In the course of a four-hour hearing, the bench repeatedly asked the Commission's counsel, Harish Salve, to explain the grounds on which he expected the Supreme Court to help enforce its guidelines. The bench also sought to know how the government could possibly enforce the guidelines in question. Among other things, the bench wanted to know whether the Commission had the power to issue such guidelines and enforce them. Asking other agencies to implement them is no remedy, the bench said, especially since the judiciary could not play an executive role. Power to enforce a guideline is inherent in the power to issue it, the bench suggested.

A second point posed by the bench related to the judicial power to issue a writ of mandamus against individuals and organisations in the media. This power, it observed, was only invoked in cases involving the violation of fundamental rights. Individuals and organisations could seek such a writ against the state. But for the Commission to seek such a direction in its aid amounted to an inversion of constitutional principles.

The Commission, through its counsel, expressed the opinion that the defiance of its guidelines by some newspapers and television channels implied a challenge to the rule of law. As an authority empowered by the Constitution to take all measures to ensure free and fair elections, it enjoyed the requisite power to issue guidelines, Salve claimed.

At one stage, the bench wondered whether there was any point at all in challenging a set of guidelines that had no teeth. The court did not take up the issue of freedom of expression, guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution, since it was tilting towards the view that the guidelines themselves had no legal basis.

Shanti Bhushan, counsel for *Frontline*, as also for Jain TV, argued that Article 324 confers only administrative powers on the Commission. In other words, the Commission can direct and control all officials engaged in election duty and apply certain norms to candidates and political parties. These powers did not, however, extend to the media, which stand outside the election process, he argued. The Commission enjoys extraordinary powers only with regard to cancellation or postponement of elections, if the situation warrants. It can warn political parties and candidates about the likely consequences of violation of election law, Bhushan pointed out. The publication of opinion and exit poll results did not amount to any such violation. On the contrary, argued Bhushan, they could be useful inputs for voters to decide which party to endorse, which could contribute to political stability.

At one stage, the bench wondered whether there was any point at all in challenging a set of guidelines that had no teeth. The court did not take up the issue of freedom of expression, guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution. Although this was one of the grounds listed in *Frontline*'s petition seeking the quashing of the Commission's guidelines, the bench did not take up the question since it was tilting towards the view that the guidelines themselves had no legal basis.

The bench was not convinced by Salve's claim that the guidelines were the result of a near-consensus among the political parties, and that even the Press Council of India had recommended restrictions to be placed on the dissemination of the results of opinion and exit polls.

The Constitution Bench dismissed the Commission's writ petition at the admission stage itself saying that the petition had no merits. It rejected the Commission's plea that the bench should issue appropriate directions, or at least make a declaration that the guidelines are enforceable and legal. After dismissing the writ petition, the bench went on to examine the scope of Article 324 by hearing arguments on whether the Commission had the requisite powers to issue such guidelines.

When the E.C.'s counsel justified the Commission's powers under Article 324, Justice Bharucha told Salve that the bench had had enough of arguments, and asked whether the Commission expected the bench to write a judgment basing itself on Article 324, which would show that the Commission had far less powers than it claimed it had. The bench asked him whether the guidelines could be enforced on CNN or the BBC, international satellite television channels, or even on the Internet, if at all the Commission enjoyed the requisite power under Article 324. At this stage, Salve agreed with the bench, and requested a brief adjournment in order to get in touch with the Commission to find out whether it was willing to recall its guidelines.

After consultations he informed the court that the guidelines would be withdrawn. The course of prudence seemed appropriate in the light of a gentle admonition from the court, that at the "end of the day" the Commission may be left wielding a greatly diminished power for the supervision of elections.

Although the Commission has since indicated that it intends to keep the issue alive, there is little question that it has in overstretching itself, undermined even the residual sense of respect that sections of the media had shown towards its directives. The Supreme Court did not turn its attention to an examination of the desirability or otherwise of the restrictions proposed by the Commission. It merely examined the limited question of the Election Commission's powers and the existing legal underpinning for these. The hearing before the Constitution Bench clearly indicated that Article 324 could

not be stretched so far as to restrain the freedom of expression. A fuller exposition of this point was not given since the Election Commission sought to pre-empt a larger challenge to its authority by discreetly withdrawing its guidelines. The debate on the role of opinion and exit polls, and its impact on the voters will presumably continue.

An early contribution to the discourse on the subject came from N. Bhaskar Rao, chairman of the Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies. The public debate, he said, had served a salutary purpose, in making larger numbers of people aware of the potentialities and limitations of opinion polls. The veteran election analyst concedes that there is a growing tendency to abuse opinion polls to induce a certain pattern of voting behaviour. "But you cannot prohibit," he affirms. "The best course is to sensitise the voting public about the intricacies of these polls."

Bhaskar Rao's own research points towards a certain measurable influence of opinion polls on voting behaviour. "The impact varies according to the actual situation," he says. As a broad generalisation, he has found that the impact tends to be greater where a constituency is witnessing an exceptionally keen contest, or where a large number of voters remain undecided till late in the campaign. While the Commission may have a case, a total ban, says Bhaskar Rao, may not be the best way to pursue it.

The political reactions traversed a wide spectrum. Bharatiya Janata Party spokesman Arun Jaitley sought to interpret the Commission's capitulation as a triumph for the freedom of the media. Congress(I) spokesman Kapil Sibal reaffirmed his party's commitment to the law as interpreted by the highest court, though he did criticise the BJP for trying to portray its vested interests in Jain TV as a matter of high principle. Other parties, such as the Janata Dal (United) and the Samata Party, endorsed the notion of restraint by the media, but saw little merit in draconian administrative action to enforce it.

IN a related development, a Division Bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court had on September 7 quashed an order of the Election Commission prohibiting the broadcast of advertisements by political parties and candidates on private television channels during the elections. The judgment came on a writ petition filed by Gemini TV, a Telugu language channel, challenging an August 26 order of the Commission. ■

■ EDITORIAL

Polls, the media and elections

THE Supreme Court's dismissal of the Election Commission's petition seeking a 'declaration' to enforce a 'ban' on the publication by the Indian news media of the findings of pre-election public opinion polls and exit polls for a full month (September 3 to October 3, 1999) covering the general election process is an important practical triumph for the freedom of speech and expression. At another level, it is a setback to the authority of the Election Commission (E.C.), a constitutionally high body that has made a tireless effort in recent years to expand its realm of jurisdiction in the system and bring new players and subjects under its effective regulation if not control. Given the adverse turn in the case, when it could not show any legal basis for having its banning 'guidelines' of January 21, 1998 and August 20, 1999 enforced against the media and the pollsters, the Election Commission was obliged to withdraw the controversial guidelines whose language was constructed in the style of an order and make the best of the situation by asserting, in a press note, that the "substantive" and "complex" issue of opinion and exit polls "in a poor and half-literate society, having multi-party democracy" needed to be debated by the country and the new Parliament "in a calm, post-election atmosphere".

Interestingly, the apex court chose not to go into the principal basis of the legal challenge to the E.C.'s banning guidelines – that they violated the "fundamental right of free speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution" (to quote from the original petition filed in the Delhi High Court in January 1998 by *Frontline* and its Editor against the Election Commission). Going into this issue in depth and coming up with a new benchmark on Article 19(1)(a) weighed against other considerations would have required intensive and prolonged hearings, but there can be little doubt that had the apex court elected to take the strenuous course and determine this issue definitively, the banning guidelines would have stood zero chance against the force of Article 19. After all, the Supreme Court of India has, over decades and with remarkable consistency, upheld freedom of the press as an integral part of freedom of speech and expression – putting it virtually on a par with the unassailable First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press in the Constitution of the United States. Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution permits the imposition of "reasonable restrictions" on the fundamental right of free speech and expression on eight specified grounds and for no other reason. The eight grounds are: the sovereignty and integrity of India; the security of the State; friendly relations with foreign States; public order; decency or morality; contempt of Court; defamation; and incitement to an offence. No justification for the banning guidelines cited in the E.C.'s case could have remotely approached the definition and test of a "reasonable restriction" on free speech and expression under these specified heads. It can be added that in the highly unlikely event of Parliament legislating the substance of the E.C.'s guidelines into a statute, that also will stand no chance against Article 19.

Unsurprisingly, the E.C.'s case in the Supreme Court faded away when it failed to rebut the objection that the guidelines were legally unsustainable "because there is no power or authority with the Election Commission to gag the media in this manner" (to quote again from the *Frontline* petition). To make up for the weakness of its case, the E.C. attempted to take the high ground, arguing essentially that its empowerment by Article 324 of the Constitution for the "superintendence, direction and control

of elections" gave it wide powers that were more than adequate to issue these banning guidelines. The Constitution Bench that heard the matter made light of the contentions in favour of enforceability of the guidelines, calling attention to the absence of "any teeth" or legal basis for enforcement against "third parties" such as the media and the public (as distinct from political parties, candidates and state authorities involved in the conduct of elections). More interestingly, the Bench orally observed for the benefit of the E.C.: "At the end of the day, you may go with a perception that you have far less powers than the public perception."

ALL this should not detract from the excellence of the work done by the three-member Election Commission, which after all is conducting one of the wonders of the world, an Indian general election involving some 605 million eligible voters across wonderfully vast, diverse, varied and volatile circumstances. After the excesses of the Seshan era, the multi-member E.C. has not merely come to stay. Under the leadership of Dr. M.S. Gill, the Chief Election Commissioner, it has played an objective, fair, secular and eminently sensible role in the superintendence, direction and control of elections. It has intervened deftly and in time where warranted; guarded its independence and jurisdiction without making a song and dance about this; resisted improper attempted encroachments (by those like the acting Governor of Bihar, who has seemed in need of lessons in elementary constitutional functioning *vis-a-vis* both the E.C. and the elected State government) without inviting public confrontations; shown courage (as in deciding Bal Thackeray's disenfranchisement for a period on transparently just grounds) but avoided grandstanding; functioned as a team presiding over an election-conducting army of civilians that is without parallel anywhere else in the world; and served as a force for public education in the values and modalities of elective democracy.

However, the sweeping attempt to give opinion and exit polls a bad name and to suggest that such exercises detract from the freedom of choice by citizens and the democratic process itself, especially given the mix of mass poverty, huge illiteracy and multi-party democracy, cannot be upheld. Opinion and exit polls and psephology, the fairly young discipline that attempts to study electoral behaviour scientifically, have over the past 15 years made a qualitatively impressive contribution to an understanding of the Indian political process. In general, they have raised the level of public awareness of the opinions and views of various sections of society on political parties, candidates and issues. At their best, when they are conducted honestly, transparently and on the basis of the principles of statistical science and a rigorous scientific methodology, polls can serve as an antidote to partisan propaganda and baseless claims made on various sides. The carefully qualified, nuanced and understated presentation and analysis of the results of a series of State-wise opinion polls by Dr. Prannoy Roy, a pioneer of Indian psephology, over several days on Star News prior to this thirteenth general election is an example of the insight-providing and educative role of scientific polling.

Dr. Gill and the E.C. are doing an important service to democracy when they criticise and object to the recent trend of abuse of opinion and exit polls for partisan political ends. A notable example of manipulative use of polling over the manipulated media is Doordarshan's suspiciously timed telecast of the results of a shoddily done exit poll; the telecast was a crude attempt to influence the electorate in favour of the BJP-led combine. Would government-controlled Doordarshan have telecast, in mid-general election, the findings of an exit poll predicting victory for the Opposition? On the other hand, there is no need to exaggerate the direct impact of opinion and exit polls on mass voting behaviour. If there is a 'bandwagon' effect, there can also be a 'swimming-against-the-current' effect that energises those swimming against the political current to bring out their supporters in larger numbers and put up a more determined fight. In any case, under Indian conditions, the publication of opinion and exit polls cannot make anything more than a small, if not marginal, difference to how the masses vote.

NEVERTHELESS, the time has come to challenge the authenticity, transparency and competence of several polls commissioned and presented by the non-official and official media in India. Most of these polls fail to provide the reader with the minimum disclosure of technical and methodological information required by the code of conduct supposed to apply both to polling agencies and the news publications using their services. (Going by the record available in print and on television, a number of poll analysts and learned commentators do not care, or seem unable, to distinguish between *per cent* and *percentage points* while discussing shares of the popular vote, swings, and comparative electoral performance.) Then there is a distinctive problem posed by a first-past-the-post system under conditions of tremendous electoral diversity, unevenness and complexity – the problem of converting shares of the popular vote into seats while making predictions. Most seat predictions made by pollsters for Indian elections have nothing to do with statistical science and represent only plausible guesswork at best; with tall claims made and the methodology and formulae of share-of-the-vote to seat conversion unacceptably sought to be passed off as trade secret, such exercises often degenerate into pseudo-academic sharp practice.

What is required is a balanced and progressive attitude to polling and psephology, which is able to see the advantages they offer in providing relevant public information and raising public awareness in a democracy and also their limitations and the potential for abuse. The E.C. has erred in forming a one-sided, almost dogmatic opinion on the role of opinion and exit polls, seeing mainly the potential for, and the recent trends of, misuse; it has also tended to go beyond its jurisdiction and attempt drastic 'corrective' action that, on the one hand, conflicts with the constitutionally protected freedom of the media and, on the other, virtually abolishes close-to-the-election polling in India. If the E.C. changes its approach and converts its wholesale hostility to opinion and exit polling into a concretised moral campaign among the public against the manipulative and dishonest use of polling and against professional and media malpractice, it is likely to get a lot of intellectual and popular support. ■

CTBT contretemps

The entry-into-force deadline is here, but the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty clearly will not make it.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

ON September 24, 1996, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), opened for signatures after it was approved by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This year, that date, will mark the passage of the three-year deadline set by the Treaty's provisions to enable the CTBT to come into force. The Treaty can come into effect only if 44 specified countries ratify it and submit the instruments of ratification to the U.N. Secretary-General.

Article XIV of the Treaty lays down the requirements for its entry into force (EIF) (see box). The list of 44 states – Annex 2 of the Treaty – comprises the states that formally participated in the 1996 session of the Conference on Disarmament (C.D.).

The EIF clause, that mandates upon the 44 states to ratify the treaty, was a device evolved as a result of backroom manoeuvres to ensure that the (then) threshold states such as India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea were forced to become party to the Treaty. (Para 2 of Article XIV is poorly worded resulting in ambiguity with regard to the actual deadline though the Preparatory Commission of the CTBT Organisation (CTBTO-PrepCom) or the signatories to the Treaty do not seem to be overly concerned about it. It speaks of "three years after the date of the anniversary of its opening for signature". The ambiguity is essentially in the use of the word "anniversary" as it lends to the interpretation that the deadline is September 24, 2000. The accepted interpretation, however, seems to be September 24, 1999, although it is not clear how a court of law will view it.)

Paragraphs 2-3 of Article XIV, which allow annual conferences to enable the entry into force, was the result of the suggestion by the Canadian negotiators as they felt that a strict EIF provision would make it difficult to bring the Treaty into force promptly. It requires that a majority of the states that have deposited their instruments of ratification request a special conference "to consider and decide by consensus what measures consistent with international law may be undertaken to accelerate the ratification process in order to facilitate the early entry into force."

As of September 15, 1999, exactly 152 countries had signed the Treaty and 44 countries ratified it. Of these 44 states, only 21 are from the specified list of 44. Of the seven countries which have exploded nuclear devices, only France and the United Kingdom have ratified the Treaty. Israel and North Korea are the key threshold states that have not signed the ratification.

The U.N. Secretary-General has convened a Special EIF Facilitation Conference during October 6-8, 1999, after the Vienna-based ambassadors of a majority of the ratifying states made a request on May 11 as required under Article XIV.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Preparatory Committee meeting held in May in New York had provided the forum for an informal discussion among the ratifiers on the convening of the EIF Conference. The U.K. has been in the forefront of getting the EIF conference convened. The informal exercise of arriving at a proper agenda, procedures of the meeting and the measures to be proposed has been on since May 18 with Britain's Ambassador to Austria, John Freeman, serving as the "Consultative Chair".

The EIF clause stipulates that only ratifiers can vote at the conference. Signatories can attend only as "observers". It appears that even non-signatories and non-governmental organisations have been granted an "observer" status. Accordingly, India – a non-signatory – too has been invited. According to sources in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India is not likely to attend the meeting. The reasoning could be that since it cannot participate in the discussions, there is no point in attending the meeting.

External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh clearly stated the Indian position on CTBT in the post-Pokhran-II phase (see *Foreign Affairs Journal*, September-October 1998): "After the tests, India stated that it will henceforth observe a voluntary moratorium and refrain from conducting underground nuclear test explosions. It has also indicated a willingness to move toward a *de jure* formalisation of this declaration. The basic obligation of the CTBT is thus met: to undertake no more nuclear tests. *Since India already subscribes to the substance of the test ban treaty, all that remains is its actual signature.*" (emphasis added).

Pakistan, having declared a moratorium on nuclear tests, has adopted a somewhat similar position. In his UNGA address last year, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that Pakistan was ready to adhere to the CTBT "in an atmosphere free from coercion and pressure". He reiterated this in his National Defence College address on May 20. Some recent pronouncements have linked the signing of the CTBT to the lifting of sanctions, giving meaning to the phrase "atmosphere free from coercion and pressure". However, perhaps to save the embarrassment of being confronted with the question of signing the Treaty, having given some assurances at the last UNGA, Sharif has decided not to attend the session this year.

TOPPING the list of states whose ratification is essential for the Treaty making headway is the United States. The U.S., which holds the largest nuclear arsenal, has conducted 1,030 nuclear tests and has put in place the gold plated multi-billion dollar Stockpile Stewardship Programme (SSP) with the objective of being in readiness to resume nuclear testing if it becomes necessary for reasons of national security and "supreme national interests of the country". Ratification by other countries, particularly by China and Russia, would be predicated upon the U.S. ratifying it first. The issue of U.S. ratification has, however, been politically stalemated since President Bill Clinton transmitted it to the Senate on September 22, 1997 for its "advice and consent". The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Republican Senator Jesse Helms, has not held a single hearing on the Treaty. He is holding the CTBT hostage in order to get his political pound

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of flesh. Senate rules give the Foreign Relations Committee jurisdiction over treaties. While in principle it is possible that the Senate could give its consent after a single hearing, it is most unlikely to take up the Treaty for consideration as the topic is not listed for hearings.

With the deadline nearing, there is much evidence of pressure being mounted on Helms. On June 28, five Republican Senators wrote to Helms urging him to hold hearings. Armed with findings of a poll – which shows that 80 per cent of Republicans and 86 per cent of the Democrats, on the one hand, and 82 per cent of the general public, on the other, want the CTBT approved – Clinton and a group of nine bipartisan Senators issued a joint statement on July 20 calling for prompt action on the Treaty. On the same day, all the 45 Democratic Senators wrote to Helms calling for Senate hearings.

In a letter dated August 2 and addressed to Senator Trent Lott, the Senate majority leader (whose unstinted support Helms seems to enjoy), nine eminent scientists, including Dr. Hans Bethe, who headed an important division of the Manhattan Project, Dr. Freeman Dyson, Dr. Herbert York, founding director of the weapons facility, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, nuclear weapons specialist Dr. Richard Garwin, and some important former intelligence and military officials, called for prompt ratification. They pointed out that in the context of reports of Chinese nuclear espionage in the U.S., ratification of the CTBT was an essential and key step towards protecting the U.S. against weaponisation of stolen nuclear secrets.

On August 9, Clinton, in his address on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the current Chair, General Shulton, and four former Chairs had issued a statement endorsing the CTBT and urged Helms to hold hearings during this fall season. The most dramatic, however, is the statement on September 8 by Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan. Stating that the October conference should not proceed without the U.S. providing a leadership role, he has threatened to obstruct all Senate proceedings unless the CTBT is taken up for debate. Senator Helms appears unmoved.

The underlying issues are complex. While in U.S. domestic terms they are political, in global terms they have to do with issues of nuclear disarmament in general. The reasons for the other two Nuclear Weapon States (NWSs), Russia and China, having not ratified the Treaty stem from these considerations. The ratification in the U.S. has got linked to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the proposed defence postures of the U.S., the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-II), the alleged Chinese nuclear espionage and the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. India's opposition to the Treaty at the C.D. was primarily on the grounds that the Treaty, as adopted, had failed to address broader nuclear disarmament issues.

Ironically, after Pokhran-II, the BJP government's position on CTBT.... is being dictated by what one may call the "railway compartment mentality". The present government is all for signing the Treaty for some imagined *quid pro quo* from the U.S. administration, such as the transfer of dual-use technologies.

Ironically, after Pokhran-II, the BJP government's position on CTBT, aided by the arguments of the hawkish defence analysts and strategists, is being dictated by what one may call the "railway compartment mentality". Arguments related to disarmament have been thrown to the winds and the present government is all for signing the Treaty for some imagined *quid pro quo* from the U.S. administration, such as the transfer of dual-use technologies. Indeed, it would have gone ahead and signed the Treaty but for the fact that the government itself fell and the hold-out states now includes the U.S. as well.

The crux of the problem in the U.S. imbroglio is the proposed revision of the ABM Treaty which the U.S. is negotiating with Russia. Helms' contention is that the ABM Protocols and the Kyoto Protocol to the U.N. Convention on Climate Change have not been sent to the Foreign Relations Committee as required and, unless that is done, he will not take up the CTBT which is very low in his priority. A key issue in the proposed ABM Protocols pertains to the demarcation of Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) and ABM, the development and deployment of the latter being prohibited under the ABM Treaty. The objective of the revised protocols is to enable the development and deployment of the proposed National Missile Defence (NMD) system for which Clinton has sought a $10.5-billion funding between now and 2005.

On the one hand, Russia perceives the NMD to be violative of the ABM Treaty and will not move on START-II, which is awaiting ratification by the Duma, until ABM Treaty Protocols are renegotiated to its satisfaction and NMD is not pursued. Indeed, ratification has perhaps become even more remote in the light of the recent developments in Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the U.S. administration wants the immediate deployment of a robust NMD (which could include space-based weapons) for national security against the perceived emerging ballistic missile threats from North Korea, China and India, and views the proposed revision of the ABM Treaty to be restrictive. In fact, the hawkish Helms wants the ABM Treaty, which according to him is defunct after the collapse of the Soviet Union, scrapped so that the NMD can be established. "The Clinton administration wants to negotiate permission from Russia over whether the U.S. can protect itself from ballistic missile attack by North Korea. This is unacceptable," says Helms. Fearing that the new protocols will not get two-thirds majority in the Senate, and without the benefit of START-II ratification by Russia, the Clinton administration is unlikely to send it to the Senate.

ALTHOUGH unrelated to the CTBT or other arms control issues, the Clinton Administration does not want the Kyoto Protocol, which puts binding obligations on the U.S., accepted until there is stronger commitment from developing countries for greenhouse gas reduction. Clinton feels that it is premature to send the Kyoto Protocol to the Senate. But Clinton had, according to Helms, given a legally binding commitment to send the two treaties to the Senate. When this did not happen, Helms set June 1 as the deadline for a debate on the CTBT. June 1 has passed and Helms is steadfast in his refusal to consider the CTBT as the situation remains unchanged. Helms has also used the Indian nuclear tests as arguments for opposing the CTBT saying that

"the Indian tests, from a non-proliferation standpoint, have demonstrated that CTBT is scarcely more than a sham."

North Korea's August 1998 launch of the Taepo Dong-I missile, and reports of increased deployment of Chinese M-11 missiles opposite Taiwan, have had their ramifications in the U.S. debate on TMD in East Asia (proposed to be deployed in conjunction with Japan and Taiwan) and the NMD itself. This has increased the already tense Sino-U.S. relations after the Cox Report on nuclear espionage and the attack on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Beijing has argued that the development of an East Asian TMD would be inconsistent with U.S. commitments on the ABM Treaty. Chinese officials have warned that U.S. missile defences could force China to increase its offensive forces, or, due to the technology involved, lead to an arms race in space.

In his March 26 address at the C.D., Chinese President Jiang Zemin, even as he announced that the CTBT would soon be submitted to the National People's Congress for ratification, said: "Disarmament should not become a tool for stronger nations to exert control over weaker ones, still less should it be an instrument for a handful of countries to optimise their armament to seek unilateral security superiority. To reduce the armament of others while keeping ones own intact, to reduce the obsolete while developing the state-of-the-art, or even to sacrifice the security of others for one's own security and to require other countries to scrupulously abide by treaties while giving oneself the freedom of action by placing domestic laws above international law, all these are acts of double standards. They are a mockery of international disarmament efforts and run counter to the fundamental purposes and objectives of disarmament."

IN the light of all this, the likely scenario after September 24 is that the October EIF conference is unlikely to have these key countries as voting participants.

The status of 44 states

Status of the 44 states whose ratification is required for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to Enter into Force (Article XIV) as of September 16.

State	Date of signature	Date of ratification
Algeria	October 15, 1996	—
Argentina	September 24, 1996	December 4, 1998
Australia	September 24, 1996	July 9, 1998
Austria	September 24, 1996	March 13, 1998
Bangladesh	October 24, 1996	—
Belgium	September 24, 1996	June 29, 1999
Brazil	September 24, 1996	July 24, 1998
Bulgaria	September 24, 1996	—
Canada	September 24, 1996	December 18, 1998
Chile	September 24, 1996	—
China	September 24, 1996	—
Colombia	September 24, 1996	—
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	—	—
Democratic Republic of the Congo	October 4, 1996	—
Egypt	October 14, 1996	—
Finland	September 24, 1996	January 15, 1999
France	September 24, 1996	April 6, 1998
Germany	September 24, 1996	August 20, 1998
Hungary	September 25, 1996	July 13, 1999
India	—	—
Indonesia	September 24, 1996	—
Iran	September 24, 1996	—
Israel	September 25, 1996	—
Italy	September 24, 1996	February 1, 1999
Japan	September 24, 1996	July 8, 1997
Mexico	September 24, 1996	—
The Netherlands	September 24, 1996	March 23, 1999
Norway	September 24, 1996	July 15, 1999
Pakistan	—	—
Peru	September 25, 1996	November 12, 1997
Poland	September 24, 1996	May 25, 1999
Republic of Korea	September 24, 1996	—
Romania	September 24, 1996	—
Russian Federation	September 24, 1996	—
Slovakia	September 30, 1996	March 3, 1998
South Africa	September 24, 1996	March 30, 1999
Spain	September 24, 1996	July 31, 1998
Sweden	September 24, 1996	December 2, 1998
Switzerland	September 24, 1996	—
Turkey	September 24, 1996	—
Ukraine	September 27, 1996	—
United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	September 24, 1996	April 6, 1998
United States of America	September 24, 1996	—
Vietnam	September 24, 1996	—

[illegible] 44; signatories: 41; ratifications: 26.

With the U.S. absent, the conference is unlikely to take any significant decisions. Also, as MEA sources point out, since the UNGA will be held at the same time, nothing significant is likely to happen at the EIF meeting. So the question is: what would or what can the Conference do in terms of "measures to accelerate ratification"? Indeed, it would be interesting to speculate what kind of measures the remaining ratifiers will envisage to accelerate the process in the U.S.

What the EIF conference definitely cannot achieve is to waive the requirement of the 44 ratifying states to bring the Treaty into force. It also cannot make amendments to the Treaty. Indeed, during the C.D. negotiations, it was ensured that such a "waiver conference" is not permitted. However, John Holum, the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and Politico-Military Affairs, at a special briefing on April 7, 1998, after the U.K. and France ratified the Treaty, said: "They could adopt on their own a test ban treaty that would have all the same provisions but a different EIF provision. That's a theoretical possibility. Or they could decide on provisional application. I think any of those kinds of options would be very difficult to pursue because the EIF provisions were the product of very intense negotiations and... certainly, the two who have ratified last week have strong views on that question."

In all likelihood, the October conference will open with the opening remarks of all the ratifying states and conclude with a pious declaration with regard to the importance of the CTBT with a resolution calling upon the rest of the 44 states to ratify the Treaty at the earliest. The conference may also adopt a resolution to step up diplomatic efforts for the conclusion of the Treaty and a decision to convene another special EIF conference in 2000, if the CTBT is not in force by then. It is becoming increasingly clear that, unless nuclear disarmament is addressed in its entirety, the CTBT could remain a non-starter. ■

Pakistan's compulsions

AMIT BARUAH
in Islamabad

PAKISTAN'S decision not to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) at this stage comes as no surprise. Linked to this decision is the formal announcement that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will not visit New York to attend the ongoing United Nations General Assembly session. However, the issue reportedly figured in the discussion between Sharif's younger brother and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott in Washington on September 15.

Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz told *Dawn* on September 12: "We will not consider the signing of the CTBT till the time the sanctions imposed against Pakistan by the United States are removed." Aziz also told the newspaper that Pakistan had committed itself to signing it by September 1999 only if a coercion-free atmosphere was created. "Our condition has not yet been met so there is no question of signing the CTBT at this stage." The Foreign Minister said that the recent enunciation of a draft nuclear doctrine by India would have nothing to do with Pakistan's decision in this regard.

Addressing the U.N. General Assembly on September 23, 1998, Nawaz Sharif said: "We have declared a moratorium on nuclear testing; so has India. There is no reason why the two countries cannot adhere to the CTBT. In a nuclearised South Asia, the CTBT would have relevance if Pakistan and India are both parties to the Treaty."

Sharif said then that Pakistan would be ready to sign up in September 1999 in conditions "free from coercion or pressure". If India resumed testing while Pakistan adhered to the CTBT, Islamabad would invoke the "supreme interests clause" as provided under Article 9 of the Treaty, he said.

Earlier, speaking to the foreign media on May 23, 1998, prior to the Pakistani nuclear tests, the Prime Minister had questioned the relevance of the CTBT and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Sharif said: "Apart from threatening Pakistan, India is now blackmailing the world by offers of bargain on the CTBT. We believe that the Indian actions (tests) have rendered the non-proliferation regime and instruments such as the NPT and the CTBT irrelevant. The Indian tests have posed new challenges and dilemmas in the field of non-proliferation. Fresh thinking is now needed on these issues."

Clearly, between May and September 1998, Pakistan's thinking on the "relevance" of the CTBT had undergone a major change. From a position of considering the Treaty irrelevant, Pakistan shifted to a position of adhering to the CTBT in conditions free from coercion and pressure.

Whatever be the U.S. decision on lifting the Pressler sanctions on Pakistan, Islamabad will still link its decision on the CTBT to what India does. It would appear that Pakistan's decision not to link its stand to that of India on the CTBT stands reversed.

Similarly, while the Foreign Minister in his comments to *Dawn* on September 12 denied any linkage between India's nuclear doctrine and Pakistan's position on the CTBT, Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad gave a different opinion in a lecture delivered at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS) in Islamabad on September 7. He said: "If this (nuclear) doctrine is to be implemented, India will require nuclear warheads to be placed on its short, medium and longer-range missiles. It would want to match the other nuclear powers by developing thermonuclear weapons. Unless India has received nuclear weapons designs from clandestine sources, it will need further nuclear tests to achieve the advanced deployment capabilities it desires... the very possibility that India may conduct further nuclear tests creates doubts in Pakistan regarding the advisability of our early adherence to the CTBT. If India conducts further nuclear tests, this will, once again, oblige Pakistan to respond."

Shamshad Ahmad added: "Further nuclear tests by India will completely subvert the CTBT. The first priority for the world must be, therefore, to press India – and not Pakistan – to sign and ratify the CTBT and to reverse the preparations it has made for further nuclear tests."

Pakistan is keen that the U.S. should withdraw the Pressler Amendment, which imposed a ban on arms sales to Pakistan. Pakistan also wants to link its decision on the CTBT to what India does – at this moment Nawaz Sharif can ill-afford to be attacked by the Opposition for yet another "pro-U.S." action.

The Sharif Government had come in for considerable criticism for its July 4 accord with the United States to end the Kargil misadventure. With the Opposition mounting a challenge through street demonstrations, the Prime Minister would be loath to sign the CTBT at this stage. Hence the decision not to go to New York at this juncture.

Had India been in a position to adhere to the CTBT, Pakistan could have taken a decision on signing the Treaty with relative ease. However, the fall of the Vajpayee government complicated the situation for Pakistan. It also stalled the parallel U.S.-Pakistan and U.S.-India dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation.

In his September 7 lecture, Shamshad Ahmad also proposed that until the CTBT came into force, Pakistan and India "could formalise their unilateral moratoriums into a binding bilateral arrangement".

Whatever be the U.S. decision on lifting the Pressler sanctions on Pakistan, Islamabad will still link its decision on the CTBT to what India does. It would appear that Pakistan's decision not to link its stand to that of India on the CTBT stands reversed.

The Sharif Government also faces flak from right-wing Islamic elements which see any decision to sign the CTBT as a "sell-out of the Ummah". It is clear that for Pakistan, the economic dimension is crucial in any decision regarding the Treaty.

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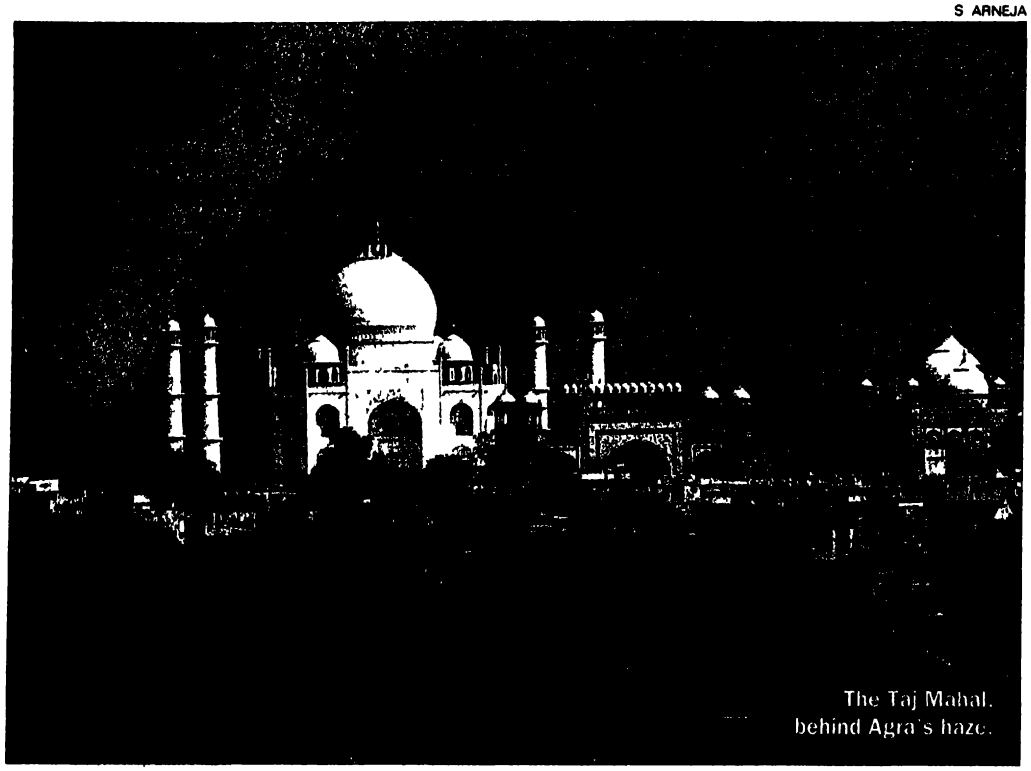
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The Taj Mahal, behind Agra's haze.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in Agra

AN August 31 order of the Supreme Court directing the closure of 168 iron foundries in Agra has upset foundry owners, workers, trade unions and the rest of the town's small-scale industry. The order constitutes the latest in a series of interventions by the court based on a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer M.C. Mehta in 1984 that first drew attention to damage caused to the Taj Mahal, the marble monument, by the polluting foundries and other industries located in an area known as the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ). Agra in Uttar Pradesh is one of five centres which have a cluster of foundries. The others are Rajkot in Gujarat, Batala in Punjab, Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Howrah in West Bengal.

The order directed the closure of 53 units immediately on the ground that they had not acted to contain their pollution level. The remaining units had either switched to or were looking for technical alternatives. Eight units had switched to natural gas as a substitute fuel and 107 units (78 of them cupola-based and 29 non-cupola-based – a cupola is a furnace for melting metals) had applied for natural gas connections. However, the court set a September 15 deadline for these 107 units to start using the new fuel. They had to suspend operations as the supply of coke and coal to them was stopped after the deadline.

Coke and coal used as fuel by the units were identified as the leading causes of pollution in the belt. An order passed by the apex court on December 30, 1996 had directed that those units which had not found an alternative plot in an industrial area or had not applied for a natural gas connection, should stop functioning from April 30, 1997. It wanted the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) to start supplying natural gas to these industries by June 30, 1997. And thereupon, the supply of coke and coal to them should be stopped.

GAIL informed the court that until December 1998 only 115 units had sought the supply of natural gas. By September 1998 GAIL completed the pipeline network to these units. However, according to GAIL, 79 cupola-based foundries did not come forward to complete the process. On April 4 this year, the court issued notices to the 79 units, asking them to show cause why they had not availed themselves of the facility from GAIL. They were also asked to state why their units should not be shut down.

On behalf of the 79 units, the Agra Iron Foundries' Association (AIFA) submitted that they were awaiting new technology from the National Metallurgical Laboratory (NML) and the Tata-Korf to upgrade their units. In a counter-affidavit filed on April 5, AIFA stated that the foundries had taken *bona fide* steps to upgrade technology that would enable the foundries to use natural gas instead of coal. It added that the upgradation process was not complete in 78 units (one unit was not cupola-based) and that as soon as the NML developed the technology and Tata-Korf manufactured new cupolas, the units would switch over to natural gas.

According to AIFA, the NML had conducted 10 trials of its new technology and these tests were not successful initially. It said that the foundries had paid GAIL Rs.2 lakhs as security deposit and Rs.6 lakhs as guarantee and Rs.32 lakhs to Tata-Korf towards consultancy and equipment cost.

According to the counter-affidavit, Tata-Korf had informed AIFA on April 26 that the cupola would be commissioned and stabilised by July and if it was working in a satisfactory fashion, the orders could be placed the same month. Tata-Korf had also mentioned that the demonstration unit would be ready only by late September.

However, AIFA members told *Frontline* that the initial trials were not successful and until the technology was foolproof, it would not be prudent for the foundries to switch to natural gas. Besides, Tata-Korf would complete supplying all the cupolas only by July 2001, by which time all the 78 units would shift to natural gas. The foundry owners were expecting to switch to natural gas only after September.

Prosecution counsel, however, argued that the 78 units were delaying the process of shifting to natural gas. Though GAIL was ready to supply gas to 115 units in December 1998, the units were not ready to convert, counsel said.

The court ordered that the 53 units which had not entered into an agreement with GAIL should stop operations immediately or move out. If they did not shift,

then it would be considered a breach of the December 1996 judgment. September 15 was the deadline for the 29 non-cupola industries – eight of which had already switched to gas – to convert to natural gas, failing which their supplies of coke or coal would stop.

Given that the conversion of the 78 cupola-based units would not be completed by July 2001, the court held that it will be a matter of grave concern if the atmospheric pollution (as noted in various reports) was allowed to continue. The court said: "The question is not strictly whether the 78 industries have or not acted *bona fide* in making some efforts for conversion to natural gas but assuming that they have taken some steps, the question is whether the danger to the environment does not require urgent action. The data already collected shows high levels of pollution in Agra in this area affecting the environment in the TTZ area."

According to a senior personnel manager of Sterling Machine Tools, the biggest industrial unit in Agra, the unit had taken a gas connection from GAIL and planned to start operations immediately. He said that production would suffer initially. SMT also shifted one of its coke-based cupolas to Dholpur in Rajasthan. "The gas furnace costs around Rs. 50 lakhs. While we have the money, small units do not," he said.

A leader of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said that the foundry industry was very exploitative and the working conditions hazardous in several ways. The majority of workers were on contract, even though they had put in a number of years at the same unit.

Some workers at G.T. Iron Industries, a casting unit that would be closed down following the non-supply of coke, told *Frontline* that they had heard of the court order and were unsure about where they would go if the unit closed down. All trade unions have opposed the closure order, as foundries are a major source of employment. But they also realise that the economy of Agra depends on preserving the Taj Mahal.

S.P Kashyap, former Principal of R.B.S College in Agra, said it was unfortunate that the focus was on pollution, and the closure of units and not on the workforce. Foundry owners relied on cheap and abundant labour. The prevalent economic insecurity had dealt a blow to workers' interests.

Dwelling on the crisis the industry would face, Pramod Garg, a representative of the National Chamber of Industry, Uttar Pradesh, said that the entire engineering trade depended on casting, which was one of the basic functions of the foundries here. He argued that the new technology would make furnaces more costly than the ones in use. On September 8, Garg, along with representatives of AIFA and Laghu Udyog Bharati, met Union Industry Minister Sikander Bakht to convey their apprehensions in the wake of the court order. They claimed that nearly 3,000 cottage and engineering units were dependent on the foundries and about three lakh workers were directly or indirectly employed. Pollution control systems were already installed in 168 units as per guidelines laid down by the Central and State Pollution Control Boards.

They said that there was no proven and feasible cokeless cupola technology available anywhere for small-scale foundries. Seeking to shift the responsibility for the pollution away from the foundries, they said that the increase in sulphur dioxide levels in the city was due to vehicular pollution and the running of 30,000 generator sets in the city. They asked the government to intervene by pleading to the apex court for more time for the foundries to change over to new technology. They also requested it to subsidise the technology transfer.

A review petition has been filed on behalf of AIFA. Unions, on their part, have decided to resort to an agitation after the elections. No political party has raised the closure of the units as an election issue. ■



S SUBRAMANIUM



S SUBRAMANIUM

An old cupola or furnace in an iron foundry and (below) a new cupola installed in another.

Targeting Dalit voters

The consolidation of Dalits and the fear that they may turn out in large numbers on polling day, leads to sporadic incidents in a constituency in Tamil Nadu.

S. VISWANATHAN
in Cuddalore

WHEN a Dalit panchayat president and five of his Dalit associates were massacred in Madurai district in July 1997, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi criticised caste Hindu intolerance of the political empowerment of Dalits (*Frontline*, July 25, 1997). Two years later, a large number of Dalits were prevented from exercising their franchise and those who dared to vote were beaten up and their houses set afire. Strangely, this happened in Chidambaram (Reserved) parliamentary constituency, one of the seven constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu on September 5.

A significant feature of the 1999 Lok Sabha elections in the State is the consolidation of Dalits and attempts by some of their organisations, which fight for their empowerment, to join the political mainstream. Branded variously as "terrorists", "disruptive forces" or "anti-social elements" by parties which depend on caste-based political mobilisation, these organisations seem to have realised the futility of fighting in isolation and have started showing greater interest in electoral politics. Most of them perceive the Dravidian parties as "not friendly" towards Dalits, and the Bharatiya Janata Party as a party of oppressive forces. The decision of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) to steer clear of both the fronts in the State, one led by the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the other by the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), gave these organisations the political space they needed.

The death of 11 Dalits (along with six others) in a police action against a procession of striking tea estate workers at Tirunelveli on July 22 united the Dalit organisations and paved the way for their entry into the front led by the TMC. With a minimum of 15 to 20 per cent Dalit presence in almost all the constituencies in the State, the move was seen as having the potential to tilt the electoral balance (*Frontline*, August 27).

As expected, the development caused resentment among some of the mainstream parties, which depend on the support of certain castes, which are seen by Dalits as being inimical to them.

The resentment over Dalit consolidation appeared to be more pronounced in areas which have a substantial Dalit presence and which have witnessed frequent caste-related violence. With a 35 per cent Dalit share in the electorate, Chidambaram (R) constituency is one such vulnerable area. In this constituency, the Vanniya caste forms a substantial chunk of the population. Vanniyas, who figure in the "most backward caste" (MBC) list, occupy a position slightly above Dalits in the social ladder; the economic lot of a majority of Vanniyas is no better than that of Dalits.

The two sections had been fighting each other until a few years ago. The founder of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Dr. S. Ramadoss, built bridges between the two when he converted his Vanniyar Sangam into a political party in 1989. Although there were sporadic incidents, peace prevailed even when the southern districts were rocked by caste-related violence. This unity, which helped Ramadoss build his political base in about six parliamentary constituencies, was shaken a year ago when differences surfaced over the functioning of the PMK general secretary and former Union Minister for Social Welfare, Dalit Ezhilmalai. Ezhilmalai left the party and joined the AIADMK on the eve of the elections, when he was denied the party ticket to seek re-election from Chidambaram.



G SUKUMARAN

The belongings of a Dalit villager in Thathankuppam reduced to ashes. Intimidatory tactics were used to prevent Dalits from voting in the Lok Sabha elections.

Under these circumstances, the elections in Chidambaram assumed significance. It was a high-stakes contest for the PMK as its candidate, P. Ponnusamy, was to take on the Dalit Panthers convener, R. Thirumavalavan, who is popular among Dalits. Dalit Panthers is a member of the TMC-led front. The situation became tense right from the day of filing of nominations. Leaders from both sides reportedly made provocative speeches.

The hectic campaign was expected to draw an unprece-



G. SUKUMARAN

In Annaiyampettai, a Vanniya village, houses burnt following a clash.

dented Dalit turn-out on polling day. Vanniyas appeared equally determined to face the challenge. It is not, therefore, surprising that the no-holds-barred electioneering culminated in large-scale violence on election day. Dalits said that they were prevented from voting and when they resisted, violence was unleashed on them. Their houses were burnt and property damaged. They alleged that impersonation and bogus voting were widespread in a number of polling stations. In areas which have a higher concentration of Dalits, Vanniyas complained that they were prevented by Dalits from voting. Their houses were allegedly torched by Dalits.

SINCE Dalits, who are mostly agricultural workers, could not turn up during the morning hours, non-Dalits came in large numbers to vote. The polling agents of Thirumavalavan were terrorised, beaten and driven out. Dalit voters standing in the queues were intimidated. In the absence of polling agents it became easier for miscreants to manipulate the polling. In certain areas, Vanniyas trooped into the booths, jumped the queues and voted. The pattern was similar in about 50 villages. Even in an urban booth in Neyveli township, a polling agent complained of malpractices. He said the time-consuming process of challenging a vote deterred the agents from lodging complaints.

In a statement issued on September 6, the TMC accused the DMK and the PMK of keeping the administration and the election machinery under their command, taking full control of the booths and preventing Dalits from exercising their franchise. The DMK-PMK combine made a mockery of parliamentary democracy by "imprisoning" Dalits in their homes, the TMC said, and urged the Election Commission to order repoll in 50 booths under the supervision of its observers.

Chief Electoral Officer Naresh Gupta turned down the demand. "We do not find any *prima facie* case," he said. According to him, the District Collector and the Returning Officer had reported to him that there were some caste-related clashes in the constituency but that these did not affect the electoral process. On September 6, polling day, there were more incidents of violence involving Dalits and Vanniyas in many areas of the constituency. Over 100 houses were reportedly burnt. The police fired in the air to disperse clashing groups at Ambalpuram, near Bhuvanagiri.

On September 12, Thirumavalavan went on a fast in Chennai to press for a repoll in certain booths; he wound it up in the evening, responding to an appeal from Moopanar. Moopanar expressed his solidarity with the Dalit leader and said that malpractices did take place in Chidambaram.

Thirumavalavan told *Frontline* that they would also demand that the E.C. send investigators to identify the polling stations where repoll would have to be ordered and arrange for the despatch of Central police forces at the time of counting. He said that the authorities had not acted on a petition he gave on September 2 listing about 125 booths where he feared possible malpractices and violence. He also demanded speedy relief measures in the affected areas.

A week after the incidents, the affected areas were still tense. Lenin Nagar colony in Thiagavalli, where almost all the houses had been burnt, looked forsaken. Only one resident was found there along with two policemen. The people who fled for life stay in a Dalit colony across the river that borders the village. At Anukkampattu, the dazed people declined to speak. A youth who served as a polling agent refused to talk as policemen were around. At another Dalit village, only the women remained: the men had to seek shelter elsewhere. People in the affected areas said the cash relief of Rs.1,000 was inadequate to take care of their immediate needs. At Alampakkam and Anaiyampettai, Vanniyas said that they were prevented by the majority Dalits from voting. A number of Vanniya families have lost property in arson. Apart from houses, about 2,000 ducks were scorched in Anaiyampettai. Although the police and the district administration failed to take preventive measures, they could contain the trouble. Police patrols were seen in several places and fire service vehicles were kept in readiness. Of the 504 persons arrested in connection with the incidents, 400 are Dalits. Nearly 60 Dalits and Vanniyas who were injured in the clashes were admitted to the Cuddalore General Hospital.

A. Devanathan, member of the PMK Politburo, agreed with the Collector's perception that repoll was unwarranted. Fact-finding teams sent by People's Watch, a Madurai-based human rights organisation, and the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry units of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), however, concluded that Dalits were prevented from voting in more than 25 villages and wanted the E.C. to ensure their right to vote. K. Balakrishnan, member, State Secretariat of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), who headed a study team that visited the areas, said that in a large number of villages, Dalits were prevented from voting and there was large-scale rigging. Dalits who defied the threats were attacked. Pondicherry PUCL president D. Ravikumar said that if Dalits could not exercise their right to vote even in a reserved constituency there was the danger of these hapless people losing faith in the political system itself. ■

Making the caller pay

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's proposal to make the calling party pay for calls to mobile phone subscribers reflects a peculiar concern for protecting the interests of the elite segment at the expense of basic service subscribers.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY



If the TRAI's 'Calling Party Pays' proposal is implemented, basic service operators and subscribers will end up subsidising cellular phone services.

WHO should pay for telephone calls made by a fixed line subscriber to a cellular phone subscriber? Up until now, it is the latter who has had to pay for the privilege of being able to receive calls even when he or she is on the move (after screening incoming calls using a caller-identification facility) However, a recent proposal put forward by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which is likely to be notified soon, seeks to shift the cost of calling to the fixed line subscriber Further, tariff on such calls will be higher than that for calls from one fixed line to another What is more, the basic service provider is required to share the revenue from such calls with the cellular licensee in whose network the call terminates, in a ratio that leaves one-third to the former and two-thirds to the latter

In putting forward the 'Calling Party Pays' (CPP) proposal, the TRAI has parroted the private cellular licensee's claim that charging cellular phone subscribers for incoming calls has had a dampening effect on cellular phone usage and that doing away with incoming call charges for cellular phone subscribers would improve usage The effect of this proposal, however, will be that a fixed line subscriber (utilising what may be called an essential service) who calls a cellular phone subscriber will end up subsidising the latter's premium service

A TRAI consultation paper dated August 31, which discusses the CPP proposal, says that calls from fixed lines to cellular telephones are "premium calls" to access persons whom it may not be possible to access through fixed line telephony Seeking to offer a rationale for the higher tariff on such calls, the paper states that "the higher charge will reduce the asymmetry in the charge for calls from basic service to cellular mobile and *vice-*

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versa." This, it says, would reduce the likelihood of the cellular phone network coming under "undue pressure" which would "adversely affect" the quality of service.

The paper further states that a portion of the increase in the charge for calls from fixed lines to cellular phones should go to the cellular service operator in order to provide an "incentive" to the latter to maintain the network for incoming calls.

The TRAI has, therefore, proposed that a fixed line subscriber calling a mobile cellular phone subscriber will now pay between Rs.2.40 and Rs.3.60 for a two-minute call (depending upon his or her usage bracket). As stated, two-thirds of this revenue will go to the cellular operator. (The regulatory body had originally proposed a tariff of Rs.3.90 a minute on such calls, with 85 per cent of the revenue going to the cellular operator. Subsequently, it modified the tariff to Rs.1.20 per metered call unit and the share to 50 per cent. This was subsequently modified as now proposed.)

TRAI member N.S. Ramachandran told *Frontline* that the cellular network set up by licensees at considerable cost was being underutilised and that the CPP proposal would improve its usage. However, the point is whether cellular phone usage needs to be improved in the first place: many cellular phone subscribers state that cellular networks are often more congested than fixed line networks.

A TRAI member claimed that the "incentive" that the TRAI seeks to confer upon cellular subscribers through the CPP regime and the substantial lowering of rental and call charges consequent on the migration to a revenue-sharing regime (*Frontline*, August 27) are likely to make cellular phone services affordable even in the rural areas where the basic telephone network itself has a limited reach. That claim, however, sounds hollow in view of the tariff differential between the two services.

THE TRAI's consultation paper on the implications of the CPP regime came in for discussion at an Open House in New Delhi in early September. Here, cellular licensees' representatives argued that the tariff proposed (Rs.1.20 per metered call unit) was too low and that the revenue sharing formula (50 per cent) was not good enough. Consequently, the TRAI arbitrarily and without any serious consideration of the economics of the ratio and its likely impact on either the fixed line subscriber or the basic service provider, hiked the tariff and the cellular licensees' share under the CPP regime, it was stated.

Currently, basic service providers receive a revenue of between 80 paise to Rs.1.20 per call on calls made to cellular phones. Under the CPP regime, despite the higher tariff on such calls, the basic service provider will make a net loss on some calls, after providing two-thirds of such revenue to cellular phone licensees. Senior officials in the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) told *Frontline* that DoT revenues would drop by about Rs.100 crores a year under the effect of the CPP regime.

The TRAI's consultation paper presents various cost-computation scenarios, but the basis of the computations is far from clear. What is clear, however, is that the implementation of the CPP regime will boost the revenues of the cellular licensees at the expense of the basic service subscribers and providers.

It would not be unreasonable to say that cellular phone subscribers are the elite segment among phone users; quite a few of them have their bills picked up by their businesses. Yet, the TRAI proposal suggests that the fixed line subscribers (who do not constitute the elite segment) should, in effect, subsidise the elite segment.

Curiously, the TRAI had pulled up Usha Martin Telecom, a cellular licensee, for offering free incoming call facility to its subscribers. (Usha Martin Telecom had announced that it would absorb the additional costs.) The TRAI's CPP proposal will now have the effect of allowing all cellular phone licensees (most of whom were not willing to absorb the cost) to offer the free incoming call facility to their subscribers by shifting the costs to fixed line subscribers.

As a justification for the CPP proposal, the TRAI cites the prevalence of the CPP regime in many other countries. The comparison, however, is anomalous, given the very low teledensity in India and the fact that in India, rentals on fixed lines (which were increased only recently) and charges for calls from one fixed to another are still very high as compared to many other countries. Illustratively, even in the United States, where cellular telephone subscribers are no longer considered an elite segment, a CPP regime has not been implemented.

The CPP regime which is to take effect in India from November 1 clearly goes against the basic tenets of the New Telecom Policy, one of the aims of which is to provide telephone services to the common person at affordable rates.

THE TRAI proposal on the CPP regime is of a piece with many of its earlier rulings reflecting the regulator's views on the objectives of the privatisation of telecom services.

Last year, a TRAI ruling sought to limit competition in cellular telephony by questioning the eligibility of the public sector Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) to offer the service. Even after the New Telecom Policy unequivocally set at rest any such doubts and the Delhi High Court endorsed the position, the TRAI has once again questioned MTNL's remit to provide mobile phones of Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) technology, under the terms of its licence. The TRAI's exercise is likely to delay MTNL's entry.

Earlier, with misplaced and rather exaggerated concern over its own jurisdiction and authority, the TRAI had invalidated the government's Internet policy; the ruling delayed by a year the entry of private Internet Service Providers, to the detriment of subscribers' interests.

In the past, some of the TRAI's rulings have reflected a peculiar concern for the interests of private licensees *vis-a-vis* the state, and for the more affluent subscribers *vis-a-vis* the less affluent ones. For instance, last year, it stopped the DoT from encashing bank guarantees furnished by licensees who had defaulted on their dues.

Nowhere was the TRAI's misplaced priorities more manifest than in its controversial tariff proposal announced on March 9 (*Frontline*, April 9). The proposal sought to raise rentals and call charges for basic service subscribers who used their phones sparingly (as a domestic utility rather than for commercial purposes) and simultaneously sought to lower long-distance call rates. The TRAI had then offered the specious argument that the subscriber who used his or her telephone more intensively should be rewarded with lower tariffs, and that those who used the utility sparingly should be made to bear a proportionately higher burden of the cost of provision of such services. Following a public debate of the proposals, the more controversial aspects of the proposal were jettisoned, but not before an ugly confrontation between the government and the regulator had vitiated the atmosphere. ■



A prayer hall destroyed in Gujarat's Dangs district earlier this year.

ROBERT NICKLESBERG/GAMMA

■ INDIA AND THE U.S.

The view from Washington

A U.S. State Department report on religious freedom in India criticises the BJP and other "Hindu organisations" for their campaigns against Christians, administering a shock to the BJP-led government which has been seeking to move closer to Washington.

JOHN CHERIAN

THE Bharatiya Janata Party-led government has often claimed that India's relations with the United States improved qualitatively since it assumed power at the Centre. Top BJP functionaries point to the Clinton administration's tilt towards India during the Kargil crisis as an indication of this change. The BJP-led government left no stone unturned to get on the anti-terrorism bandwagon of the U.S. For the Clinton administration and the BJP regime, terrorism was another word for radical Islam. In early September, two senior Indian officials went to Washington to discuss with their counterparts in the U.S. State Department the problem terrorism in Afghanistan.

Given this background, the Central Government was perhaps taken aback by the U.S. State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999, which sharply criticised the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and "other Hindu organisations" for their attitude towards religious conversion and non-Hindus. The report was released on September 9 in Washington. Media reports from Washington said that the Clinton administration's special representative for international religious freedom, Robert Seiple, will visit India for a first-hand look at the situation. "There are a lot of things that happened last year that are troubling," Seiple told mediapersons in Washington.

The State Department report on religious freedom is lengthy and covers 194 countries and territories. While acknowledging that the Constitution of India guarantees religious freedom, it specifically mentions that in 1998 and 1999 "there was an unusual and serious outbreak of societal violence against Christians", apparently sparked by rumours of "forced conversions". The report adds that "efforts to prevent such incidents from occurring and to prosecute those responsible at the state and local levels were inadequate."

To bolster its arguments, the State Department report quotes from United Nation documents, including the report of the U.N. Special Rapporteur for all Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion. The U.N. official's report had cited "traumatic situations" in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab as well as inter-communal incidents in other

parts of the country. The report also says that Indian human rights organisations have reported more than 90 incidents of attacks on Christian communities and institutions in 1998.

The report gives various other examples of the present government's culpability in spreading the communal virus. One, Union Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi's plan to "Indianise and spiritualise" government school curriculums all over India and to make the study of Sanskrit compulsory from Class III to Class X. The report describes the BJP as one of the "off-shoots of the RSS, an organisation that espouses a return to Hindu values and cultural norms". While the BJP at the national level has downplayed its Hindu nationalist agenda, Christian groups have noted the coincidence of its coming to power and an increase in complaints of discrimination against minority religious communities, it says.

According to the document, Washington has conveyed to senior Indian leaders and government officials its "deep concern" over the attacks on Christians in 1998 and early 1999 that were carried out by groups loosely affiliated with the BJP. In this connection, the U.S. Ambassador to India, Richard Celeste, met Union Home Minister L.K. Advani and BJP president Khushabhau Thakre in late 1998. In January 1999, Karl Inderfurth, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, met the Indian Ambassador to the U.S., Naresh Chandra, to express concern about "the prosecution" of Christians in India. There have been half a dozen high-level meetings between the U.S. and Indian officials in 1999, including one between Robert Seiple and Naresh Chandra in Washington in February 1999.

THE BJP-led government has given the Clinton administration plenty of excuses to meddle in the affairs of the country. When the Clinton administration first raised the issue, the Indian government had no courage to tell Washington to mind its own business. Instead, the government expended its energies to convince Washington to put Pakistan on the list of "terrorist states". With great pomp and ceremony, the State Department brings out a list every year of countries which it deems as "terrorist". The State Department has asserted that the 1999 Report on International Religious Freedom will "be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy and making resource allocations." The International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act of 1998 will be used by the U.S. to determine which countries have engaged in or tolerated "particularly severe violations" of religious freedom.

The External Affairs Ministry issued a statement in the second week of September stating that it has "no plans or intentions" to invite any U.S. official or engage in a discussion with any foreign government or agency on matters concerning religious freedom. The government has conveniently forgotten that it was engaged in talks on the same issues with U.S. government officials at top levels.

THE Communist Party of India (CPI) described the developments as alarming. CPI national secretary D. Raja said: "The U.S. is trying to assume the role of the global policeman. It has no authority to pass judgment on domestic issues. But there is a need for introspection because such attacks increased after the BJP came to power and the constituents of the Sangh Parivar are directly involved." The Vajpayee government had given room for such interference, he added. "After Pokhran-II, Vajpayee wrote to U.S. President Bill Clinton and during the Kargil crisis, the government kept saying that it had the U.S.' backing."

The U.S. State Department has asserted that the 1999 Report on International Religious Freedom will "be used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy and making resource allocations."

Congress(I) spokesperson Kapil Sibal also echoed similar views. He said that while interference in the country's internal affairs was unacceptable, the BJP-led government, by "protecting" those responsible for atrocities on minorities, was responsible for inviting U.S. concern. He said that the recent sequence of events had shown that the government was protecting a person like Dara Singh, who is believed to be behind the murder of the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons in Orissa on January 22. L.K. Advani whom the U.S. Ambassador to India met to discuss issues relating to atrocities on minorities was the first one to give the Bajrang Dal a clean certificate, saying that the organisation was not involved in the Staines murder.

The BJP-led government is trying to project the developments as a minor hiccup. In the third week of September, Michael A. Sheehan, U.S. coordinator for counter-terrorism, was in Delhi. Sheehan, who has the rank of Assistant Secretary, reports directly to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. The present government wants to further intensify cooperation with Washington in the fight against "narco-terrorism". Even on Afghanistan, New Delhi seems to be toeing the U.S. line. All previous governments had kept some lines of communications open with Kabul. The BJP-led government is intent on snapping all links.

The stoppage of Ariana Airways (the Afghan national airline) flights from Amritsar to Kabul is an illustration of the government's keenness to curry favour with Washington in the so-called crusade against fundamentalist forces. However, there are strong indications that the U.S. does not have any serious differences with the Taliban. Relations between the two countries are expected to be back to normal if and when the government in Kabul hands over Osama bin Laden to the Clinton administration.

Indian officials play up the fact that Islamabad does not figure in Sheehan's tour itinerary. The BJP-led government is also enthused by Washington's plan to form an exclusive "community of democracies". At the recent Association of South- East Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Singapore, Albright invited India to join up. Pakistan is not being considered for membership as Washington has not given it the required "certificate". The BJP-led government is trying to pass these developments as positive indications of a new relationship with Washington. All the more reason why Delhi is shocked by the contents of the State Department report. The strongest reaction has come from the RSS, which has dismissed the report as "cheap propaganda" aimed at "frightening away Christians and Muslims from voting for the BJP." ■

A summit of side-shows

The Auckland summit of the forum of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation was overshadowed and defined by a multilateral consensus on military action in East Timor.

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Auckland



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/ AP

APEC leaders at the Auckland summit, (from left) President of the Philippines Jose Estrada, Russian Prime Minister Vladmir Putin, Taiwanese representative Chiang Pin-Kung, U.S. President Bill Clinton, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai and Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai.

SUBSTANTIVE diplomacy was the buzzword at the Auckland summit of the forum for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). As in Kuala Lumpur last year, the September 9-13 meeting of the "economic leaders" of APEC, as the political heads of the member-states and non-state entities are known for this purpose, turned out to be a summit of side-shows. If the Kuala Lumpur conference was eclipsed by a frontal diplomatic assault on the host, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, by United States Vice-President Al Gore, the Auckland meeting was not only overshadowed but almost defined by a multilateral "consensus" on forcing Jakarta to invite a United Nations peace keeping force to East Timor (see separate story), the disputed Indonesian province which is not recognised by the U.N. as being part of the most prominent South-East Asian country.

In the event, the summit hostess, New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, won bouquets, not brickbats. True to his style, Mahathir, a high-profile maverick, stayed away and only sent his heir-apparent, Abdullah Badawi, to Auckland. In Kuala Lumpur he had stood his ground despite Gore's articulation of Bill Clinton's agenda for "globalising democracy". A Minister deputised for the besieged Indonesian President B.J. Habibie. That turned the special ministerial meeting of the APEC forum on East Timor into a commentary on Indonesia's controversial actions in that territory, with the Minister from Jakarta (as also an official from Malaysia) choosing to participate in the crisis talks on East Timor as observers, not interlocutors.

Malaysia conveyed to the forum leaders that it was willing to participate in a U.N.-led peace initiative in East Timor but not in a multinational military brigade even if it had U.N. sanction. However, during the deliberations on the final day of the summit, the main question was whether or not a global military action should be launched in East Timor with the blessings but not the financial support of the U.N. For Indonesia, which had agreed to "invite" a U.N. peace force hours before the summit concluded, it was no longer a question of of diplomacy. The issue got transformed into a realpolitik move by a new coalition of countries armed with an informal APEC "consensus". Naturally, all leaders except the absentee Indonesian President were pleased.

IF the summit's side-show led to more action at the U.N. headquarters, the much-heralded summit within a summit, the one between President Bill Clinton and his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin on September 11, helped put relations between the U.S. and China "back on track", American spin doctors feel. The Chinese interlocutors were transparently less upbeat, but they too conceded that the meeting, held at Clinton's initiative, helped ease the chill that had set in following the recent U.S. bombing of Beijing's embassy in Belgrade at the height of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-sponsored strikes on Kosovo.

The direct outcome of the Jiang-Clinton summit was that the two countries resumed their dialogue, which had been stalled since the U.S. missile attack, on the sensitive question of the admission of the world's most populous nation into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). China has made it abundantly clear now that it can and will join the WTO as a developing country with the privilege of balancing its rights and obligations as a potential member. The U.S.-China debate on the issue of "rights and obligations" is the "sticking point", according to Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan.

Much as China valued the resumption of talks – the issue of its WTO membership has been on hold for almost 13 years, according to Beijing – the Jiang-Clinton summit was more significant in other ways as viewed by both sides. While Clinton reaffirmed Washington's one-China policy and indicated a preference



WIN McNAMEE/ AP

U.S. President Bill Clinton with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.

for a resolution of the dispute between China and Taiwan through peaceful means and through dialogue, Jiang minced no words in asserting that China would not renounce the right to use force to settle the Taiwan question if Taipei did not retract its latest pronouncements calling for state-to-state relations between the two sides. China regards Taiwan as a recalcitrant province that should be reunited with the mainland. Jiang insisted during his talks with Clinton that any move by Taiwan to annul its own call for a *de facto* creation of two Chinas must be credible, too, with no trace of doubt about the finality of such an about turn.

Beyond these trade and territorial issues of direct concern to China, Clinton proposed to Jiang that they resume their parleys, suspended since the Belgrade incident, on the whole gamut of the "arms control agenda". This, according to Clinton, would cover the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the U.S. would like China to sign.

For the U.S., China's explicit adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which it had already acceded to, would be of no less concern. Accepting China as a sovereign equal if not a political peer, Clinton suggested to Jiang that the two countries resume talks on the South Asian arms race too. Jiang, according to a U.S. spokesman, mentioned South Asia as an area of Chinese concern in the international arms control domain.

The U.S. National Security Adviser, Sam el Berger, annotated Clinton's con[illegible] over South Asia to mean that W[illegible]ngton's policy reference was to engage in talks with Beijing and to "get them to cut off nuclear (arms) cooperation with Pakistan." By design or oversight, Tang, while answering a question by this correspondent on the South Asian dimension of the U.S.-China arms control agenda, did not make any mention of this aspect of Clinton's exchanges with Jiang. Tang said that Jiang was categoric that China adopted a principled stand that restraint by India and Pakistan would be conducive to peace and stability in South Asia. He said China's position was that peaceful means should be adopted by India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

South Asian arms control, especially the nuclear dimension, is a relatively new aspect of the U.S.-China dialogue within the larger topic of international armament restraint. Given the recent power shift in regional politics, China's participation in a dialogue with the U.S. on global arms control issues including the India-Pakistan question may be indicative of some sort of a super-league discussions between the two.

However, the relevance of a planned new Sino-Indian strategic dialogue remains unaffected if a comment by a spokeswoman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry is any guide. She confirmed in Auckland that China and India had agreed in June on the need for mutual consultations on "security" issues.

IF the Clinton-Jiang summit sparked considerable diplomatic interest, the tripartite summit between Clinton, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and the South Korean leader, Kim Dae-Jung, on North Korea's suspected preparations for the test flight of a long-range ballistic missile did not evoke the same kind of interest in Auckland, although the subject was considered important. In fact, the Japanese leader, who had matched American diplomacy at the previous summit, did not announce any new plans in Auckland, which his American critics would have dismissed as another manifestation of textbook diplomacy.

While the conventional wisdom was that the Auckland meet would be remembered as the summit on East Timor, Clinton, who was at his customary best in admiring New Zealand's unique welcome ceremonies featuring the culture of the land's indigenous people and not that of its white settlers, did not leave an impression, especially because he would not commit American troops for a U.N. deployment in East Timor. "Globalisation of Democracy" was a theme he elaborated upon, but the rhetoric sounded somewhat surrealistic like a variant of George Kennan's "containment" phraseology in relation to Communism – this time, it was a containment of bad regimes.

ON the economic front, the APEC forum pledged to press for a three-year new round of multilateral negotiations under the auspices of the WTO for the purpose of evolving a "single package" of measures. Accounting for 45 per cent of the total globalised trade and composed of such economic superpowers as the U.S. and Japan besides notable activists such as Canada as also emerging economies such as China, APEC gave a collective call for the elimination of agricultural export subsidies through WTO-sponsored negotiations.

Also celebrating a decade of "unprecedented cooperation" in the Asia-Pacific region in pursuit of a "vision of stability, security and prosperity", the leaders of the forum's 21 sovereign countries as also non-sovereign entities such as Taiwan and Hong Kong renewed their common commitment towards strengthening their respective markets and toning up the financial markets.

The most important expression of a collective resolve was the "reconfirmation" of the "commitment to achieve the Bogor Goals of free and open trade and investment by 2010/2020 A.D." To underscore this, the "economic leaders" outlined principles to enhance competition and regulatory reform. Trade facilitation was also a new refrain at the summit. ■

A plea to the LTTE

In an unprecedented step, Amnesty International urges the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to spare the lives of those who may be on the terrorist organisation's hit-list.

D.B.S. JEYARAJ

AMNESTY International, the London-based human rights organisation, issued in August a direct appeal to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), that has acquired over the years a reputation of being one of the most ruthless guerilla organisations in the world. The appeal was extraordinary in three respects.

First, it was unusual for Amnesty to direct such an appeal to an organisation that has no legal basis to be considered a *de jure* entity. Usually Amnesty's appeals pertain to alleged human rights violations by sovereign states and their duly constituted governments. Basically a guerilla outfit, the LTTE is at best a sort of non-governmental organisation that is entitled to certain "belligerent rights" as a consequence of its protracted military campaign, during the course of which it established territorial control over certain parts of Sri Lanka.

Secondly, the appeal was in essence a pre-emptive move against the LTTE. It was not a case of Amnesty merely reacting to a past event; the appeal was based on a prognosis for the future. The Amnesty communique highlighted the civilian status of certain Tamil politicians, mentioning them by name, and of other unnamed persons falling under that category, and appealed to the Tigers not to assassinate them. Taking into account the record, Amnesty is clearly trying to prevent further such incidents – again an unusual move.

Thirdly, Amnesty expanded the scope of its appeal by not restricting it to just the LTTE's international secretariat based in Britain but extending it to several other branch and front offices of the Tigers – in France, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands. Amnesty issued the appeal as a proactive venture and as a means to exert pressure on the LTTE on as many fronts as possible. Since the Tiger hierarchy in the Northern mainland of the Wanni was neither visible nor accountable for incidents, pressure was being exerted on the more vulnerable Tiger agencies in the west.

AS is the consequence of most such appeals issued by Amnesty, the LTTE addresses mentioned are receiving a flood of letters from members of the Amnesty's network living in many parts of the world. This is perhaps the first time that the overseas branches of the LTTE are being subjected to humanitarian pressure inspired by Amnesty. Usually, Tiger propagandists use Amnesty appeals concerning human rights violations by the Sri Lankan state and its organs for their own purposes.

Whenever charged with human rights violations, it has been a routine ruse for the LTTE to condone itself on the grounds that it was a government in the making and that having to conduct a liberation struggle against overwhelming odds, it was not always possible to adhere to human rights tenets. While disclaiming any responsibility to adhere to the principles of human rights on those grounds, the Tigers, on the other hand, insist that they and they alone should be recognised as the sole representatives of Tamils and that Tamil Eelam was already a *de facto* reality. The killing of perceived opponents and dissidents from the Sri Lankan Tamil community is a brutal manifestation of this objective. The LTTE has for quite some time gotten away with such dual conduct, and the Amnesty appeal in a way attempts to check that. The LTTE is forced to accept the reality that there are some universal rights it must recognise if it wants the civilised world to accept its *bona fides*.



V. Prabakaran, the LTTE supremo.

That the overseas branches of the LTTE are feeling the pressure inspired by the Amnesty seems evident from the reaction of some of its minions. The Tiger weekly *Eela Murasu* and fortnightly *Ulagathamilar*, published from Paris and Toronto respectively, have written editorials criticising the Amnesty appeal. A website maintained by N. Satyendra in Britain has launched a frontal assault on Amnesty International. Satyendra was the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) representative at the Thimphu talks of 1985. His abrasive behaviour at the talks contributed greatly to its collapse, and later Satyendra was issued a deportation order by New Delhi. But he had left India before it could be served on him. Now he is an LTTE supporter, and in a bid perhaps to outlive his TELO past, Satyendra at times is more strident than LTTE supremo V. Prabakaran himself.

The Amnesty appeal to the LTTE is based on the premise that owing to their civilian status most of the Tamil non-LTTE political leaders are entitled to full protection under international human rights laws. Of its own volition, the LTTE had agreed to adhere to the Geneva Convention, which among other things has set down rules regarding the treatment of civilians in troubled situations. Although the LTTE runs neither a *de jure* nor a *de facto* government, it had in February 1988 unilaterally announced and given guarantees to relevant institutions that it would abide by the provisions of the Geneva Convention, as also its optional protocols one and two. The LTTE engaged in this manoeuvre during the height of its confrontation with the Indian Peace Keeping Force for reasons unknown. Nevertheless, it is now bound to that commitment in the international perception.

Even as Amnesty condemned the executions and is now trying to

prevent further killings, it is clear that this stance is based upon its principled opposition to the death penalty, whether officially or unofficially imposed. When death sentences were passed on five soldiers convicted for the rape and murder of the 19-year-old Jaffna schoolgirl, Krishanthy Kumaraswamy, and the killing of her mother, brother and neighbour, Amnesty promptly issued an appeal against the death sentence. Since the penalty itself was reintroduced in Sri Lanka, Amnesty also lodged a public appeal urging that it be repealed. Amnesty secretary-general Pierre Sane wrote directly to Chandrika Kumaratunga, imploring her to revise the position. Sane also pointed out that it was not possible "for a government to respect human rights and execute prisoners at the same time."

THE Amnesty appeal is based on Article 3 of the Geneva Convention, 1940, that enshrines the protective principles of individuals in a conflict situation. Article 3 forbids governments and armed opposition groups from indulging in torture or killing of civilians not taking part in hostilities. It is in this context that Amnesty has mentioned the names of certain individual Tamil politicians and Tamil political leaders in general as perceived targets of the LTTE. It has also made clear that its initiative should in no way be interpreted as an endorsement of them or their parties. Amnesty believes that the LTTE's attacks are in clear violation of international human rights laws against killing anyone not directly involved in hostilities.

In the Sri Lankan context, there are certain difficulties in trying to define who a "civilian" is. For instance, President Chandrika Kumaratunga as head of the armed forces or other ministers participating in National Security Council meetings may not participate in active combat but are they strictly "civilians"? Also some Tamil political party members also double up as paramilitary or auxiliary soldiers. Some politicians are former guerillas and carry personal weapons. Many have armed bodyguards. Defining these "civilians" is an intricate exercise.

Yet, the fact that some elected officials or office-bearers of political parties carry arms or possess bodyguards is not a criterion for negating civilian status, Amnesty feels. A clear distinction, however has to be drawn between "combatant leaders" such as Manickathasan of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and Razeek of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) as opposed to the patently non-violent Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and other "non-combatant", political wing leaders such as Siddharthan of the PLOTE and Suresh Premachandran of the EPRLF. In any event, Amnesty has gone ahead with its proactive initiative because it discerns a clear pattern in the LTTE's killings that show no signs of stopping and because it feels it is imperative to prevent them rather than issue condemnatory statements.

The recommended action is to send telegrams, telex and fax messages and express and airmail letters to the LTTE offices abroad. Amnesty has proposed that certain provisions be included in the recommended missives. They are:

(a) Explaining that Amnesty's action on behalf of the persons allegedly under LTTE threat conforms to obligations under international humanitarian law;

(b) Condemning the deliberate and arbitrary killing of political leaders;

(c) Expressing concern for the lives of N. Raviraj of the TULF (Acting Mayor of Jaffna), R. Sambandan (the TULF MP for Trincomalee), Y. Balachandran (the PLOTE MP for Wanni), K. Sivajilingam (the TELO chairman for the Velvettithurai Urban Council), V. Anandasangari (acting president of the TULF) and other politicians reportedly under LTTE threat;

(d) Urging the LTTE leadership to issue a clear statement condemning the deliberate and arbitrary killings of all civilians including politicians not taking part in the hostilities;

(e) Appealing to the LTTE for an immediate halt to attacks on people taking no direct part in hostilities by the LTTE or by forces under the LTTE control. The latter clause has been necessitated by the fact that in many cases the LTTE claims non-involvement in an attack while the foul play is conducted by satellite outfits such as Sangilian, Ellalan and Pandara Vanniyan "*Padaigal*". It is well known that these names are bandied about by the LTTE in a puerile attempt to absolve itself of any blame.

A relentless campaign

D.B.S. JEYARAJ

AMNESTY International has been conducting an intensive campaign to get the death sentence awarded to four persons – S. Nalini (33) and Perarivalan (24) (Indian nationals) and Nalini's husband Murugan (28) and Santhan (28) (Sri Lankans) – in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case commuted to life imprisonment. This campaign is based on the organisation's principled opposition to the death penalty and its aim to redress certain perceived flaws in the judicial process in the matter.

Amnesty has opposed the death penalty and in all cases in all countries on the ground that it is a violation of the right to life and the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The organisation has time and again tried to mobilise the global collective conscience to express unconditional opposition to the death penalty as a violation of the right to life, emphasising that the punishment is never known to have acted as a deterrent or to have established retributive justice.

Amnesty has given special attention to the Rajiv Gandhi murder trial ever since the due process of law was initiated. It has issued press releases and communiques calling for international action whenever the need arose in its perception. Its latest and most comprehensive report and connected appeal was issued on August 12 (AI Index ASA 20/32/99). In the seven-page report, the organisation has traced the progress of the Rajiv Gandhi trial, the trial court convictions, the Supreme Court appeal and the subsequent verdict. While being attentive to the perceived flaws in the judicial process, Amnesty has, however, focussed more attention on getting the death sentences commuted.

It has expressed concern that while Nalini, Murugan, Perarivalan and Santhan were acquitted by the Supreme Court of offences under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), the Supreme Court failed to consider the incompatibility of certain provisions of TADA with international standards for fair trial when it held that their trial under those provisions should not be called into question.

"To confirm sentences of death imposed after a trial held under provi-

sions of a law which has now lapsed following widespread criticism from national and international human rights bodies that it denied the right to a fair trial, is manifestly unsound," Amnesty has stated.

While reiterating that capital punishment is based on a misguided perception that the death penalty is an appropriate means of deterrence or retribution, Amnesty has also pointed out that though the Supreme Court has ruled that the death penalty could be applied only in the "rarest of the rarest cases", at least a dozen executions are carried out in India every year. It also draws attention to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights urging governments to impose a moratorium on executions, and has requested India to abolish the death penalty.

Even as Amnesty spearheads a campaign to get the death sentences commuted, the stay on the death sentence on the four convicts has been extended as a consequence of periodic appeals.

Amnesty hopes the Supreme Court will review the petition in the light of the concerns raised, and it has called upon the President of India to exercise his powers to commute the death sentences in case the petition is rejected. ■

Ingrid Massage, the Amnesty International official in charge of the Sri Lanka desk in London, when contacted said: "There is a grave concern in the international community about the continuing, deliberate and targeted attacks on civilians like Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam or the local councillors in Jaffna. There is no way that the LTTE can commit such killings and at the same time maintain that it abides by the Geneva Convention."

AMNESTY'S immediate concern for the lives of certain Tamil politicians has been necessitated by the prevailing circumstances. The LTTE has been issuing notices calling on these politicians to resign or face the consequences. Many of them have received threatening letters and telephone calls in the name of the LTTE or its fellow travellers. Neelan Tiruchelvam, who was killed on July 29, was under a threat too. Amnesty appears to be building up pressure on the LTTE in order to deter possible plans to exterminate these people.

Although many prominent political leaders, including Chandrika Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, are under continuous threat, the current political situation makes lesser politicians, mainly Tamils, imminent targets. According to political analysts, the LTTE is perhaps in its most virulent phase. The brunt of their violence would seem to be directed at fellow Tamils rather than the so-called main enemy, the Sinhala state.

The LTTE finds that in spite of years of fighting and innumerable losses, it is nowhere in sight of its political objective. What is more, it finds itself increasingly alienated from international opinion. The territory controlled by it in Sri Lanka has shrunk considerably. Although by no means a spent force, the LTTE is certain that the process of decline has begun. Furthermore, there is a possibility that the devolution package may be implemented bypassing the Tigers. Under these circumstances, the resulting political frustration seeks to target perceived scapegoats for this state of affairs. The tradition in Tamil politics has been to blame forces or individuals among the community or the internal enemy as the source of all troubles. Therefore, the LTTE has apparently turned its wrath on Tamils who are a hindrance to their goal. After all, Prabakaran had his baptism of fire by gunning down former Jaffna Mayor Alfred Duraiappah on July 27, 1975. Tamil killings have continued for nearly two decades.

The LTTE has its own motives for targeting Tamil political parties. According to the Editor of *Lanka Guardian*, Dayan Jayatilleke, "the LTTE's plan is to monopolise the Tamil nationalistic space and present the Colombo-Delhi-Washington axis with a *fait accompli* and force the latter to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with it. The LTTE's goal goes beyond the limited objective of monopolising the Tamil political space ahead of any talks with the Sri Lankan Government."

Jayatilleke, in a newspaper interview, went on to say: "The killings are a signal to Colombo to stop propping up the TULF, the EPDP, the EPRLF, the PLOTE and the TELO as alternative Tamil formations to work its devolution and other political plans for the Tamils in the face of the LTTE's hostility. As regards New Delhi, the LTTE thinks that the BJP-led government is friendly, but South Block's powerful bureaucracy is highly suspect in its eyes. It is to Indian officialdom that the LTTE attributes the routine extension of the ban on it. The LTTE is trying to make India see the futility of propping up groups like the TULF and the EPRLF. To the U.S., the assassinations are a signal to suggest that the LTTE cannot be rejected and ignored but has to be constructively engaged."

If the prognosis about the LTTE's current hostility is correct then some more killings can be expected. In that context, Amnesty's appeal is a desperate measure enacted under desperate circumstances to mobilise international opinion against the LTTE and prevent a bloodbath of Tamil innocents. What is further needed is for the Amnesty initiative to be supported by other human rights and non-governmental organisations too. Only a world wide campaign of great proportions can possibly contain the bloody strategy. Though some would say that the neo-fascist LTTE would not respect even international opinion, it does seem worthwhile to make such an attempt, however quixotic it may appear.

There are two other issues in this regard. One, the Sri Lankan government must wake up to the imminent danger most Tamil politicians are in and provide them adequate security. The TULF with its "unarmed democracy" policy is particularly vulnerable. The second issue relates to developments in India, notably Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nationalist Movement led by P. Nedumaran, a long-time supporter of the Tamil Eelam and LTTE cause, is currently engaged in a campaign to get the death sentences imposed on four persons convicted in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination stopped. As part of this campaign, Nedumaran and other like-minded persons have been arguing strongly against the concept of capital punishment. In that process, some eloquent and emotional points have been made regarding the sanctity of human life, how no one has the right to deprive a person of life and how killing someone does not deter the cause and so on. Now, the life and death question before these people is whether the same yardstick does not apply to the LTTE. If death sentences imposed after due process are a matter of objection, then what is to be done in the case of Tiger killings that are arbitrarily executed? If the supporters of the LTTE who are clamouring for eradication of capital punishment in India can prevail upon the LTTE too to implement a moratorium on civilian killings, then it would provide a reprieve for many beleaguered persons on the brink of death in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. ■

A no-win situation

Bringing peace to the northeastern region of Sri Lanka requires more than a smart military operation. Lack of progress on the political front has created a no-win situation here.

V.S. SAMBANDAN
in Colombo

NORTHEASTERN Sri Lanka is going through a painful phase, marked by an impasse, in both political and military terms. With the country set to face national and presidential elections in the year ahead, it is possible that positions will harden among both the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government. The Opposition United National Party (UNP), whose endorsement of the policy decisions taken by the ruling People's Alliance (P.A.) is crucial to resolving the crisis, is also expected to adopt a tough stand.

Exactly a year ago, following a fierce battle between government troops and the separatists, Killinochchi and Mankulam changed hands. While Killinochchi came under the control of the LTTE, the government regained Mankulam.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Since then nothing much has happened to alter the situation. But the security forces have scored a string of successes in the Wanni area, regaining chunks of territory from the Tigers. The crucial gain was the retaking of Madhu, a pilgrim centre in Mannar district.

In the second week of September, the security forces started a fifth round of Rana Gosa (Battle Cry) operations in the Wanni area comprising four northern districts. The previous such operation had been conducted with remarkable ease. Going by reports coming from the northeastern area, Rana Gosa V has not made much gains as the LTTE has put up stiff resistance.

(Reportage on military operations is largely confined to information based on secondary sources as journalists are not permitted to enter the areas until after the completion of a military operation. Moreover, censorship of news related to military operations has been in place since June 1999.)

The Defence Ministry said that the troops "advanced from general areas north and east of Welimarandamadu Tank and general areas east of Periyamadu tank". Indications are that the total number of casualties on both sides could well be above 150.

Heavy casualties have been reported from the northern Mannar district, where a fresh offensive was launched on September 12. The operation has strategic significance in that it seeks to cover areas which would, if successfully penetrated, lead to the opening of a much-needed main supply route to the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The operation launched in September 1998 implied a rethinking on the part of the government with regard to its plans to open a main supply route to Jaffna through a series of offensives called Operation Jaya Sikuru (Sure Victory). After Operation Jaya Sikuru was given up, the western offensive was launched, and it has been widely perceived as one aimed at opening a main supply route along the western coast.

Operation Rana Gosa also marks a shift in military strategy after the Killinochchi operations in that an earlier approach to open a main supply route along the Kandy-Jaffna road, which runs through the Tiger heartland, was abandoned in favour of a more practical western route.

Bringing peace to the troubled northeastern region would require more than a smart and successful military operation. While the military advance is crucial, equally important would be the progress made on a resolution of the political issues. Unfortunately, nothing has happened on this front as the goals of both the government and the LTTE have remained unachievable.

For its part, the government is keen on a solution within a framework that envisages a united but non-unitary nation, while the Tigers remain committed to their separatist agenda. And so the attrition continues.

So it is imperative for the government to address the ground realities in the northeastern region, especially the situation faced by civilians living under the LTTE's sway. Regulations on fishing, and movement between the government-held and LTTE-held areas, lack of proper transportation facilities between Jaffna and the rest of the island and mounting pressures on the food delivery system are but early manifestations of more trouble ahead.

The advantage now lies with the military, successive operations having eroded the territorial base of the LTTE. With the ongoing military thrust, the efficacy of the civil administration, already handicapped as a result of the government having to run basic affairs in an essentially enemy-held area, has been further affected. The prevailing no-win situation, according to Tamil politicians, could help the LTTE to try to prove that it has a presence all over the northeast. This could impel it to launch attacks on economic installations and security personnel, as was seen in a recent attack on a police station in Trincomalee.

By systematically dismembering the other militant groups, the LTTE is better placed to claim the status of the "sole representative of the Tamils". The assassination of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam, senior leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and those of Razeek of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front and Manickathasan of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam are indicators of the LTTE's unwillingness to accommodate an alternative leadership for Tamils, either politically or militarily.

However, the present delicate balance and uncertainty could change dramatically if the LTTE were to strike at any Army camp. Military strategists are in no doubt about the LTTE's capabilities. The question now is when and where it will strike. ■

An Islamist agenda for Dagestan

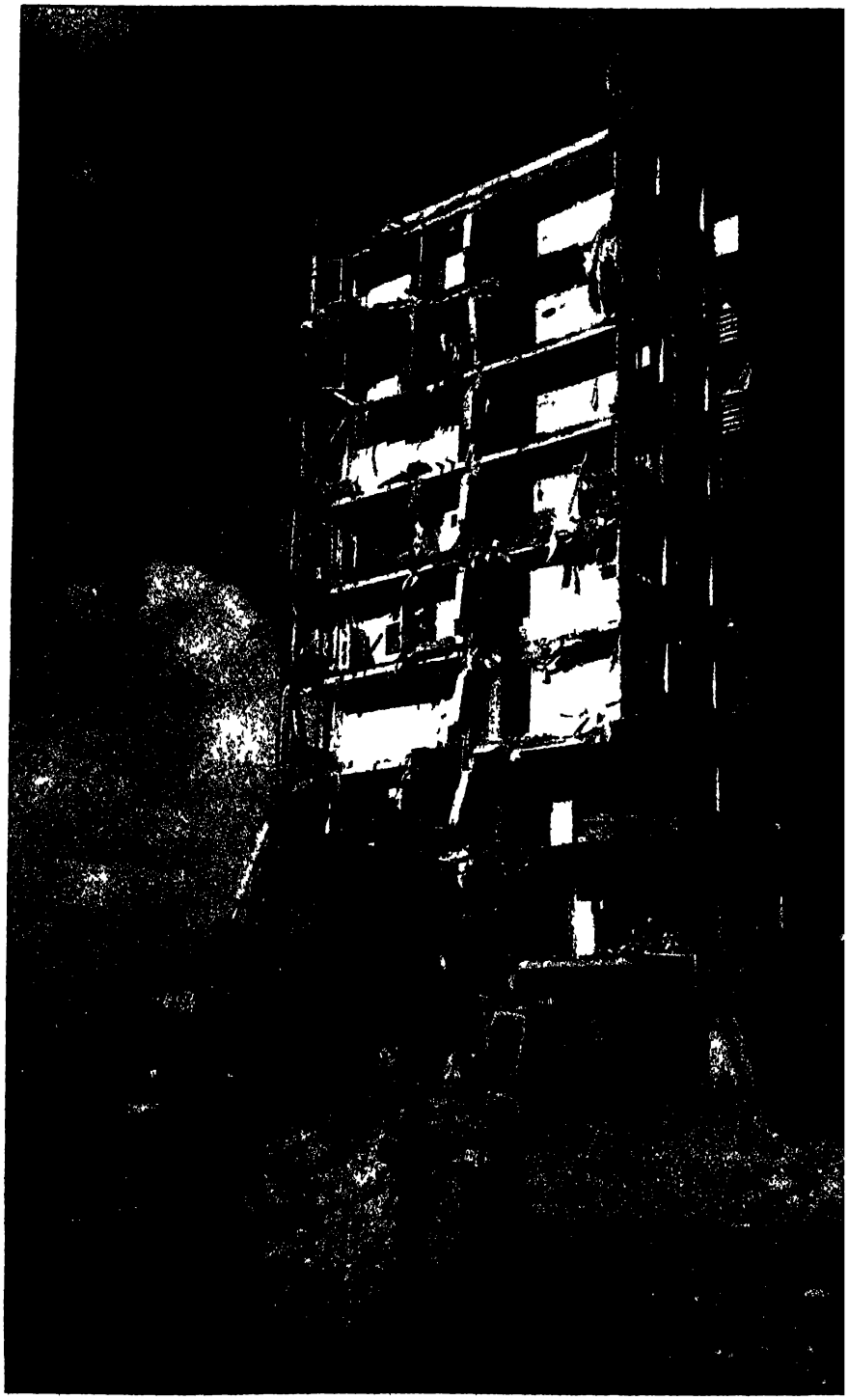
The recent spate of explosions in Russia is believed to be the handiwork of Islamist fundamentalists intent on liberating the province of Dagestan and creating an Islamic state in the north Caucasus region.

JOHN CHERIAN

RUSSIA'S ongoing battle against Islamist separatist forces in the southern province of Dagestan is assuming dangerous dimensions. In the second week of September, two multi-storeyed apartment buildings were destroyed by bombs, killing more than 150 innocent civilians. In August, a bomb had destroyed an apartment building in southern Russia. In the first week of September, a bomb exploded in an upmarket shopping complex near the Kremlin. These attacks have all occurred after Russia intensified its war against the Islamist militants who had crossed into Dagestan from Chechnya.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has said that the bombings were "a clear terrorist attack". President Boris Yeltsin said on television that Russia was dealing with "wild, criminal terrorists" and has ordered the Interior Ministry to set up a special team to protect nuclear power stations, railway stations, oil pipelines and other strategic installations. Panic seems to have set over Moscow, after the recent explosions. A few days before the blast on September 13, Khattab, a Jordanian-born militant of Chechen origin and a leader of the separatists, had warned that the fight was no longer confined to Russian military targets. The Russian media quoted Khattab as saying: "Let Russia await our explosions blasting through their cities."

However, the rebels have issued a statement denying their hand in the terror campaign in Moscow and other Russian cities but the bombings, from all indications, are the handiwork of the fundamentalists who want to ignite a secessionist war in northern Caucasus. Russian authorities claim that the insurrection is spearheaded by "Wahhabites". The "Wahhabi" school of Islam has its origin in Saudi Arabia and its interpretation of Islam is the most "rigid". Although the Saudi Government also swears by Wahhabism, many Saudis feel



MISHA JAPARIDZE/AP

An apartment building in Moscow that was rocked by an explosion on September 10.

that their government is not adhering to a pure form of Islam. In fact, some radical proponents of Wahhabism, like Osama bin Laden, are sworn enemies of the royal family in Saudi Arabia.



ITAR TASS/AP

President Boris Yeltsin. Some people in Moscow think that Yeltsin is using Dagestan as a diversionary ploy, in view of the exigencies of domestic politics.

THE trouble in Dagestan started in early August, when several villages in Botlikh district were raided by 1,500-2,000 heavily armed fighters from Chechnya. Reports say that the invaders were mainly hardened Chechen fighters owing allegiance to a Chechen warlord, Shamil Basayev. According to Russian officials, there are some Arab fighters also. Their aim is to create an "independent Republic of Dagestan".

Dispersed by the Russian federal forces, the fighters retreated to the Dagestani settlements of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar. According to the Russian media, these areas are "the bulwark of Wahhabism" in the northern Caucasus. Sharia law is already in place here. In fact, many Russian commentators point out that Moscow had been too complacent about the activities of the Wahhabites. A senior official in the Interior Ministry said that 43 million roubles were stolen from the pension fund of Dagestan and used to finance the formation of a detachment of 50 rebels who were to fight in Botlikh district.



NATALYA MEDVEDEVA/AP

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov. He is considered to be a moderate in the politics of the region.

When the local administration was thrown out in Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi two years ago and the Islamist announced the formation of "an independent Islamic territory", Moscow was not too concerned. But after the recent large-scale incursions from Chechnya, the Wahhabites in Dagestan started openly supporting the call for the creation of an Islamic republic. Documents seized from the insurgents show that the ultimate aim of the rebels is to create an Islamic state comprising the entire north Caucasus.

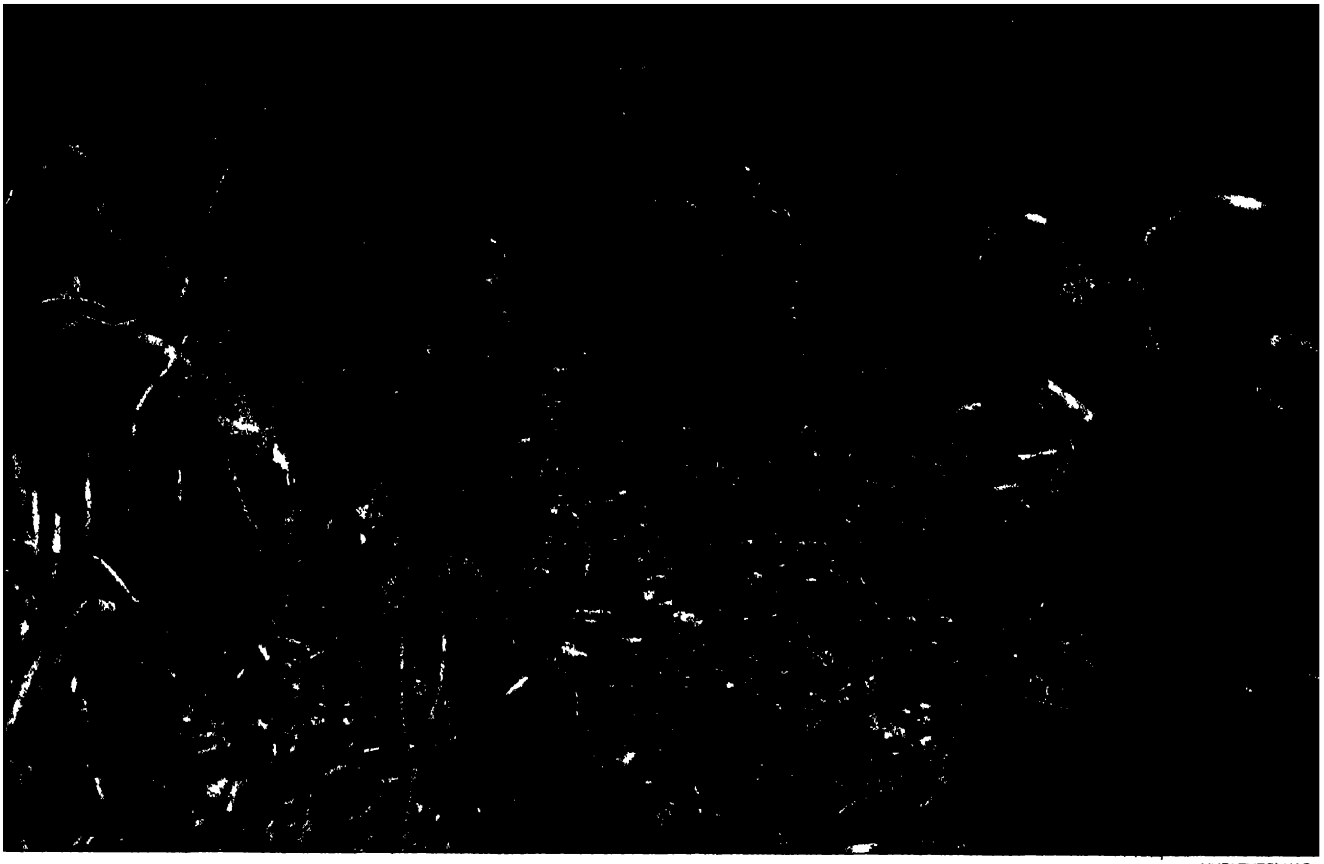
It was only in August that the Russian authorities realised the gravity of the situation and decided to clear the rebels from the "independent Islamic territory". Russian federal authorities used helicopters and missile artillery guns to attack rebel positions in Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi.

Ramazan Abdulatipov, chairman of the Council of the Assembly of the People of Russia, said that the Islamists in the Caucasus are generously supported by foreign fundamentalist organisations in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, United States, Britain and Germany. "Their leaders support these extremists, knowing very well that he who rules Dagestan rules the north Caucasus. Their goal is to destabilise the region," he said.

In August, Russia sent letters to the Group of Seven Countries, the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, asserting that the rebels in Dagestan were backed by Islamic states. The letter claimed "that irrefutable evidence attest that the terrorists are receiving financial, material and other assistance from outside". During the Chechen uprising, countries like Turkey were known to have provided assistance to the rebels there. The letter also conveys Russia's desire to portray itself as a bulwark against rampaging Islamic militancy in Europe.

In Moscow, questions are being asked about the serious security lapse which first allowed the rebels to sneak in from Chechnya across the heavily fortified borders. Yeltsin has criticised the "carelessness of the military" but some in Moscow are of the opinion that due to the exigencies in domestic politics, the Kremlin may have tried to use Dagestan as a diversionary ploy. Yeltsin seems to have grossly miscalculated.

THE Dagestan conflict is also deeply enmeshed with the problem in Chechnya. The "*de facto*" independent republic of Chechnya is now an important player in the volatile politics of the region. Although no coun-



YURI TUTOV/AP

Russian paratroopers prepare to storm the Dagestani village of Karamakhi on September 12.

try has accorded it recognition, its very existence as an Islamic entity has been a source of encouragement for the other "republics" in the region. The violent politics of Chechnya has also spilled over to neighbouring territories. Dagestan suffered a lot in the course of the bloody war in Chechnya. After the war, Russian authorities did not bother to allocate additional funds to Dagestan, which is one of the poorest regions in the country.

The Chechen President, Aslan Mashkadov, is considered a moderate in the context of the politics of the region. His main rival is Basayev. Basayev's real aim is to overthrow Mashkadov and he is using the publicity generated by his adventures in Dagestan to further his political goals in Chechnya.

Maskhadov is known to be against "Wahhabism" becoming the dominant trend in the northern Caucasus and could be persuaded to play a more active role in curtailing it if he gets certain tangible assurances from Moscow. It is rumoured that Mashkadov is not averse to a deal with Moscow, whereby his state is given quasi independence and allowed to run its domestic affairs. Basayev, on the other hand, talks of an Islamic state stretching from the Chechen capital Grozny to the Caspian sea. Some of President Yeltsin's advisers like Presidential Council member Emil Pain, are already talking loudly about allowing Chechnya to "politically secede". Pain also believes that Russia must also come to terms with the Wahhabites and should try its best "to incorporate them into civilised society".



RUSLAN MUSAYEV/AP

Chechen rebel Khattab. He has threatened Russia with "explosions blasting through their cities".

For some time, radical Islamists have been dreaming of creating a "great imamate from sea to shining sea". A senior Russian military analyst, Vladimir Lutovinov, has described the events in Dagestan as the "first attempt" to spread neo-globalist ideas of orthodox Islam to Russia via Chechnya. Their main goal is to "liberate" the divided and resettled ethnic groups from "the colonial pressure" of Russia and to create a united Islamic state in Chechnya and Dagestan, and subsequently expand its borders by incorporating other north Caucasian states.

The Dagestan adventure of the Wahhabites may have failed this time, but as the heinous terrorist activities have shown, the battle will continue in other forms. The rebels are trying to force the federal troops to spread along the border with Chechnya and involve them in a long-drawn-out fight against a large number of small groups. ■

A simmering civil war

The split in the ranks of the rebels fighting President Laurent Kabila and the rift between their supporters across the borders have made peace elusive in the Congo despite a ceasefire accord.

JOHN CHERIAN

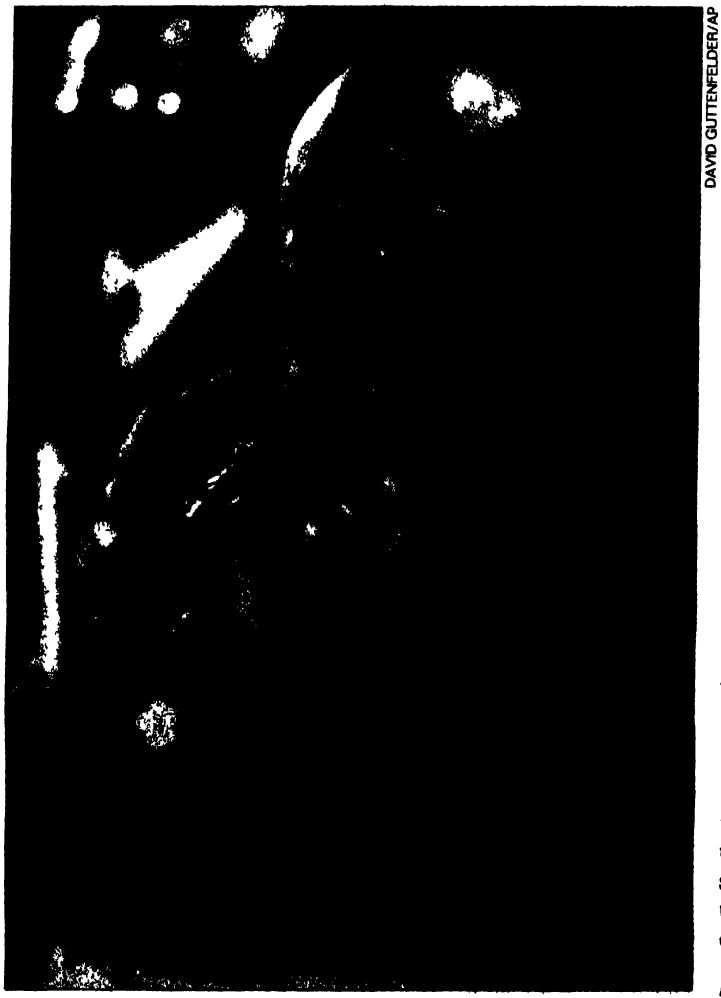
AFTER months of painstaking diplomacy, all the rebel groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) signed a ceasefire accord in Lusaka, the Zambian capital, in the first week of September. The countries openly involved in the war – Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia along with the Congo – had signed a separate ceasefire accord in July but fighting continued owing to the reluctance of the rebels, backed by Uganda and Rwanda, to fall in line (*Frontline*, July 30).

The civil war erupted in the Congo a year ago, when the rebel forces launched a full-scale military offensive to overthrow the government of Laurent Kabila who was installed in power after a similar rebellion in 1997. The rebels then overthrew the corrupt and dictatorial regime of Mobutu Sese Seko.

Observers feel that the current ceasefire is a fragile one largely because the rebels who tried to overthrow Kabila are now hopelessly divided. The Rally for Democracy (RCD), the main rebel movement, split and its leader, Wamba dia Wamba, was ousted by another faction. To complicate matters, Uganda and Rwanda, which had propped up the RCD, have developed serious differences of opinion. The depth of their rift was highlighted by the fight between their armies to take control of Kisangani, Congo's third biggest city, in the second week of August. At least 200 people were reportedly killed in the fight. Kisangani is one of the main centres from which illegally-mined diamonds and gold are exported. It is well known that many people close to the governments involved in the Congolese civil war have profited from this illegal trade in precious metals and stones.

Tensions between Uganda and Rwanda surfaced when President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda started supporting the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC), a new rebel group, led by Jean Pierre-Bemba in northern Congo. Large-scale fighting broke out when South African Foreign Minister Nkosazana Zuma visited Kisangani to finalise the name of the rebel leader who would sign the ceasefire agreement.

After the split in the RCD, Uganda continued to support Wamba dia Wamba, while Rwanda, which apparently played an important role in Wamba's ouster, had propped up Emile Ilunga, a medical practitioner from Kabila's home province of Katanga. Uganda helped Wamba set up a new headquarters in Kisangani. However, Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame, the Rwandan strongman, seem to have sorted out their differences for the time being. Museveni and Kagame were old friends and comrades-in-arms. Kagame was Museveni's security chief when he was fighting in the bush to overthrow the Ugandan government in the 1980s.



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/AP

President Laurent Kabila.

A majority of the rebel leaders are at the moment with the faction led by Ilunga, whose headquarters are in the rebel-held eastern city of Goma. Of the 50 original founders of the RCD, 41 support Ilunga. Under the accord, the rebel groups are entitled to one seat each in the proposed military council that will be empowered to administer and monitor the peace in the troubled region. However, they have demanded more and the demand has been rejected by the countries that had signed the ceasefire agreement. In Lusaka, the African leaders had to allow all the founding leaders of the RCD to sign the ceasefire accord to break the deadlock. There is very little chance of the rebel factions ever agreeing to sponsor one candidate to the powerful military council.

THE rebels were never too popular with the

people of the Congo. The RCD, which until a couple of months ago was in control of more than half of the country, is viewed as a mere appendage of the Tutsi-dominated government of Rwanda. People believe that Rwanda, because of its own domestic compulsions, precipitated the second round of civil war in the territory of its bigger neighbour.

Kabila, who rode to power on the strength of the predominantly Tutsi army, was financed and backed by Rwanda and Uganda in 1997. The Rwandan government did not expect Kabila to turn his back on his benefactors in less than a year. It was the continuing presence of the Hutu extremist groups near the border with Rwanda and Kabila's determination to be his own man that prompted Rwanda to launch its ill-conceived attempt to unseat Kabila. In 1993, to escape retribution from the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan army, 300,000 Hutus had fled to eastern Zaire. Many of them later joined the Interahamwe, the dreaded Hutu militia, during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis. Rwanda's goal was to prevent a repeat of the horrific events. Kabila, on the other hand, wanted to break free from the shackles imposed by Rwanda. Immediately after he got rid of his Tutsi advisers a year ago, Kabila's popularity soared.

Rwanda's attempt to overthrow Kabila in the summer of 1998 had prompted five African states – in an unprecedented show of solidarity – to send troops to help him. The five countries that have been officially or unofficially supporting Kabila were Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad and Sudan. When the rebels swept across the Congo in 1997 in their successful attempt to overthrow Mobutu, there was comparatively little bloodshed. But the current war has resulted in immense bloodshed. Many atrocities, committed by both sides, have been documented. After distancing himself from his Rwandan mentors, Kabila had started demonising the Tutsis. Hundreds of Tutsis were massacred in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in August 1998. One thousand civilians were massacred by the southern Kivu by Rwandan and rebel forces. Ethnic cleansing in Makobolo in January 1999 claimed more than 500 lives.

THE military stalemate combined with the growing desire of the intervening countries to extricate themselves from the quagmire, has led to the signing of the latest ceasefire agreement. The countries also seem to have realised the futility of finding a military solution to the problems of Central Africa. There was also the ever increasing danger of the war engulfing the entire region.

As it is, Angola's intervention in the war has encouraged the renegade Unita forces to derail the 1994 Lusaka Peace Accords. Unita launched a full-scale military offensive earlier in the year. With most of Angola's elite troops fighting in the Congo, Unita opened up new fronts and is once again in control of about half of Angola. Faced with serious reverses, the Angolan Government has recalled the bulk of Angolan troops in the Congo. Unita's allies in neighbouring Republic of Congo (Brazaville) have also been encouraged to re-ignite the civil war. Brazaville, the capital, was attacked by pro-Unita militias identified with former President Pascal Lissouba, who was ousted with Angola's help.

In Zimbabwe, domestic opinion has not been favourable to military intervention in the Congo. Even the hitherto pro-government Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has become critical of President Robert Mugabe's policies. There were also serious but unsubstantiated allegations that people close to Mugabe and the military establishment are profiting from the war in the Congo.

In Uganda, the war has considerably dented Museveni's stature. The Western media allege that people close to Museveni, including his brother, had profited enormously from the war. With Ugandan troops heavily deployed inside the Congo, rebels opposed to Museveni have increased the frequency of their attacks inside Uganda. The rebels in Namibia, encouraged by Unita, tried to seize the Caprivi strip, which is wedged between the borders of Angola, Botswana and Zambia, in the last week of August. Peace in the Congo was getting to be an attractive option for all the major players concerned. There was also a growing domestic pressure in the Congo for a negotiated solution.

But a durable peace may be elusive. For Rwanda and Uganda, the war has brought enormous profits, mainly through the illegal smuggling of gold and diamonds. Rwanda will only be satisfied after the Interahamwe is subdued. The proposed multilateral peacekeeping force will find it extremely difficult to disarm the extremist Hutus and the other guerilla groups such as the Mai-Mai, fighting on the side of Kabila; and the Banyamulenge (Tutsis long settled in the Congo) and the dissident Congo Armed Forces, which had broken away from the Congolese army after the fall of Mobutu. ■



THEMBA HADEBE/AP

Rebel leader Ernest Wamba dia Wamba signs the ceasefire agreement in Lusaka.

A long and winding road

In Guatemala, which has come a long way from the days of a military dictatorship to a barely functioning democracy, the outcome of a nationwide referendum and the scuttling of peace accords slow down further progress towards peace and democracy.

SIDDHARTHA BAVISKAR

JULY 1999, Santa Anita estate, Colomba Costa Cuca, Quezaltenango, Guatemala: Looking at Aura Vicente as she cradles an infant inside a damp and dirty building, it is hard to imagine that she was once the first female captain in the Revolutionary Organisation of the People in Arms (ORPA). "When the army kidnapped and murdered my father, I had no choice but to flee to the mountains near San Marcos," she says softly. It was there that Vicente, then known only by her alias, "Juana", joined the Left-wing insurgency that erupted in the mid-1960s. She spent the following 10 years on the run before escaping to Mexico. It was only in 1997, following the signing of the United Nations-sponsored peace accords, that she could return home. Camps scattered across the verdant landscape provide some 1,50,000 former Guatemalan refugees and demobilised Left-wing combatants a chance to lead normal lives once again.

In December 1996, the Government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) signed the last of a series of peace accords, one that promised to bring a "firm and lasting peace" to a country that had been torn apart by a 36-year-long civil war. Some 2,00,000 persons were killed or "disappeared" during the bloody conflict; hundreds of thousands sought refuge abroad or in other parts of the country.

The scope of the accords is impressive. It ranges from a Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights to an Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to another on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society. Indeed, there is scarcely an area of national life that they leave untouched. Such comprehensiveness would seem to augur well for the future of Guatemala. It would, for instance, imply that the harsh discrimination that marks this divided society will soon be reduced if not eliminated, and that its armed forces will have greater respect for democratic norms.

Unfortunately, recent events point to a less sanguine outlook. Although Guatemala figures among middle-income countries in terms of per capita income, there is a gross maldistribution of land and income. Such inequalities are exacerbated by the cleavage between ladinos (Spanish-speaking whites or mestizos) and (predominantly Mayan) indigenous peoples, and the rural-urban divide.

Three-fourths of Guatemala's 11 million citizens live below the poverty line; of the 58 per cent of the population that lives in extreme poverty, over four-fifths is Mayan. The top 10 per cent of the population receives 46.4 per cent of the national income while the two lowest quintiles combined get only 7.9 per cent. As little as 0.15 per cent of the rural population (a little more than 10,000 people), engaged in commercial agriculture, controls as much as 70 per cent of agricultural land.

A 1997 assessment by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) describes Guatemala as one of the most "archaically repressive, unjust and racist societies in the western hemisphere." Agricultural production has focussed on exports, leading to a critical level of food insecurity. Infant mortality rates, illiteracy and malnutrition continue to be unacceptably high.

Thus, poverty afflicts the peasant more than it does the city-dweller; it hurts the indigenous majority much more than it does the ladino minority. The state has done little to improve things. Its spending on education and health is one of the lowest in the region; its capacity to tax, redistribute wealth and provide basic services to the needy, frighteningly low.

The unequal distribution of resources which, in turn, has led to the concentration of power in the hands of a small private sector and military elite, was one of the main reasons for the rise of the Marxist-led, Cuban-supported insurgency (broadly represented by the URNG) in the country. The fact that toward the second half of the 1980s the insurgency was largely a spent force may be attributed largely to the brutal and widespread repression unleashed by the Army and right-wing paramilitary groups. Their justification? Defence of national sovereignty and, later, also of the constitutional order against an internationally-supported Communist insurgency.

In the Cold War context, these counter-insurgency efforts, which included grave human rights violations, were actively supported by the United States as part of its foreign policy – a fact noted by the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) established in June 1994 as part of the peace agreements. Observers note that, unlike the peace process in neighboring El Salvador where guerillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) were firmly maintaining the offensive against the beleaguered Salvadoran military when they came to the negotiating table, in Guatemala the URNG guerillas had become more of a nuisance than a threat to the state even before the talks began.

Having gained the upper hand over its opponents, why did the Guatemalan military agree to support the peace initiative formally? One plausible reason is the presence of a moderate faction within the military high command. According to Colonel Benito Raggio, Military Adviser to the U.N. Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA), "the Guatemalan military is a professional institution. There are moderate 'visionaries' in the military high command who realised that, although the insurgency had been defeated militarily,

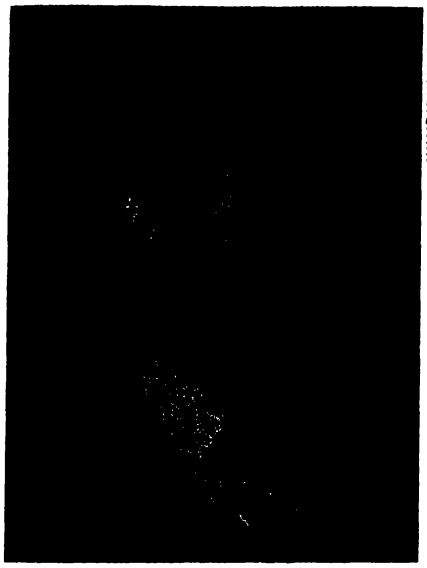
an ideological and political victory was not possible. Also, Guatemala's image in the international community had deteriorated and, with the end of the Cold War, international pressure on the government had mounted."

In Raggio's view, the Army's strength and resistance to civilian control stemmed from the fact that the Guatemalan state was weak and had abdicated its basic responsibilities to the military. "It was the Army that largely dealt with the crisis that Hurricane Mitch (November 1998) left in the wake. Only it could deal with the soaring crime in the country." This opinion, however, ignores the important contribution of local non-governmental organisations and international agencies to relief operations, and towards strengthening and improving key political institutions such as the judiciary and the police.

A second factor, besides the Army's pragmatism, is that the military has not found the terms of the peace agreements to be punitive. While the armed forces seem to be fulfilling some of the commitments demanded by the peace agreements (some of these even preceded the accords as, for instance, reducing manpower by a third) it is far from clear whether their basic autonomy with respect to the state has been eroded thus far. During the conflict, the military acted with impunity against any perceived opposition. It kidnapped, tortured and killed scores of guerillas as well as innocent civilians.

The reports of both the CEH and the Catholic Church-sponsored Project on Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI) provide chilling testimony to its flagrant violations of human rights. The CEH report, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence", concludes that the state-perpetrated genocide (including over 600 massacres) against the Mayan community between 1981 and 1983 and that, together with paramilitary groups, it was responsible for over 90 per cent of the human rights violations committed. The report calls for bringing the perpetrators to justice and compensating the victims. Unfortunately, its recommendations are not legally binding.

Another clear sign of military independence is that those responsible for the brutal assassination of Bishop Juan Gerardi – the Army is widely suspected to be behind it – in April 1996 are still at large. The military has been unwilling to cooperate with the investigation, which has dragged on fruitlessly. Bishop Gerardi, a staunch defender of human rights and the leader of the REMHI project, was killed barely two days after he presented the project report titled "Guatemala. Never Again".



WANG YUAN-MAO/AP

President Alvaro Arzz. Little progress with regard to the accords can be expected during his lame-duck government in an election year.

Military resistance to control by the state is perhaps understandable given that it has governed the nation for much of this century, including an uninterrupted three-decade rule after the U.S.-led overthrow of the democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz Government in 1954. It had also influenced the framing of the last Constitution (in 1986) which does not permit a civilian to hold the position of Minister of Defence.

Raggio attributes military autonomy to deeper problems. He says: "If the military can act with impunity, it is ultimately due to a political, structural problem; one that is related to the poverty, corruption and illiteracy in this country." The causes of military supremacy may be many, but one thing remains clear: the military vehemently opposes any effort to make it answer for its crimes.

Recent startling revelations, however, may force it to be more cooperative in this regard. A military logbook that records in frightening detail the fate of 183 Guatemalans at the hands of the security forces during the mid-1980s – and U.S. complicity in the anti-insurgency campaign – surfaced last May in the U.S. What makes the document unique is that it was smuggled out of the Guatemalan Army's own archives. Although the military has denied the report, its publication may well build up sufficient pressure on a reluctant Alvaro Arzz Government to take the military to task.

OBSERVERS note that two serious inherent weaknesses undermine the accords. First, to what extent do the signatories to the agreements represent the aspirations of Guatemalan society as a whole? The URNG is an umbrella organisation formed in 1982 by various politico-military organisations such as the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP); the Organisation of the People in Arms (ORPA); and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). It claims to speak for a broad spectrum of disaffected Guatemalan citizens, in particular the Mayan majority.

However, while the revolutionaries were involved in promoting social movements in support of the indigenous cause from the mid-1970s, the relationship between the Mayans and those who claimed to fight on their behalf has often been marked by suspicion, hostility or outright rejection.

Finally, although diverse civic organisations were consulted during the negotiations, clear support to the agreements, and to the broader process that they represent, has not been forthcoming from important right-wing groups, in particular the Guatemalan Revolutionary Front (FRG). The FRG is one of the two right-wing parties – the other being the ruling National Advancement Party (PAN) that dominate national politics. As Edelberto Torres-Rivas, a Guatemalan sociologist and adviser to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), puts it, "for the FRG, the URNG is just a gang of criminals; therefore it views the promises made at the negotiating table by the PAN government not as moral commitments of the Guatemalan state but only obligations undertaken by the current Government."

The second drawback of the accords has to do with implementation. The agreements are full of ambitious objectives and stirring phrases. Yet their wording is so ambiguous and they involve so many agencies that verifying them and holding someone responsible for their implementation will be a slippery task.

The Government has already fallen short of its scheduled commitments on most issues. It has dragged its feet on vital components of the reform process, for instance, those affecting the tax system. Guatemala's effective rate of taxation is dismayingly low: only 8 per cent, a little over half the average rate for Latin America and way below the 30 per cent

average in western Europe. This has prompted even the fiscally conservative International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to ask for a significant increase in tax rates. It should not be surprising, then, that the state is financially strapped.

Land reform is another issue on which critics charge the government with having done very little, and made largely cosmetic, changes. As a source from the international community, who wished to remain anonymous emphasises, any attempt at a genuine land reform will confront stern resistance from the landed elite. The source said: "The mechanisms established by the government are so inadequate that it will take as many as a hundred years for the half a million peasants estimated to be potential beneficiaries of the reform actually to receive such benefits. There is not going to be any redistribution of land here. There are two topics that are taboo in this country: land and the military. They have not changed; nor are they going to."

Looming elections (presidential, congressional and municipal scheduled for November 1999) have distracted the governing party from accord implementation and further debilitated an already flagging political will. Indeed, observers note that were it not for the persistence of a raft of international agencies and occasional prodding from generous international donors who are pouring money into the country, even the progress shown thus far would not have been achieved. If the FRG wins the November elections, as is being speculated, the fate of the agreements will be even more uncertain.

UNDOUBTEDLY the most severe setback to the process of peace and democratisation in Guatemala was the mandate against the constitutional reform in a nationwide referendum held in May 1999. The reforms were designed to provide fundamental legal and constitutional authority for key elements in the peace agreements, particularly those relating to indigenous rights, the role of the armed forces, and the reform of the justice system. The nation's rejection of the reform package means, for example, that it refuses to acknowledge the rights of its indigenous community by failing to grant official recognition to its 23 languages. It also implies that the role of the Army in Guatemalan society and its position with respect to civilian authority continues to be ambiguous. Torres-Rivas points out that centuries of oppression and systematic exploitation, first at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors and the creole elite and later by the predominantly ladino elite, has meant that today the Mayan communities live in appalling conditions of poverty, ethnic discrimination and exploitation. "They are second-class citizens", he sums up.

However, what is perhaps more troubling is that less than a fifth of the registered voters bothered to go to the Consulta Popular (as the referendum was called) at all. Indeed, Guatemala has had one of the lowest rates of voter turn-out in Latin America. For many poor, illiterate Guatemalans, voting is a time-consuming and expensive ritual, the outcome of which offers little hope for change. Many others regard it with cynicism. Given these circumstances, their apparent indifference to a referendum that was promoted more by a host of international agencies than by their government itself is perhaps understandable.

Several explanations are offered as to why people turned down the proposed changes. Foremost among them are that Guatemalan society is deeply racist and conservative; that promoters of the reform were unduly complacent; and that the government lacked the will to "sell" the reform. According to Torres-Rivas, a lack of political will and the hostile attitude of the influential evangelical Church guaranteed a negative response.

The reforms had taken a long time to get through the Guatemalan Congress and had expanded from 12 to 50 items in their coverage. "Congress wilfully scuttled the reform initiative. It overburdened the reform package in order that its complexity would confound voters, ultimately leading most of them to reject it," Torres-Rivas said. The injunction of the powerful and conservative evangelical Church to its followers to vote against the reform if they did not understand the contents of the reform package had further stood against its success.

The rejection of the proposal means that a new government, whether formed by the FRG or the PAN, will be even less enthusiastic about reforms than the present one. What makes things worse is that the young Left-wing coalition party, the New Nation Alliance (ANN), and other Left-wing groups have been unable to rally popular support for the accords.

THE return of peace and democracy to Latin America has been hailed widely. Elections are held; votes are cast. Guatemala, too, has shed its authoritarian legacy. Today the possibility of another military coup is remote because the military knows that in the present international context, it will prove costly if it strays beyond the boundaries of constitutional legality. However, if Guatemala has to be something more than a barely functioning democracy it needs to surmount daunting structural obstacles, among them, widespread poverty and severe inequality and discrimination. So far, the push for reform has come from without, mainly at the urging of the international community. But for any change to be successful in the long term, it has to come from within.

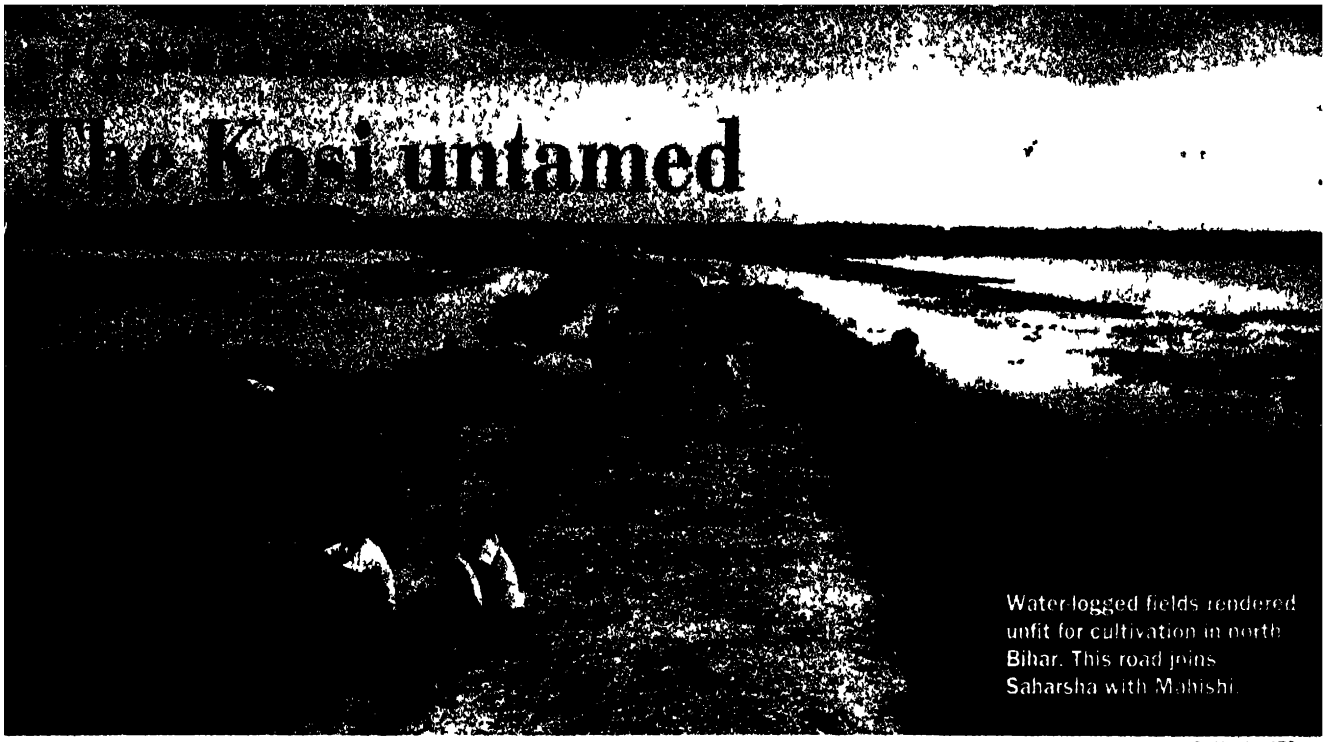
This is happening, albeit at what seems an agonisingly slow pace. The result of the referendum was discouraging and little progress on the accords can be expected from a lame-duck Arzz Government in an election year. Yet at the same time, Mayan organisations, human rights groups and a host of other non-governmental organisations representing civil society are gradually coming to the fore. Only when Guatemalans themselves understand and are convinced of the need for change will far-reaching reforms be proposed, accepted and implemented.

Such a process will take time but so long as it is carried out through the ballot box and not through the barrel of a gun, there is hope yet. Dinorah Azpuru, a researcher at the Association for Research and Social Studies in Guatemala City, is optimistic about the possibilities of a more peaceful and democratic nation. "I think that we are advancing on both fronts; democracy continues to be strengthened, and though the peace process has met with obstacles, it has not stalled. If we consider the current situation in the context of Guatemala's political history, recent changes have been transcendental."

From seamstress to guerilla leader to vegetable seller and, now, to a community creche worker, Aura Vicente has come a long way. "Now I have to attend to problems faced by the community and to the education of my children. The peace was signed; but it is only a signature. It stopped the war and the massacres... that's good. But things haven't really changed. Poverty and ill-treatment still exist. Now we have to take up a political struggle." ■

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The Kosi untamed



Water-logged fields rendered unfit for cultivation in north Bihar. This road joins Saharsha with Mahishi.

KANCHAN MAHATO

The flood -prone Kosi is 'Bihar's sorrow', a nightmare in flood management. Efforts to contain the river's annual season of fury by building embankments have not succeeded. A trip along the Kosi, in the thickly-populated and desperately poor northern Bihar, that revealed tales of woe.

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
recently in north Bihar

FOR the third time after sunset, Ganga Prasad Yadav had predicted "landfall" in two hours, when the boat rammed yet again into silt. As his fellow boatmen jumped into knee-deep water in the middle of nowhere in the Kosi, Ganga Prasad remained motionless – a silhouette on the wooden ridge, but for the early-night glow off his silver teeth. Rescuing a wooden boat from the Kosi's silt was an everyday chore that would be done in good time. He therefore peered eagerly at the small crowd inside the boat in the hope that someone would play the tape-recorder once again. Rarely had Ganga Prasad listened to himself singing the Ramayana, squatting on the edge of the boat, for night travellers crossing the endless river.

Time has no meaning on the Kosi, as is the case in most parts of north Bihar, where urban priorities are often made to stand on their heads. It was six hours since Ganga Prasad and his friends had raised their oars and started the return journey with the visitors to Ghonghepur village on the edge of the western embankment of the Kosi. For the team of journalists, who had made their onward-crossing downstream in five hours, the string of villages so full of life within the river were the least of the day's surprises.

From the mainland village of Baluaha to the east, the Kosi was but a broad expanse and the villages long green beads in its middle. The western embankment was a distant mist. The boat had struck the bottom right in the heart of the Kosi, when the river unveiled ever-changing, ever-recharged channels of muddy water and silt, small trees, paddy fields, cattle and huts. For every serpentine channel that the Kosi made within itself, it clogged and choked another under silt. Navigation on the Kosi's bosom was therefore a necessary discovery on foot for the boatmen who took turns to pull the boat with nylon ropes through freshly deposited mud, through tall grass and shrubs, sometimes along the crumbling edges of island-villages.

The Kosi was full of freshness: playful river dolphins, spotlessly white cattle dotting rows of jute-and-bamboo huts, handpumps on the riverbanks, rising above flooded tubewells, women in canoes that were full of fodder, a friendly hoot, silence that made music out of the sinking footfalls of boatmen. Momentarily at least, the Kosi seemed like a different world.

But remove the lens, as it were, and the larger setting is as muddy and depressing as the Kosi silt. Northern Bihar, through which the Kosi and all other major tributaries of the Ganga flow, is among the poorest and the most backward regions of India In many parts of the 21 northern districts of the State, which are among the least urbanised parts of the country, flood-mauled gutters masquerade as highways. Nights underline the absence of electricity There are virtually no transport and communication facilities The first link to settled society down south, a bridge (at Mokameh) across the Ganga which flows west to east dividing the State, is only three decades old. The pervading lawlessness in north Bihar had so far been encouraged mostly by isolation – not by an organised awareness of caste or by social and political consciousness, unlike in the case of the South. However, that is changing – for the worse.

North Bihar's worst curse is not lawlessness or even the lack of developmental infrastructure – it is geography. Geography, paradoxically, is its blessing too. The plains of Bihar, adjoining Nepal, are drained by a number of rivers that have their catchment in the steep and geologically nascent Himalayas. For centuries, torrential rains in the Nepal Himalayas have made these rivers – including the Ghaghra, the Gandak, the



INDWAR PANJAT



INDWAR PANJAT

Water in a protected village in the foreground, with the embankment in the background. Embankments have largely proved counter-productive in the war against floods here; (below) people living on an embankment meant to protect the village. Sometimes it is the only dry stretch of land available.

Buhri Gandak, the Bagmati, the Bhutahi Balan, the Kamala, the Kosi and the Mahananda – carry a very high sediment load down to the plains North Bihar's plains are hence one of the most fertile regions in the country, and settlement began here as early as the 7th century B C Many locations in the region are associated with legends, including those in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata Several of these were centres of the first kingdoms of India, such as Magadha, the first empire of the Mauryas, had its capital in the North Bihar plains

Once the rivers enter the plains much of the silt begins to settle, raising the beds of the rivers, shrinking their channels, blocking their flow Come the rainy season and the rivers cut fresh paths through the sediment Most rivers of north Bihar have done this extensively, the Kosi being the most notorious example The interlacing channels of the Kosi, which confuse Ganga Prasad and other boatmen in Saharsha district, in a way symbolise the scourge that is endemic to north Bihar rivers

The silt yield of the Kosi, one of the largest tributaries of the Ganga, has been estimated to be about 19 cubic metres per hectare per annum, which is among the highest in the world, according to a report of the Centre for Science and Environment The river is better known today as "Bihar's sorrow", for the devastating floods that it causes and, more particularly, for its disastrous shifting of course It has been variously estimated that in the last 250 years the Kosi has moved westwards by an astounding 210

A transplanted village

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
at Ghonghepur

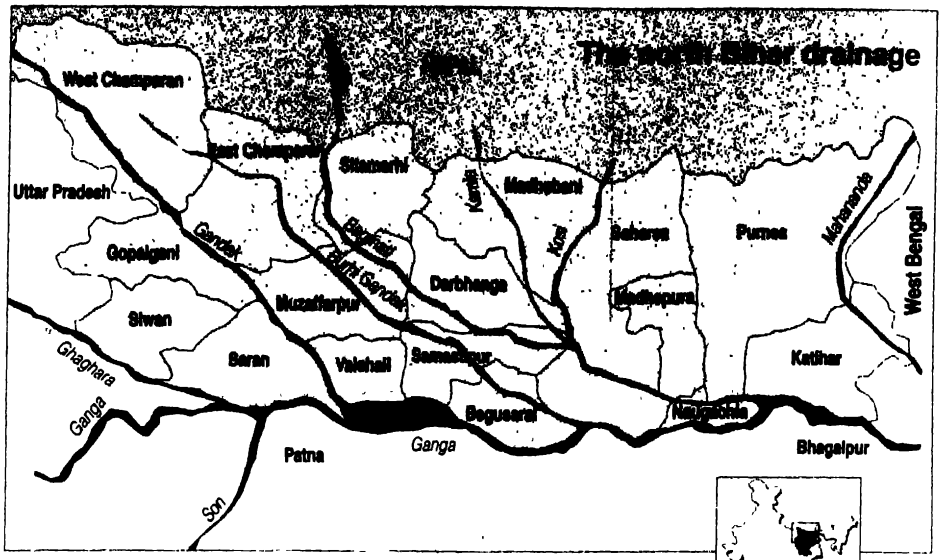
THE river dictates lifestyle in Ghonghepur, a speck on the edge, a victim of the Kosi's western embankment. The small village will have a place in any flood map of north Bihar, and its claim to fame is the stagnant waters of the Kosi and the Kamala that engulf it for most of the year.

The embankment that was meant to protect the village is, according to residents, sometimes the only dry stretch of land available. Most households have built makeshift homes there, some five [illegible] rags and hay, in between temporary shops. A village transplanted on to the embankment.

Even as the Kosi erodes an area, it builds up land elsewhere. Large tracts suddenly become available for cultivation, but crops rise for harvest go under. The unpredictability makes farming or any other investment a risky venture, and young men leave early as labourers in search of employment, mostly to Punjab and Haryana. Women and children and the old remain on the edge of poverty. They are at the mercy of moneylenders and [illegible] orders that take them in unfamiliar destination. [illegible]

source of income, but milk must reach the cities the same day. For most part of the year, hours in a boat is the only way to reach civilisation. There is no land worth working on.

The local school exists only on paper; the Kosi claimed it long ago. The teacher seldom comes, thanks to the flood. Children catch fish, cut fodder or herd cattle, and pin their hopes on becoming labourers in the cities. Sometimes they are lucky to the carpet weaving industry in [illegible]



Source: Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi

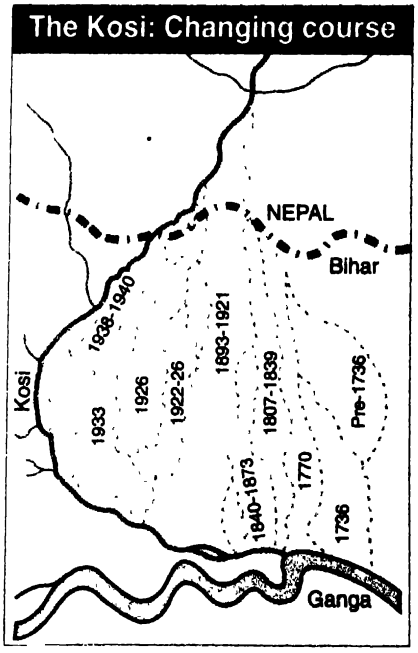
km, that in 200 years it has shifted its course by about 130 km, and so on. As satellite pictures indicate, the river, which flowed east of Purnea (in the 18th century, according to some people) has moved, through more than 12 distinct channels, to its present course, on the east of Saharsha. The root cause of such shifting of course by the Kosi is the steepness and fragility of the Himalayas where it originates: the river carries five times the sediment load of any other river in Bihar.

Now, a silent revolution is on in north Bihar. Organisations have been sprouting in every other locality against what has been independent India's solution to the waywardness of the Himalayan rivers – trying to contain them within sand-and-mud embankments on either side. For example, as the length of the embankments along the Kosi has increased, the string of activist organisations representing what is termed as "Kosi sufferers" too have grown. The people indeed "suffer" because of the Kosi; however, engineering solutions initiated by successive governments have made its lethal mood swings inevitable.

"It is like tying a snake into knots to keep it in good humour," says Dinesh Kumar Mishra, an engineer-turned-activist-researcher and convener of the Barh Mukti Abhiyan (BMA), who is in the forefront of north Bihar's campaign against man-made flood disasters and putting the blame for them on the rivers. "By building embankments on either side of a river and trying to confine it to its channel, its heavy silt and sand load is made to settle within the embanked area itself, raising the river bed and the flood water level. The embankments too are therefore raised progressively until a limit is reached when it is no longer possible to do so. The population of the surrounding areas is then at the mercy of an unstable river with a dangerous flood water level, which could any day flow over or make a disastrous breach."

At Shatwar in Mahishi block of Saharsha district, villagers Ramakanth Mukya and Rajendra Jha say that their land, though outside the Kosi's eastern embankment, has been under stagnating water for months. Manik Chandra Jha, a teacher of the local school for 30 years, said that the village was low-lying *vis-a-vis* the Kosi, and, that in addition to the eastern embankment a road had been constructed parallel to it, blocking the natural drainage into the river. Rainwater stagnates on land that was used for cultivation. So do the waters of th small streams that used to flov into the Kosi. Mosquitoes, no fish, breed in the stagnant, oxy gen-starved water.

"This is a ubiquitous sight ir north Bihar," says Mishra "Rainwater collects outside the embankments and the rise in the water level within causes seepage through the embankments to the "protected" areas. A more serious problem arises when the embankments on the main river prevent the entry of a tributary. Sluice gates are constructed, but they have to be kept closed during the rainy season, as the flood waters of the main river would otherwise force their way through the tributary into the protected areas. But closed sluice gates during the rains also mean that the tributary would submerge the protected areas. So the tributaries also have been embanked, and rain and flood water stagnates between the embankment of the main river and that of the tributary. It has to be pumped out, or people have to wait endlessly, sometimes for



Periodic changes in course mark a feature of rivers in north Bihar. The Kosi, for example, has moved westwards cumulatively by 210 km in the past 250 years, taking more than 12 distinct routes during the period. The river, which used to flow near Purnea in the 18th century, now flows east of Saharsha.

Source: Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi.

Vastralaya, the textile shop, right there on the embankment, where the wooden shelf has more of tonics and tablets and emergency medicines than clothes. The owner, Mahendra Prasad Sah, is the village "medicine man". Mahendra Prasad has a medicine for every known disease in the village and ostensibly has the licence to sell them. "The really sick (if they are lucky) go to the public health centre 12 km away by boat, paying Rs. 25 per head," he said.



KANCHAN MAHATO





KANCHAN MAHATO

more than a year, for the water to evaporate."

The case of Ghonghepur village (see box), at the southern tip of the western Kosi embankment, is typical. According to the original plan, the embankment was to have ended 4 km upstream. However, as misfortune would have it, it was extended up to Ghonghepur. It now runs 126 km down the river, to the west, from Nepal and ends abruptly at Ghonghepur. Beyond this point the Kosi started spilling back into the village, submerging areas that were until then free from floods, according to Mishra.

Politicians and government officials came to the village again. Another embankment was constructed at right angles to the western embankment, to prevent the Kosi from entering the village. But during the next monsoon, floodwaters of the nearby Kamala river were blocked by the new 'T-spur embankment'. The village today is under water for nearly six to eight months a year, according to its residents.

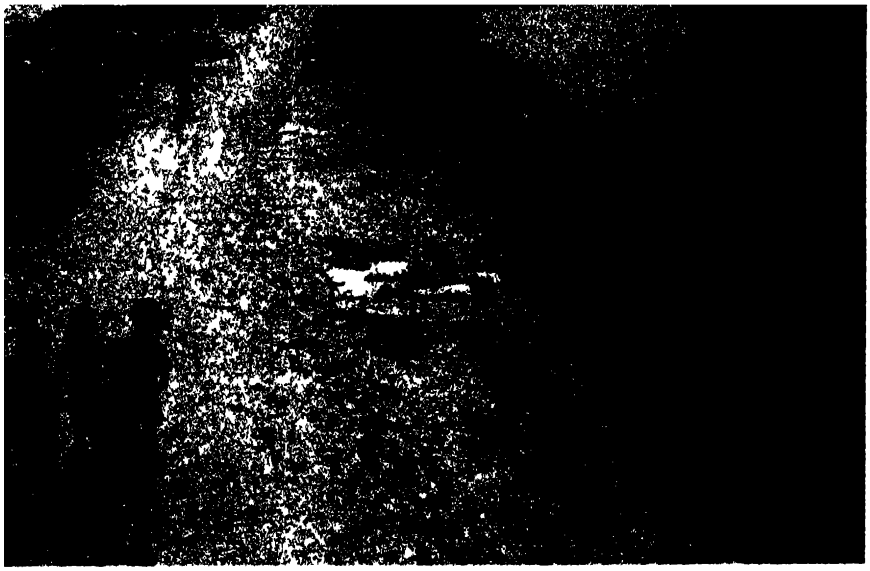
At Belwara, on the eastern Kosi embankment, Vidyanand Janand, who introduced himself as a "lecturer", said that before the embankments were built the river would swell only gradually giving the people sufficient warning to move to safe places. Moreover, he said, the farmers used to welcome the annual floods, which would certainly recede after replenishing the soil with fertile silt. "Today it is hazardous to live near the embankments. Waterlogging has left valuable land unfit for cultivation. Productivity has come down drastically. Yet people live there with a false sense of security."

According to one estimate, there is permanent water-logging in over 1,82,000 ha of land outside the eastern Kosi embankment alone. The State Government claims that it had drained out water from 65,000 ha but villagers living near the embankment and activists of the BMA point out that it has been of no use because the major sluices at Basua and Belwara are as good as closed permanently, cancelling any effect of drainage.

Ever since embankment-building started on the Kosi, the other north Bihar rivers – the Gandak, the Mahananda, the Burhi Gandak, the Ghaghra, the Kamala-Balan, the Bhutahi Balan and the Bagmati, in addition to the Ganga – too have been embanked systematically, producing the same problems. The length of embankments along the Bihar rivers grew from 160 km in 1954 to 3,465 km in 1998 (at a cost of Rs.746 crores). Simultaneously, a network of roads and railway lines were built east to west, cutting across the natural drainage system in the plains where all the rivers flow from north to south. Thus, embankments that were meant to control floods have resulted in the flood-prone area in north Bihar going up from 2.5 million ha in 1952 to 6.89 million ha in 1994.

The social and environmental costs of this have been heavy. But the benefits to the well-entrenched network of politicians, engineers and contractors from the construction of embankments (and roads), the repairs to them, and the flood relief work have been enormous.

Bihar is India's most flood-prone State, with 76 per cent of the population in the north living under the recurring threat of devastation. This year monsoon floods started early in several districts of north Bihar. The very first spell of rain





(Above left) A village used to exist here. Even as the Kosi devours an area, it yields land elsewhere. (Above) Life on the Kosi's western embankment. To left is the Kosi, and to right the Kamla Balan. The rivers flow parallel to each other for a long distance and the embankment acts as a wall in between. (Left) Waiting for ferry boats on the eastern embankment of the Kosi. Floods often force them to leave their villages, but later they return.

breached three embankments, flooded 550 villages in eight districts, and displaced more than a million people. At least 12 people were killed in the first week of August; by September 6, the toll mounted to 282, with all the major rivers, including the Kosi, the Bagmati, the Gandak, the Mahananda and the Ganga flowing above the danger mark and threatening to breach their embankments.

On August 5 itself, the annual ritual of shifting the blame to the Centre was performed in the Legislative Council by Chief Minister Rabri Devi and State Water Resources Minister Jagdanand Singh. Rabri Devi told the Council that it was beyond the State's means to check the annual floods. The onus, she said, was on the Centre. Replying to a special debate, Jagdanand Singh said: "It is impossible for us to save north Bihar from floods without the cooperation of Nepal. It is for the Union Government to take up this issue with that country."

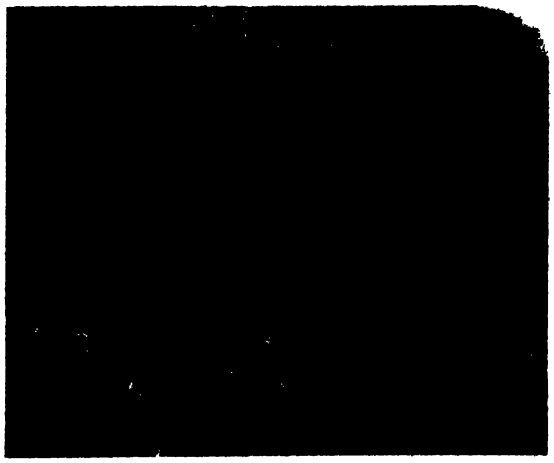
The State Government skirted the issue of embankments and referred to a 50-year-old proposal to construct a high dam across the Kosi at Barahkshetra in Nepal. Such a dam has been widely projected (but rarely believed) as the true solution to the problem of floods in north Bihar. Year after year the flood-hit population has been fed on this mirage of the dam in Nepal, which would store the Kosi's monsoon deluge and release it during the summer months to help irrigation and the production of electricity.

But the Government has had no clear answers to questions about the safety of such a dam in a highly seismic zone, about the heavy siltation that could fill it too early, about the enormous quantity of water that would continue to flow down the Kosi because it has a huge catchment below the proposed dam. Nor does it say anything about the huge construction cost that would put the price of power and water from the dam above the reach of the ordinary people, or about the opposition in Nepal to such a project.

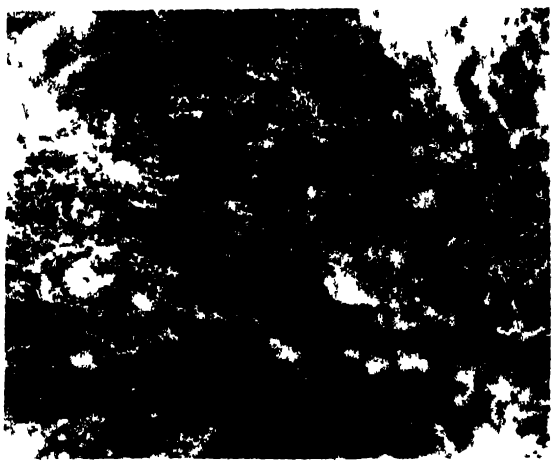
The effect of the dream is beginning to wear thin. At a meeting organised in Belwara to discuss the issue of embankments, the residents of the villages were sharply divided though many were unaware of the factors that spell disaster from the high dam: "We have been doctored into believing that when there is a lot of water, it is because the Nepal Government releases it to India. Can't Nepal take water to its own land?" one of them asked. Another said: "If the water flows naturally as it did in our villages before these embankments were built, a flood would spread slowly and affect us less. But add to these embankments a big dam in Nepal. What will happen if it bursts, as the embankments do now?"

Along all the northern rivers, breaches in the embankments, both natural and man-made, are becoming more frequent.

The State Government describes those who cut the embankments to save their own lives as "anti-social elements". Vijaya Kumar, an activist of the BMA, says: "In many villages, people are assisted in such endeavours by local government officials. Clearly, an enraged river has no respect for authority."



COURTESY NRSA



(Top) A 1998 image from Indian Remote-sensing Satellite 1-C of the north Bihar area shows the Kosi before the floods in February; (above) the picture shows the area during the floods in August the same year.

The curse of the Kosi

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
at Belwara

BELWARA, a small village on the eastern embankment of the Kosi, has been eroded in large stretches by the river at least 11 times in the past three decades, according to the villagers. The sluice gates that were built on the embankment, to allow the Satras Dhar, a tributary, to enter the Kosi, is now in a state of disrepair, smashed by the deluge in 1984, and clogged, as the Kosi's bed is at a higher level. The tributary is now a dead stream on a new route along the embankment, submerging areas originally protected by the eastern embankment.

When the embankment was being built in the late 1950s, villagers who lived in areas within, such as the family of Brajendra Singh, were sold on the dream of "land for land, house for house, employment for one" and "permanent salvation from floods". But the promises seldom materialised, and even if they did, the results were not as rosy as they were made out to be.

The alternative land offered was soon permanently waterlogged and thus unproductive. The construction of some houses was abandoned half-way through as the loan disbursements did not come. No employment was offered. Only a few were "rehabilitated". So Brajendra Singh has continued to live within the embankment whenever the Kosi shrunk its flow, and has no place to go when the river engulfs his land annually. "It had always been the river of sorrow for us. We cannot control it. The embankment must come down," he said.

At the time of construction, the two embankments of the Kosi had 304 villages between them and the river. In the last 40 years, the Kosi has never failed to inundate these villages and life has been quite unsettling.

Those who fought to stay immediately outside the embankments, by demanding at the time of construction that the space between the embankments be kept to a minimum, are no better off today. Satyanarayan Sahai, who lives outside the embankment on "protected land", too wants it to be dismantled. "By the end of October, the flood waters within the embankment drain out, but the so-called protected land where I live is permanently waterlogged," he explained.

Says Prabhu Narain Javad of the local Jyan Vigyan Samiti, which is spearheading a post-literacy movement in the village (the literacy rate here is 10 to 15 per cent): "We have shifted our homes 11 times from the village. There were floods during the time of our forefathers too. But the intensity was bearable. The silt that the Kosi spread on our lands was good for our crops. Now everything has changed. The embankment has spelt our doom. The river got us... for trying to control it." ■



KEDER SHARMA

The sluice gates that were built on the eastern embankment of the Kosi to let the Satras Dhar into the river, smashed by a deluge in 1984.

Social and environmental groups are joining hands to conduct awareness camps in the island villages in the Kosi heartland. There is a clamour for "the total liberation of the Kosi", "the total abrogation of the Kosi project", "letting the river have its original space right down to the Ganga". More practical suggestions include "controlled flooding through carefully managed breaches". There are really absurd ones too, such as "building embankments parallel to the existing ones".

Elsewhere, occasionally, prominent individuals like Bihar's Inspector-General of Police Ramchandra Khan catch the imagination of the people by leading villagers to the Kosi to read poetry to the river and to pray to and plead with it: "Come back to us!" Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the BMA have decided to move the National Human Rights Commission against the Government's neglect of more than 10 lakh "Kosi sufferers".

In the past three to four decades, the population has grown rapidly and human occupation of the flood plains of the river has reached alarming proportions. The embankments have become so well-entrenched in north Bihar's populous landscape that when there are people who welcome their dismantling (for example, people living within the Kosi embankments) there will be others who want them to continue, until the threats to their own interests end. It has become a personal issue rather than a social problem for many. Was there not the clamour for taming the Kosi in pre-Independence days? And if embankments are dismantled completely, as the demand goes, who would account for the resultant immediate havoc? Therefore, the Government and its engineers conveniently ask: what exactly is the solution, if it is not the dam in Nepal? The answers are as unclear as the idea of the dam in Nepal.

The embankments have made north Bihar's human and environmental tragedy a formidable jigsaw puzzle. There are too many pieces, too many gaps. A lot of pieces convey images of poverty and ignorance, apathy and mismanagement, corruption and fatalism, which are so characteristic of rural Bihar society. ■

This feature is based on a study tour of flood-ravaged north Bihar organised in early August by Panos South Asia for a team of South Asian journalists. The Kathmandu-based media support organisation sponsored the tour, one of a series of such tours, as part of its efforts towards enhancing information flows on water management issues in South Asia.

Remains of the day

A set of recently-released photographs of the remains of George Mallory, found in an amazing state of preservation 75 years after his disappearance, adds to the mystique surrounding the legendary climber of Mount Everest.

PRAVEEN SWAMI

Of the two alternates, to turn back a third time or to die, the latter was for Mallory probably the easier. The agony of the first would be more than he as a man, as a mountaineer and as an artist, could endure.

– Francis Younghusband in *The Epic of Mount Everest*, 1926



JAKE NORTON/GAMMA

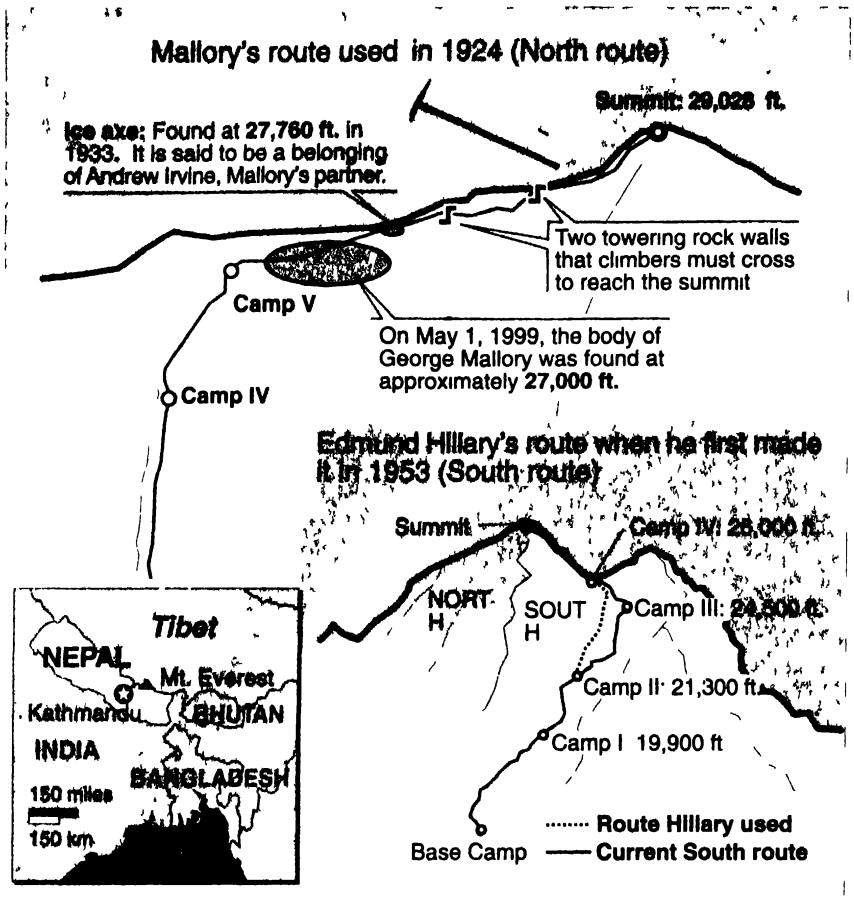
ON June 7, 1924, George Mallory sent down his last message from Camp VI on Everest to his partner Noel Odell, down at Camp V. "We'll probably start early tomorrow in order to have clear weather. It won't be too early to start looking for us either crossing the rock band or going up skyline at 8 a.m." Thereafter, no one knows what really happened to Mallory and his climbing partner Andrew Irvine before they disappeared into mountaineering legend.

The discovery of Mallory's body near the First Step on Everest in May 1999 (*Frontline*, June 18, 1999) was important not for the reason that it contributed in any meaningful way to a reappraisal of the climbing history of the majestic mountain. The fact that the body was found at the site, still roped, suggesting that Irvine fell with his partner, only affirm the case for scepticism about claims that the two could have made it to the top of the world's highest peak long before Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay did so in 1953.

These accounts largely rest on the early testimony of Odell, who himself later came to question those impressions. The mass of compelling evidence that Mallory and Irvine almost certainly died far from the summit has been painstakingly recounted in Walt Unsworth's seminal book, *Everest*.

Nor was Mallory an unqualified hero. His unsavoury racism, for one, has been largely censored out of media accounts. "Never mind Everest and its unfriendly glories," he wrote to his friend David Pye after the first ever expedition to Everest, sent out in 1921 to reconnaise the route through Tibet to the mountain. "I'm tired of travelling and travellers, far countries and uncouth people, trains and ships and shimmering mausoleums, foreign ports, dark-skinned faces and a garish sun."

The remains of George Mallory, found 75 years after his death, lying near the First Step on Everest.



THE real significance of the discovery of Mallory's body, and the scraps of paper, clothing and equipment found along with it, lies in the fact that these are monuments to the sheer human courage and perseverance of early mountaineers on Everest. With little equipment and even less of scientific or anecdotal data to depend on, Edward Norton reached a confirmed 28,126 feet during a 1924 expedition, a record that stood for three decades. In the similarly unsuccessful 1922 expedition, of which Mallory was a part, George Finch and Geoffrey Bruce made it to 27,000 feet. Bruce's achievement remains the only time a climber has set a new world altitude record on his or her very first attempt.

These achievements transcend the question of whether Mallory and Irvine reached the top of Everest or not: their achievement was that they set out to do so in the face of odds that now seem impossible.

The history of Everest climbing has been organically linked with imperialism, with ugly nationalism and uglier commercialism. The climbers of expeditions conducted during the period of 1921-1924, those who died and those who survived, redeem that history.

The 1924 expedition was, as in the case of previous expeditions, not only a battle against a mountain. As observers have pointed out, the real enemy was the absence of useful data. Although this was the third successive expedition to Everest, there had been precious little progress in the matter of the climbing kit. Modern mountaineers would consider it nothing short of suicidal to attempt an ascent with such equipment.

Modern expeditions have access to every form of technological support. Photographs can be put on the Internet almost instantaneously from Everest, sophisticated communication equipment allows for easy rescue, and hand-held global positioning system (GPS) equipment allows mountaineers to know precisely where they are even in the worst weather. All that Mallory had was a simple penknife and a wind-up watch. His compass had been left behind at Camp IV by accident.

Each climber on the 1924 expedition was given £50 for his climbing kit. Typically, the men wore woollen vests and drawers and thick flannel shirts and sweaters, covered by a light, flannel-lined knickerbocker suit. Gaberdine mittens covered wool gloves, and the socks were similarly improvised, offering hardly any real protection against frostbite. The sole real innovation was the use of the Burberry-manufactured Shackleton outfit, a lightweight suit made of gaberdine which helped keep the wind out but did little to conserve precious body heat.

Shoes were no different from those used for considerably less demanding Alpine climbs of a very different nature. They were of felt bound and soled with leather, with nothing but a few nails for grip. Crampons, footwear to increase grip on ice, were made of dural. Leather motor-cycling hoods designed to keep off speedy winds served as headgear, and crude motoring goggles strapped on with a simple elastic band protected climbers' eyes against snow blindness.

Interestingly, at least some climbers had more advanced ideas at the time. Australian-born Alpinist George Finch had already devised an early form of the modern insulated jacket, but such innovations were rejected, perhaps because of the mountaineering establishment's personal problems with the scientist-climber.

TUCKED away in Mallory's pockets were notes recording the quantities of food stocked at camps up Everest. The lists of regular rations are interspersed with those of delicacies: salmon, tongue, cafe au lait, and an array of sweets and cakes.

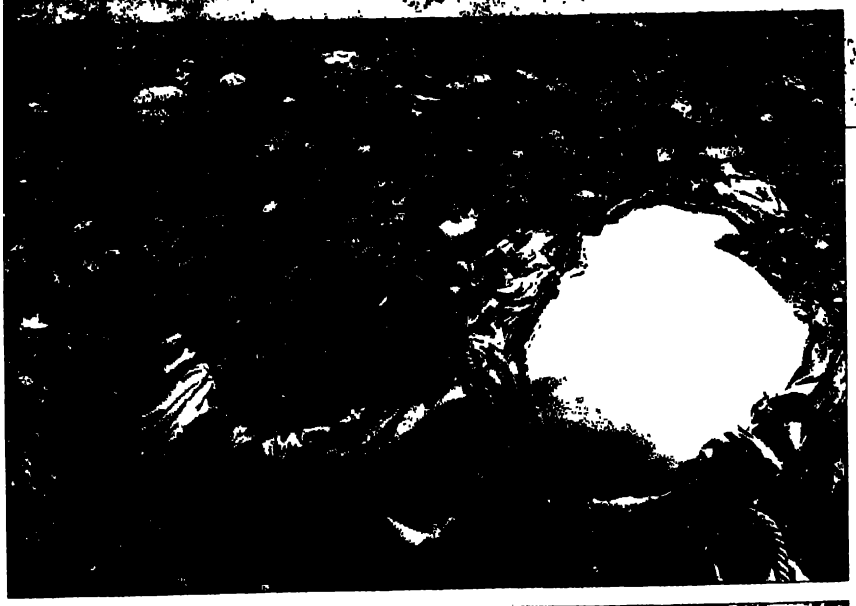
The 1921 Everest expedition, sent out to discover the route through Tibet to the mountain, suffered horribly attempting to live off the land. An unrelenting diet of yak meat, potatoes and tsampa became monotonous, and as climbers went off their food, sickness and plummeting morale rapidly followed. When the 1922 expedition went out, it was clear that a few delicacies among the diet would do no harm, a principle modern climbers understand well even as they frown at the indulgences of the grand pre-War expeditions. Meat lozenges, sweets and acid drops were supplied for climbers to suck on, soothing parched throats and tired bodies.

But, unaware of the science of what mountaineers need to eat at high altitudes and what should be avoided, planners took their stocking of delicacies to what their successors would see as absurd extremes. In 1924, sixty tins of quail in foie gras made their way to Everest, along with four dozen bottles of Montebello 1915 champagne. When E.F. Norton and Howard Somerville returned battered from an abortive summit attempt just before Mallory's fateful climb, they



ERIC SIMONSON/GAMMA

An ice axe, of a type that was standard issue for the 1924 expedition, found beside other remains. An identical axe, found in 1933 some 250 metres below the First Step, was the earliest remnant discovered of Mallory's climb. (Left) Much of the body was little decomposed, only degraded by glacial scraping of ice and rock; the climbing shoes of the time, which were felt-bound and had leather soles with just a few nails to provide grip.





were very clear about just what they wanted. "We don't want the damned oxygen," Norton is believed to have shouted out to the support party, "We want drink."

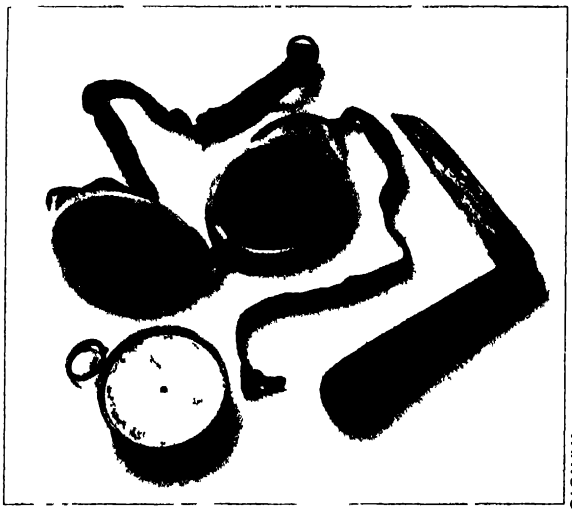
Mallory's perfectly preserved matchbox is redolent with stories about these pioneering Everest climbs. In May 1922, when climbers first arrived at North Col, at 23,000 feet, then the highest point humans had ever reached, they discovered that it had been a terrible mistake to bring slow-burning alcohol-fuelled burners instead of the smelly but more efficient Primus stoves. Making tea was near impossible since water boiled even at tepid temperatures. And tinned food, the climbers learned, had to share their sleeping bags in order to ensure that it did not

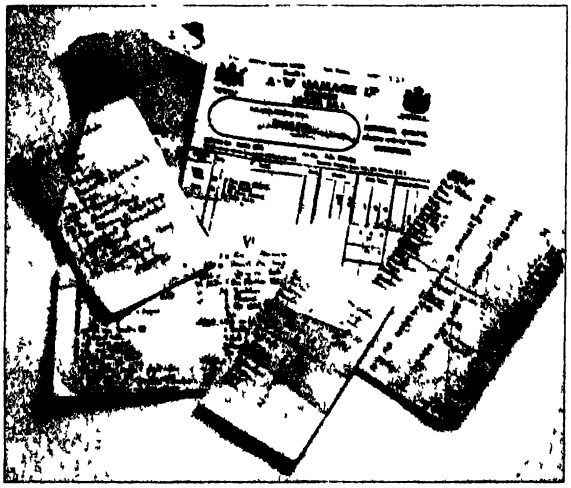




JIM FAGIOLO/ GAMMA

Matches, meat lozenges, sweets and acid drops that were supplied to climbers, found along with the remains; (right) motoring goggles, a pen knife and a wind-up watch that formed part of Mallory's climbing kit; notes recording the quantities of food stocked at camps along the way that were found in Mallory's pockets.





JIM FAGIOLO/ GAMMA

freeze. Perhaps the matches were also used to light cigarettes, for the brilliant but unorthodox Finch had a theory that smoking made breathing easier at high altitudes.

An ice axe found in 1933 by climber Wyn Harris some 250 metres below the First Step on Everest was the earliest physical remnant discovered of Mallory's climb. Engraved with its manufacturer's name, Jos. Willisch of Taesch-Zermatt, the axe was of a model which was standard issue for the 1924 expedition. The discovery of an identical ice axe along with Mallory's body appears to suggest that the axe seen in 1933 belonged to Irvine. Both may have died close to one another, although Irvine's body has not been sighted.

ONE major mystery about Mallory's climb, and one important to the history of mountaineering, has not been settled by the recovery of his body – little decomposed but degraded by the glacial scraping of ice and rock. No oxygen cylinders appear to have been found near the body, leaving open the question whether Mallory and Irvine took oxygen cylinders with them. Mallory had earlier sent down messages saying that he would be carrying two cylinders, but there has been some debate on whether he and Irvine in fact did so.

The 1922 expedition had proved beyond dispute the benefit of carrying oxygen, but many on the 1924 climb continued to object to its use as a matter of principle. Mallory's romantic beliefs had long led him to oppose the use of oxygen in climbing mountains, on Everest or elsewhere. Irvine, despite being an oxygen expert, had said that he would rather reach the foot of Everest's final pyramid without oxygen, than the summit with it.

Odell, their partner on the 1924 expedition and the sole witness to their fateful summit assault, found several cylinder parts scattered around Camp VI. He first believed that these were just signs of Irvine's incessant mechanical tinkering, but came to doubt whether oxygen was indeed used on that day. It is also possible that some mechanical defect prevented their use.

Siebe-Gorman provided units for the expedition, but a series improvements made over the 1922 version added to the weight of the oxygen sets, accentuating anti-technology positions. More serious was the fact that when the sets arrived in Calcutta, almost all were found to be defective in terms of workmanship and material. Irvine eventually set right most of the problems, and improvised a version lighter than the equipment originally put together by Siebe-Gorman. Irvine's degree of familiarity with the sets was one reason he was chosen as Mallory's climbing partner, although he was in ill-health.

The pioneering use of oxygen in 1922 and 1924 lay the foundations for subsequent Everest ascents. Decades later, however, improvements in climbing techniques and equipment allowed the challenge of climbing at such altitudes without oxygen to become a realistic test of physical endurance and mountaineering skill. On May 8, 1978, Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler realised Mallory's dreams by reaching the summit of Everest without artificial oxygen. Several climbers have since repeated the feat, notably Nepal's Ang Rita Sherpa (*Frontline* Cover Story, September 6, 1996) who has completed ten ascents of Everest without oxygen. ■

Of real security

L. RAMDAS

Society, State and Security: The Indian Experience by Verghese Koithara; Sage Publications, New Delhi; pages 414, Rs. 550.

Real Swaraj will come not by acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused

– Mahatma Gandhi, in *Young India*, 1925.

THESE pearls of wisdom came from the Father of the Nation almost three quarters of a century ago. It focussed on the empowerment of the people as the most important aspect of 'swaraj', or freedom. Unfortunately the state of the nation today is far removed from the vision that he had of India. Over half a century has passed since Independence and the Human Development Report 1999 brought out by the United Nations Development Programme tells it all. On the basis of the Human Development Index, India ranks 132nd among 174 countries listed in the report. Countries such as Botswana and Gabon rank above India. In short, the national leadership has failed its people. Basic needs such as drinking water, health, primary education and shelter have been continuously neglected. These and related aspects of 'human security' have been kept in sharp focus by Verghese Koithara while analysing India's national security concerns in this maiden work of his.

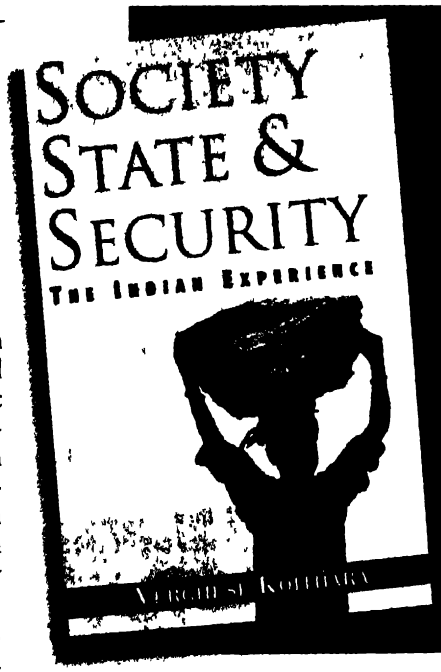
Having chosen an all-embracing title, it was inevitable that the author would end up saying something about everything. The master craftsman that he is, Koithara has arranged his 'collage' in an interesting and logical manner. The book comprises three distinct parts. Part I is titled "The Fifty Years, 1947-1997", Part II "The Coming Decade 2000-2010", and Part III "Security Assurance, 2000-2010". Each of these parts has six chapters and various aspects are treated under numerous sub-headings. This does at times tend to interfere with the smooth flow of the arguments being made. Perhaps the number of the sub-headings could have been reduced so that the text flowed more easily.

Matters affecting 'human security' feature throughout this monumental work. Unlike many analysts of 'national security' who neglected 'human security', Koithara feels that both these issues need to be addressed concurrently. In his view the leadership needs to take immediate corrective action in both these areas if India is to meet the aspirations of its people. Part I deals with the evolution of the modern Indian state, the social and economic changes and the management of external and internal security issues. In the opening chapter on the 'evolution of the modern Indian state', the author states: "Security has always been twinned with status in the minds of the Indian elite who have from the time of Independence harboured aspirations of the country becoming a great power." In the final piece called 'Looking Ahead' at the end of Part III, Koithara reinforces this Indian concept with yet another reference: "Jawaharlal Nehru fifty years ago had identified future great powers as the USA, USSR, China and India. The U.K., France, Germany and Japan did not feature in his list. If after fifty years the latter continue to remain ahead of India, in terms of both power and influence, there is need for introspection."

This obsession for power has not left us even today. Every conceivable trick is being played on the country's masses by eulogising 'militarism' and flexing the 'nuclear muscle' even as the core sectors concerning human security continue to be neglected. Discussing the economic performance of the country, Koithara concludes: "The gross failure in developing its human potential, through better health and education, has notably contributed to the modest economic results."

Lastly, there is an interesting chapter comparing India's achievements with those of China and Indonesia. The author gives his reasons for selecting these countries for the comparison as in his view these two came closest to the situations obtaining in India. The overall picture sketched by Koithara in the closing paragraphs of this chapter clearly brings out that although all three countries started roughly at the same levels in 1948/49, both China and Indonesia are way ahead in their achievements. Be it gross domestic product or the levels of poverty or literacy, India brings up the rear. The only area in which we seem to have a slight edge is the 'human rights spectrum', which involves protection from the state itself – *at least on paper*. It is no surprise, therefore, that we emerge as the third among the three even in matters concerning national security!

Part II is an attempt by the author to play the 'futurologist'. It is a well-rea-



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soned analysis of the likely trajectories most countries and regions are expected to follow in the coming decade. In the chapter on the 'emerging international system', Koithara sketches the future stance and posture of the main players as he sees it – the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, China, Russia, Japan, South Asia, South Asia Periphery, and Islam! It would appear very odd to most readers that a discussion on Islam has been included in this section. The author has justified its inclusion by mentioning that it is the only politico-religious multinational grouping wielding considerable influence on the world scene today. One can also sense the impact of Huntingon's work *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of the World Order* in Koithara's examination of the "global power matrix" in this section. It is a very interesting analysis of a question which may in the author's view have far-reaching implications for India in the coming decade.

In the chapters concerning 'latent dangers and manifest threats', there is a detailed examination of the latent dangers in terms of an enfeebled people, society, economic and technological mismanagement and environmental degradation. The analysis of manifest threats includes an examination of the Chinese and Pakistani threats, as also the maritime and nuclear threats. The author concludes that there is very little if any chance of either China or Pakistan starting a full blown war with India in the coming decade. Pakistan may, however, continue with its low intensity engagement if the outstanding disputes are not settled by then.

In the discussions on weapons of mass destruction, the author subscribes to the traditional view that nuclear weapons have both a political and a military role.

IN the discussions on weapons of mass destruction, Koithara subscribes to the traditional view that nuclear weapons have both a political and a military role. He has also highlighted the new twist given by the U.S. of downplaying the role of nuclear weapons and favouring the use of sub-nuclear high technologies.

While the author comes through in some parts as a proponent and supporter of nuclear weapons and their political and military usefulness, he does accept the fact that "the decision to find military usefulness in nuclear weapons against Pakistan and China has clearly created problems" – an understatement if ever there was one! He concludes Part II thus: "In the foreseeable future there is no conceivable cause for China or Pakistan to start a conventional, much less a nuclear, war against India." It would have been appropriate if the author had also analysed in this section the possibilities of India – under a given set of circumstances – starting a conventional or nuclear war with either of these two adversaries in the same time-frame.

Part III concerns itself with chalking out a strategy for security assurance in the coming decade. I would like to call this the 'foundation and stabilising strategy', because that is what it is. It consists of empowering people, good governance, resource mobilisation, force structure and force architecture. This section also includes a discussion of the role of nuclear weapons, the defence industry and security management. Most of the subjects treated here have featured in some form or the other in the earlier parts and therefore seem to fall into place easily. It contains a series of recommendations stating "what needs to be done" in the various sectors mentioned. Unfortunately the "how" part seems to elude us. This is an infirmity in an otherwise outstanding analytical work. Indians are past masters at making rules and regulations, laws, agreements, reports, commissions of inquiry, speeches, advice. In short, we are genuine 'paper tigers'. Never short of ideas but apathetic and too heavily bureaucratised to implement anything. Is there something that we can do to correct this? Maybe Koithara has already a title for his next book.

On the whole this is a masterly work, duly supported by references and statistics. It is a courageous, powerful and an in-depth analysis of a very complex subject. It is incisive and informative. Reading it, one feels the impact of an economist, scholar, political analyst and sailor – all of which Vice-Admiral Verghese Koithara represents in abundant measure. A must for every library and all those interested in South Asian affairs in general and India in particular. ■

Admiral L. Ramdas (retired) is a former Chief of the Naval Staff.

■ BOOKS

C. T. KURIEN

The Dynamics of South Asia – Regional Cooperation and SAARC by Eric Gonsalves and Nancy Jetly (Eds); Sage, New Delhi, 1999; pages 277, Rs. 375.

EVEN as the two large countries of South Asia recover from the effects of a war-like encounter, it is good to recall that they, along with five other countries of the region, are members of a formal association for cooperation – the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Formed in 1985, it is almost a decade and a half old. According to one of the authors who have contributed to the collection of essays that is under review, "SAARC is... a manifestation of the determination of the peoples of South Asia to cooperate regionally, to work together towards finding solutions to their common problems in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding, and to create an order based on mutual respect, equity and shared benefits." The volume, consisting of 13 contributed papers and an introduction, is based on papers specifically prepared in connection with the 10th anniversary of SAARC.

Organisations for regional cooperation seem to be flourishing in spite of rapidly spreading globalisation. In Asia the most prestigious among them is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is not just an Asian phenomenon either. The United States, Canada and Mexico have formed the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA). The European Union (E.U.) is another example. These organisations are not all alike. But economic cooperation is of primary concern to all of them.

When SAARC was formally launched in 1985, after nearly five years of preliminary discussions and negotiations in which Bangladesh played a prominent role, its seven constituents – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka – agreed to take up nine fields of nation-building activities for cooperation. Subsequently three fields were added to the list. The 12 areas thus chosen were agriculture; rural development; meteorology; telecommunications; postal services; transport; science and technology; health and population; sports; arts and

Conflict or cooperation?

culture; prevention of drug trafficking; women in development; and education. However, while inter-country cooperation was being sought, the approach was cautious. Vital economic areas such as trade, industry, manufacture and finance did not figure in the agenda initially. There were reasons for this. The first was the economic similarities of the members, especially the big three among them. Trade among the members has been extremely low, constituting around 3 per cent of world trade, compared to 16 per cent among the member-countries of ASEAN. The second reason was the dominant position of India, which accounted for 75 per cent of both the population and the gross national product (GNP) of the region, 54 per cent of its exports and 53 per cent of its trade. Apart from the economic strength of India, other countries have tended to view India and Indian "designs" with suspicion. Thus, while India is eager to keep the region free from the influence of outside powers, the smaller countries fear Indian domination and are, therefore, not totally opposed to the involvement in the region of other powers. And, of course, there is the long-standing hostility between India and Pakistan.

Under such conditions, it is indeed satisfying that the seven countries have not only come together for cooperation but continued to meet regularly and that the areas of cooperation have enlarged. Of late, these have included trade agreements as well. Under the SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA), India has agreed to show special concessions to other members, especially the small ones.

The volume under review makes a critical assessment of the working of SAARC during the first decade. It is pointed out that SAARC must be viewed not as an objective that has been achieved but as an ongoing process. Its basis is the deep-seated poverty, rapid growth of population, high levels of unemployment and unsatisfactory human development of the region on the one hand and, on the other, the conviction that unless poor countries cooperate among themselves they will not be able to make progress in a world dominated by the rich and the powerful. But while these economic considerations are conducive to cooperation, there are political, ethnic and military factors that tilt towards conflictual relations. The dynamics of South Asia and of SAARC arise from these opposing tendencies. It must be remembered that each member of SAARC has its own share of internal tensions and conflicts. The region, therefore, is one characterised by a sense of insecurity, internal and intra-regional.

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Viewed against this background, the achievements of SAARC have been quite substantial. Several programmes of inter-country cooperation became a reality almost immediately after the inception of SAARC – the Audio-Visual Exchange Programme, the Documentation Centre, the Scheme for Promotion of Organised Tourism, the Youth Volunteers Programme, the Scholarship Programme, to mention some of the more prominent ones. Several SAARC institutions have also been set up, the Agricultural Information Centre in Dhaka; the Tuberculosis Centre in Kathmandu; the Documentation Centre in New Delhi; the Meteorological Research Centre in Dhaka. Further, a Food Security Reserve for the region has been set up. A Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism has been ratified as also a convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances. Modalities of cooperation by non-governmental organisations have been worked out. A proposal, "SAARC 2000: A Basic Needs Perspective" to promote national development activity through long-term action-oriented schemes, has also been accepted.

With the SAPTA agreed upon in 1995 and coming into force subsequently, SAARC has come to have a new dimension. Under the Agreement, India offered to other members soft custom duty rates on 106 items, Pakistan 35, Sri Lanka 31, the Maldives 17, Nepal 14, Bangladesh 12 and Bhutan seven. It may be claimed that SAARC has begun to take seriously the function of economic cooperation. It is to be hoped that SAPTA will lead not only to a diversion of trade but also to the creation of trade and an increase in production and employment in the region.

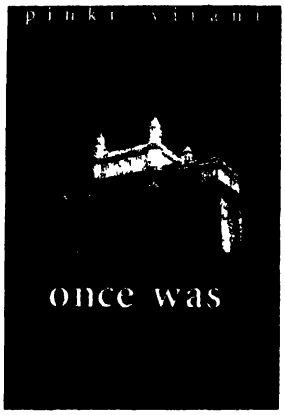
An important question considered in the volume is whether SAARC should deal with bilateral issues. At present bilateral and contentious issues are excluded from the deliberations of SAARC, and there is a provision that the decisions arrived at must be unanimous. In view of the prevailing suspicions and hostilities among the members, this is understandable. At the same time, SAARC, especially its summit meetings, provide an opportunity for the leaders of member-countries to meet and hold informal discussions on contentious issues and even bilateral ones. SAARC, therefore, works as a confidence-building and moderating agency. If this aspect can be strengthened, there is hope that conflicts can be reduced and cooperation strengthened in the region. Better understanding of the problems and positions of neighbouring countries by citizens of the member-nations is important in this regard. The volume makes a useful contribution in that direction. ■

From Bombay to Mumbai

PRAVEEN SWAMI

Once Was Bombay by Pinki Virani; Penguin Books India, 1999; xix + 284 pages; Rs.350.

PINKI VIRANI'S intensely personal account of the collapse of a city rests on the notion of a paradise lost, the giving way of cosmopolitan, secular and modern Bombay to a criminalised sprawl of urban waste, Mumbai. Its cast is diverse: the aging Mazagon glass merchant Babliseth, unable to come to terms with the transfigured Mumbai of the 1990s; the angry mafioso, Pakya; Chhaggan Bhujbal, the Shiv Sena apparatchik-turned secular politician; the rich and famous of the film industry.



Yet, there is a hole in the middle the story, one that says not a little about why the city's curious form of upper class liberalism collapsed in the face of Hindu fundamentalist assault.

Builder Manish Shah forms the first block in Pinki Virani's story of Bombay's degeneration into Mumbai. Manish Shah, freshly returned from the United States, attempts to play the Mumbai construction world by the legal rules of engagement. He refuses to cave in to extortion demands from the underworld and pays the inevitable price. His death and that of his company, Dhruva Builders, is the medium through which the author introduces us to the world of Arun Gawli and Dawood Ibrahim and of organised crime and the Mumbai Police. There is a passing reference to the landscape which propelled the rise of organised crime, the collapse of the economic powerhouses which built modern Mumbai and its mills. "The young sons of these mill workers," the author concedes, "took to the streets, not willing to go back to their villages in Maharashtra, Madhya (Pradesh) or Uttar Pradesh, uneducated and filled with resentment; a fertile breeding ground for crime and future footmen for unscrupulous politicians."

But there is no sense anywhere in the book that the reason these young people could not return to their villages was the persistence of the very poverty that drove them to Mumbai, or that they could no more be expected to "go home" than its middle class inhabitants. We find no reference at all to the theory that the murder of the mills was a project executed with the endorsement of Mumbai's rich, and that criminality and extortion directed at the city's poor is ignored, if not approved, by its elite.

Manish Shah's death leads us to the story of Babliseth, who struggles to cope with both his daughters and a changing world. Babliseth's story is among the finest, exploring a world that is recognisably not the one he spent a lifetime inhabiting. The rise of the Shiv Sena expresses itself in Babliseth's everyday life. After the 1992 riots, clients refuse to pay their dues; this aggression disappears after the retaliatory serial bombings of 1993. Babliseth finally heeds the demands of his daughters and moves out of decaying Mazagon to the suburbs.

But the world of the suburbs is a world Mumbai's poor cannot escape into: they live in slums, as the city's rich secede from the real world into high-rise apartments. Their story is censored out of Pinki Virani's Mumbai, where they instead become the problem.

We are informed that 41,000 slum homes "hold to ransom 59,00,000 of Bombay's commuters on the suburban lines". "New local trains," Pinki Virani says, "cannot be introduced because the old ones are choking track capacity because 'poor people' cannot be moved from the tracks.... and the women must look away from the seats in the compartments meant for them and hold their collective breath because early every morning the track-livers get on to the parked train and shit all over the women's seats."

Even leaving aside the hyper-real elements, Pinki Virani's account is offensive: Mumbai's poor exist and stay poor because the middle class she valorises needs them to serve as underpaid servants and workers, who have among the lowest standards of living in the world despite apparently high cash wages. Bhujbal, approvingly cited through the book, provides the political framework for such attacks on the poor. He complains bitterly that "several public personalities have been going to the court, as have the slum dwellers themselves", to prevent demolitions. "Too much kindness," Bhujbal asserts, "can also kill a city."

Too much kindness to whom and by whom? Mumbai's urban poor, who face infant mortality rates that compare with 19th century London, non-existent access to clean water and sanitation and abysmal absence of educational facilities, reflect by no stretch of the imagination the supposed generosity of Mumbai's elite. Rather, the relationships between the growth of urban poverty and the interests of the middle class, in whom Pinki Virani vests so much hope, are organic.

In her preface to *Once Was Bombay*, the author puts her political convictions up front. Her world is that inhabited by "us, the middle class", who brought to Mumbai "with our behaviour the inherent decency of a Madras and the day-to-day intellectualism of a Calcutta". The failures of this class to confront communalism and corruption, in her narrative, have led to Mumbai's degeneration.

Sadly for this class, "the vote of the literate among the middle class can only be equivalent to that of the illiterate". Nonetheless, Pinki Virani calls on it to engage in the political process to bring to power leaders who are "city-born and middle class", rather than "small-town hicks who go berserk at the first sight of power and glamour, not feudalists and rapists, murderers, rioteers (sic.), extortionists and chain-snatchers".

This curious loathing for the world outside the genteel confines of middle class Mumbai raises more than a few questions: feudals and rapists, along with murderers and rioters, are not virus-like impositions on the city that are swept in by wind and water. The book only serves to illustrate the sundering of Mumbai's middle class from its working poor. Those workers, while the mills survived, battled the Shiv Sena's elite-sponsored communalism and anti-poor agenda.

Mumbai's secularism cannot be protected by its rich. If middle class liberals indeed wish to beat back the assault of the Hindu Right, severing an anti-communal agenda from the economic empowerment of the city's poor is the worst possible way to begin. ■

The rapids of modern life

BARBARA EHRENREICH

Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything by James Gleick; Pantheon Books, New York, 1999; pages 324, $24.

YOU don't have time to read the book so you read the review. If you're a publishing honcho, you probably don't even have time to read the review; you pay some underling to skim it for quotable adjectives and phrases to insert in the ad copy. So let's save all these busy people a few minutes of their precious time and cut straight to the useful stuff: James Gleick's *Faster The Acceleration of Just About Everything* is nimble, smart, often funny, and – best of all – fast. Imagine a lite, carbonated, caffeine-containing beverage with just a slightly tart edge, suitable for imbibing while Stairmastering, faxing or otherwise multi-tasking your way through the day's to-do list.

Gleick, the author of *Chaos* and a biography of Richard Feynman, has stuffed his new book with tasty factoids about our fast, fast times. He reveals, for example, that those "close door" buttons in elevators are often just placebos, with no other function than to make us feel we have speeded up our trip. When we call 411 and ask for "Uh, Domino's", a computer edits out the "uh" so it won't waste some operator's time. It turns out that the Old English "spede", as in "God-spede", originally meant good fortune. And here is the ultimate in fast food: there's a restaurant in Tokyo that charges by the minute, not the amount consumed, and at lunchtime people actually wait in line to get in.

BUT we are not just talking sound bites here. *Faster* reverberates with huge, weighty questions, such as whether we are doomed to run up against a biological speed limit set by our sluggish old carbon-based bodies and brains. We get jet lag when we travel too far too fast, carpal tunnel syndrome when we type too much. You cannot make compost in a week or use a microwave to hurry a soufflé along, and, for the same sorts of reasons, no one has figured out how to sleep fast. Another mega-question has to do with what kind of monstrous new "organism" (my metaphor, not Gleick's) we are inadvertently creating as we all get interconnected through our high-speed communications technologies. It is kind of thrilling to get a fax from Hong Kong at the same time that a call comes in from London and a few gigabytes of data arrive by modem. We are social animals, or, as Gleick says, "We like the connectedness." It induces a pleasant giddiness, a feeling of "mania", he suggests. But weird things happen as the speed and number of connections increase. "In the day-trading rooms," he writes, "hair-trigger connectivity turns momentary whims into mob obsessions." In our news media too, "the multiplication of information pathways leads to positive feedback effects in the nature of frenzies." We glom on to Diana or O.J. or John Jr. like a lemming herd in full stampede. Against all expectations, the collective brain that emerges from our ever-richer connectedness is turning out to be kind of dumb.

So are we getting smarter or just more out of control? Expect no answers from *Faster*; there isn't time for them. In fact, you don't have to be a slacker to get the feeling of being a bit jerked around, starting with the first two sentences: "You are in the Directorate of Time. Naturally you are running late." Well, why "naturally"? I have time to read a book, don't I?

But pretty soon you are wondering what this visit to the home of the Defence Department's "Master Clock" has to do with our speedy way of life anyway, other than the author's conceit that we're "running late". You do not need to know about nanoseconds to be overextended; and, for most of us, it takes a certain amount of leisure to care about quasar clocks.

In another confusing juxtaposition, Gleick's riff on the development of high-speed photography in the 1870s, using race horses as models, leads to the observation that "only in an age of speed could we stop time". But horses have not sped up significantly in centuries, and you do not have to be a speed freak to want to deconstruct the equine gait.

Nor does Gleick let himself get slowed down by any of the sticky patches that have arisen on the autobahn of modern life. He acknowledges that some things are not accelerating at all, such as cars in traffic. Or try to get a question answered by Microsoft or Citibank: all those technologically sophisticated telephone menus and queues may be money savers for the corporation, but they are time sinks for the rest of us. It would have helped if Gleick had paused, even for a millisecond, to consider the commercial forces determining how fast things go. If the customers' needs came first, banks would clear our checks in seconds instead of days or weeks. And if mass transit were profitable, everyone would zip to work at warp speed and probably gain an hour's sleep.

So is it a good thing – this multiple-interfacing, hyper-wired, globalised, caffeine-driven, profit-maximising, millions-of-bits-per-second whatever that we are caught up in? Over all, Gleick thinks yes, though this means gliding right past questions like what has become of our attention spans or whether we are really better off with 500 channels of incoming information if they are all about Monica.

The only truculent note in the book is his attack on the Harvard economist Juliet Schor, whose 1992 book, *The Overworked American*, suggested that much of this giddy busyness is not freely chosen but imposed by employers, and that it takes a real toll on our health and families. Citing a University of Maryland study that found we are working shorter hours than ever, Gleick argues that much of the sense of frantic busyness comes from tempting new pastimes, like computer games, workouts and gambling. And he rejects, on apparently ideological grounds, any view of "workers as victims – victims of something big and systemic and inhuman". Yet intentionally or not he gives us that impression himself, when he tells us that Americans are increasingly sleep-deprived – or is that just another enjoyable part of the continuing "mania"?

Implicitly, though, *Faster* contains a darker judgment. What we lose, as "just about everything" accelerates, is the chance to reflect, to analyse and, ultimately, to come up with moral judgments. Unfortunately, deep concentrated thought is not as fast as an electron tunneling through silicon or even a nerve impulse ambling down an axon. Like composting, it takes time – for the patterns of neural firing to shift, connect and interact to form whole new patterns in our minds. Try to shorten that time and you move very quickly from diverting to distracted, from clever to glib. Faster is fun, but slower might have got us a whole lot further along. ■

New York Times Service

World Bank and healthcare

T. K. RAJALAKSHMI

Disinvesting in Health: The World Bank's Prescriptions for Health, edited by Mohan Rao; Sage Publications, July 1999; Rs. 345 (cloth), Rs. 225 (paperback).

EMPIRICAL evidence has always challenged the technological determinism and methodological individualism that are characteristic of the behavioural approach to public health, states the introduction to this enlightening compendium of papers that were presented at a seminar in 1994. The proceedings of the seminar, organised by the Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), metamorphosed into a book this year. Despite the time-lag, the book is no less relevant today, since the issues still remain the same.

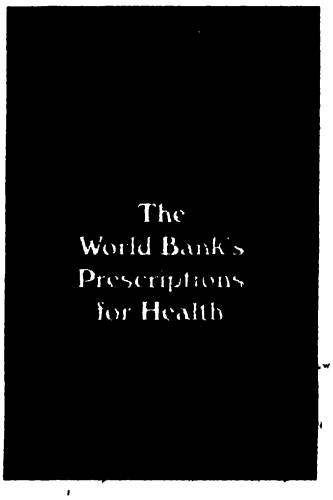
Putting public health in a new perspective, the authors say that the World Health Organisation-United Nations Children Fund (WHO-UNICEF) initiative on "Health for All through Primary Health Care" at Alma Ata has been watered down and replaced by the rallying cry of globalisation, marketisation and privatisation. It is in this evolving context, especially in view of the changes in India's economic policy, that 14 of the experts who participated in the seminar analysed the World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) 1993, titled "Investing in health and its implications for public health" as well as the very definition of what construed public health. The papers presented by them are undoubtedly the first, albeit tentative, in-depth analyses and academic critique from India of the World Bank's perspective on health.

The WDR prescribes what public and community health experts have always objected to – the magic bullet approach to health. It overemphasises the curative aspects of healthcare so as to leave healthcare to the discretion of the private sector while governments are advised to concentrate on certain essential clinical services. In his paper titled "The Political Economy of Structural Adjustment", Prabhat Patnaik argues that it is not just the ideology of liberalisation that has become important; he says there is an actual drive, most notably in underdeveloped countries, to "privatise", "liberalise", and "roll back" the state from the productive arena and to curtail social expenditure. He details the methodological flaws inherent in the WDR's prescription for health. According to him, the basic reduction in the range of services available to the people is sought to be camouflaged by a dubious "scientism", the limitations of which are obvious. He says that the health plan, which seems to be attractive at first sight (for example, using all the money to prevent infant mortality), is an effort to make the structural adjustment package, often criticised on the grounds of its adverse effects on health and other social sectors, appear palatable.

Niraja Gopal Jayal from the Centre for Political Studies, JNU, posits in her paper "The Gentle Leviathan: Welfare and the Indian State" that the moral aspect has been absent in the the neo-liberal critique of the Indian "welfare" state. She says that there has always been a disjunction between the concepts of welfare and rights of the nation. According to her, the poverty-alleviating strategies are essentially negative in character. Besides, the retreat of the government from the welfare sector has meant not so much a turn to the market as to non-governmental organisations. The shift, she points out, is evident in the differences in the language used in the Second Five-Year Plan and the Eighth Five-Year Plan. While the Second Five-Year Plan held that the state had to take on "heavy responsibilities as the principal agency speaking for and acting on behalf of the community as a whole", the Approach Paper to the Eighth Plan candidly admits that the objectives of providing primary education, preventive and curative healthcare and food security cannot be left entirely to state-sponsored organisations. That little has changed in the Ninth Five-Year Plan is probably an indicator that the shift has been more or less legitimised. According to her, even the very limited welfare orientation of the state stands to be challenged by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the technocratic developmentalists and marketisation enthusiasts. These forces do not question the morality of welfarism but the factual efficiency and efficacy of these welfarist institutions.

Imrana Qadeer from the Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health (CSMCH), JNU, in her paper titled "WDR 1993: The Brave New World of Primary Healthcare", states that even cost-effective, state-run public health programmes are sought to be undermined by WDR 1993. The possibility of expanding the scope of basic health services was being denied under the innocuous title of "essential" public health and clinical services. While population control and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) control occupy key positions under essential services, other than the control of tuberculosis, no mention is made of existing communicable diseases, the much recognised coordinates of malnutrition. The classical definition of public health incorporates the combined practice of promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services. Used judiciously, these various levels provide the basis for public health programmes. But the WDR ignores these tenets to divorce curative services from public health by setting them apart as "essential clinical" services.

Imrana Qadeer critises the WDR for its attempts to "educate" poor households to cope with poverty by building capacities to use existing services and redistribute household budgets in favour of the vulnerable. This, she remarks, is to say that with rising macro-economic pressures, solutions are provided by changing the micro-environment of the household.



Nata Duvvury, who has studied the tobacco industry, presents several plausible and hypothetical implications of the WDR's prescriptions for women. In her paper titled "Gender Implications

of New Economic Policies", she looks at agricultural reforms and what they could mean for women employed in the agriculture sector. She predicts that with increased emphasis on export earnings, there is a strong likelihood of the cropping pattern changing in favour of export crops. Increases in cash crop prices will put pressure on women to increase their labour contribution; this, however, will not necessarily lead to greater control of incomes, thus resulting in a negative human resource impact, she argues.

Mohan Rao from the CSMCH, JNU, in his paper titled "SAP (Structural Adjustment Policies) and WDR 1993: Implications for Family Planning in India", argues that the solution to family planning does not lie in contraceptive technology but in attempts to deal with the problems of ill-health and disease, the heavy load of infant mortality, the lack of changes in the structures of employment, the pervasive lack of health and educational facilities and so on. He says that, these are the very factors that have been adversely affected by the SAP in other countries: he quotes from studies to show how the SAP has affected health and nutrition in countries such as Chile, Peru, Brazil and Ghana. He says that in India, with the exception of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, the rate of decline of infant mortality has decelerated since the onset of the SAP. The chapter offers a rich historical insight into the changing definition of family planning programmes, including its most recent *avatar* – that of hormonal contraceptives – and situates the WDR's concerns for family planning services as being a part of a "minimum clinical package", in the larger context.

A.K. Shiva Kumar, a consultant with the UNICEF, in his paper titled "The Formulation of India's Health Policy: A Note on Equity", argues that if the healthcare facilities are left to the private sectors, where the ability to pay and profitability strongly influence investment decisions, one cannot expect equal facilities to develop all over the country. He cites the extraordinary urban bias, which suggests that political and other considerations dominate simple equity considerations.

K. Seeta Prabhu from the Department of Economics, Mumbai University, points out, among other things, the glaring inequalities in health expenditure which, she states, is a consequence of extreme income inequalities. According to her, the former is even higher than the differences in consumption expenditure. She says that since the mid-1980s, many Indian States have reduced the share of the health sector in total revenue expenditure, which in turn is bound to undermine the role of the public sector in providing health services.

Rama V. Baru, also from the CSMCH, JNU, in her paper, gives an inter-State analysis of the structure and utilisation of health services. She says that in most States, government hospitals are the major providers of health services. Stagnation in the growth of public expenditure has, however, led to the growth of institutions in the private sector. Baru says that despite the WDR and a confidential country report of the World Bank prescribing a user fee in public institutions as well as a cutback on curative service expenditure by the state, in most States, it is the public sector which provides curative services.

Amit Sen Gupta, who is with the Delhi Science Forum, criticises WDR 1993 for its paternalistic attitude towards the development of indigenous pharmaceuticals by developing countries. He says the foreign companies have never brought in new technology and will not do so in the future. According to Sen Gupta, the New Drug Policy announced in September 1994 was a result of the demands of the pharmaceutical industry and pressures from the World Bank for lesser controls. His paper "Infrastructure Development in Health Care and the Pharmaceutical Industry", critically analyses the Drug Policy, besides tracing the demands of multinationals since the early 1980s for decreased controls.

K.R. Nayar, from the CSMCH, JNU, in his paper discusses the consequences of globalisation on environmental health owing to not only "garbage imperialism" and consumerism, but also overall shifts in resource utilisation.

Arti Sawhney, a doctor-cum-activist, outlines the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan as well as the role played by *saathins* as health workers, among other things.

Other valuable contributors include the late T.N. Krishnan, former Director, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram; N.H. Antia, founder-director of the Foundation for Research in Community Health, Mumbai; and K.V. Narayana of the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad. For the discerning reader, "Disinvesting in Health" is a window to a new world order. ■

Signpost 2: Issues that Matter

The Kargil War

CHRONICLE OF A WAR FORETOLD

by Praveen Swami

In the summer of 1999, India fought off the Pakistani intrusion in Kargil. However, the end of the war does not mean the beginning of peace for people on either side of the border. Indeed, the war is just one phase of a predictable escalation of tensions after the Pokhran nuclear tests of May 1998.

- How did the Kargil war come about?
- Were warnings of a conflict ignored?
- Was the war an unqualified military triumph?
- Was Prime Minister Vajpayee 'betrayed' by Pakistan, or was he in fact blind to ground realities?
- What are the connections between the Pokhran nuclear tests and the war?
- How was the U S brought in as a mediator in the conflict?
- Did the BJP-led government succeed in bringing peace to Jammu and Kashmir?
- What political consequences will violence in Jammu and Kashmir have for the rest of India?
- What were Pakistan's objectives in sparking off the war in Kargil — and has it really failed?

Praveen Swami of *Frontline* magazine, who reported on the Kargil war, unearths vital data and draws on several years of experience of covering Jammu and Kashmir to answer these questions.

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Of development and deprivation

The struggle against the Sardar Sarovar Dam has brought into focus the perils of a growth path that means only deprivation for the toiling millions.

H.M. DESARDA

ON the threshold of the 21st century, humankind stands at a crossroads. The 20th century has been the most violent century in human history. Undoubtedly, the two World Wars saw the most ghastly and heinous kind of violence and genocide, but no less serious is the violence against nature and the other living species that has been driven by unbridled consumerism and production to propitiate creature comforts.

The hallmark of the present century is the phenomenal technological advance in the realm of commodity production and in the transport and communication sectors and services. The dominant ideology of the past 50 years can be summed up thus: growth, unlimited. By and large it is a creed of undifferentiated and undirected growth. The fierce and fervent intellectual, ideological and pedagogical debate through this century was not about the content and character of growth. It was driven by a desire for a humane way of organising society, economy and the polity. But, somewhere along the way, growth became the sacred cow, the unquestionable goal. Growth *per se* was development.

In less than 50 years, this growthmania has pushed the world to the brink of disaster. As resources deplete at an alarming rate, the ecological toll has become very heavy and is exceeding all limits. Indeed, the security of the planet and its people is seriously threatened by the global forces of growth.

In less than 50 years, growthmania has pushed the world to the brink of disaster. As resources deplete at an alarming rate, the ecological toll has become very heavy and is exceeding all limits.

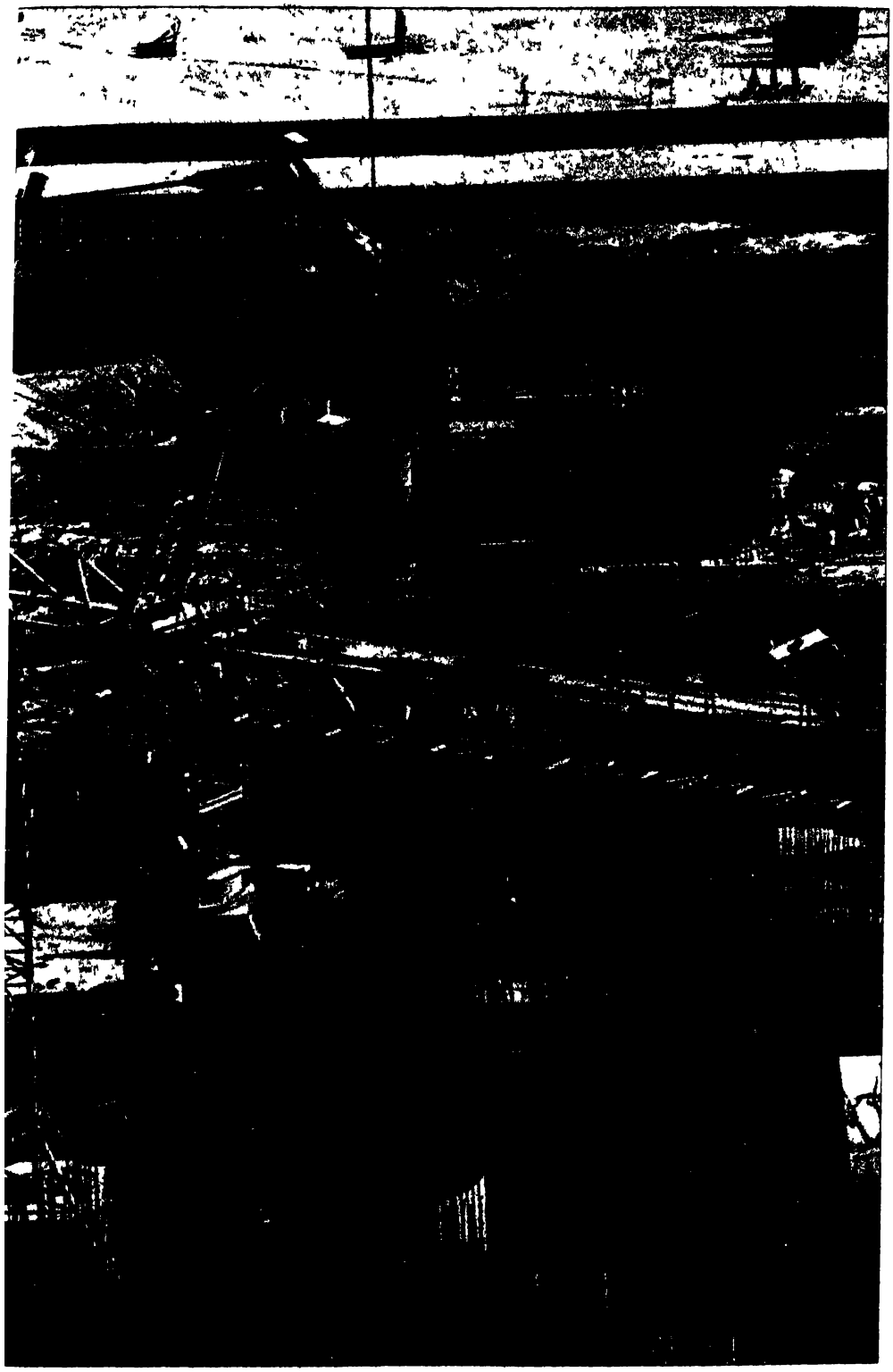
The ruling elite in the Third World argue vehemently that ecological considerations should not be entertained in the pursuit of growth. The "grow as fast as you can" model of modern Western industrialism is pursued in the name of national development. The global growth experience is replete with examples of stupendous cost and the consequences of consumerist growthmanship, and yet our ruling elite is blatantly aping the resource squandering growth path. Mega-irrigation and power projects form the kingpin of this strategy.

Water and energy are undeniably the primary prerequisites of human development, but it is erroneous to equate them with mega-projects. Age-old and time-tested sources of energy and methods of tapping them are replaced by centralised grids (for electricity) and large reservoirs (for water). Mighty power grids purvey energy over huge distances. This is precisely what we have been doing in the past 50 years in the name of planning for national development *a la* Jawaharlal Nehru. The irrigation network and the power grid have been enough to creed to satiate consumerist greed.

Regrettably, the pattern of growth that we have had has not helped usher in an egalitarian social order. According to Mahatma Gandhi, the objective of the freedom struggle was "to wipe every tear from every eye." The question after 50 years is: how far has India succeeded in this task? By any reckoning, the problems of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, ill-health and lack of shelter have become more acute and widespread than earlier. Plans and projects involving outlays of thousands of millions of rupees have not helped the toiling millions. On the contrary, the so-called development projects have affected them adversely and accentuated their daily suffering. In plain terms, for the vast majority of the people, development means deprivation, displacement and destruction of their precious life support system. Through project after project, plan after plan, the story is the same. Denied human rights and information, the displaced and deprived sections of the population are mute spectators of the power-game which perpetrates destruction in the name of national development.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, people began to resist and raise their voices in protest. They questioned the cost-benefit calculus and exposed the statistical bluff. The futility of building big, bigger and the biggest became more and more manifest. The Chipko movement in the Garhwal region and the movement against the Silent Valley power project in Kerala attracted worldwide attention. The success of these movements paved the way for the campaigns against the Sardar Sarovar Project, the Tehri dam, the nuclear power plant at Kaiga and so on. The Narmada and Tehri projects became the agenda of so-called national development for the rulers. Resistance to and refusal to agree to the growth path and pattern of development favoured by the ruling elite became the focal point of movements of the toiling people such as those of adivasis, Dalits, farmers, fisherfolk and women. Crusaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar became the symbol of people's hopes and aspirations. They exposed the hollowness of official statistics and rekindled the spirit of satyagraha and mobilised the people to stand up against the might and machinations of the state. Their struggle was against the state efforts towards the displacement and disintegration of people and communities.

The adverse impact of the resource squandering growth, process is becoming clearer by the day. The Indian as well as the global experience amply prove that the mega-projects for irrigation and power are antithetical to the interests of the common people. They do not promote equity and they are not suitable. In fact, because of the high costs involved, they provide at best temporary solutions to the permanent problems of water and



Construction work at the Sardar Sarovar Dam site, a file picture.

energy.

As of now there is a clear conflict and contradiction between the two approaches to development. One is concerned with engineering and the other with ecology. The engineering-dominated technocratic growth-path believes in building huge structures and making grids for water and electricity. The crucial factor in this approach is centralised control. It totally alienates the people who have harnessed these resources through the centuries with great ingenuity and ensured their sustainability. They are disempowered and displaced and there is no end to their suffering. Planners and policy-makers sermonise to them about suffering for the nation. Asking such questions as who constitutes the nation and for whom development is meant are considered diversionary by the ruling elite, which wants to go ahead with the displacement and is prepared to drown its opponents in the Narmada Valley, who are at this very moment rallying resolutely and bravely in the valley.

THE struggle against the Sardar Sarovar Project has been pushed into a very critical phase by the powers-that-be. The Supreme Court has lifted a stay on the dam construction work (*Frontline*, August 27) and permitted an increase in the dam's height by 5 metres. This would result in the submergence of a vast number of villages. The inhabitants of these villages have refused to move because they are aware of the tardy state of rehabilitation so far. Notwithstanding the claims and affidavits of the State governments that are parties to this project there is simply not enough land available to be provided to all the displaced people. Besides, the State governments do not have the political will to enforce this. As such, the design to submerge the area by raising the dam height is heinous. The people in the Narmada Valley have resolved not to leave their homes and hamlets, come what may. The situation is indeed critical. Will civil society and the ruling elite care to consider the gravity of the situation and realise, at least at this late hour, the consequences of such disastrous projects? Will someone listen to the cry of the soul of the people of the valley?

It is a call to the conscience of the nation. One can only hope that in this land of Gandhi there is still some spirit and sensitivity left for what is just and humane. ■

H.M. Desarda, an economist, is a former member of the Maharashtra State Planning Board.

A pioneering scientist

Vikram A. Sarabhai gave a new direction to India's space science and atomic energy programmes. Many of the goals he set are likely to be achieved in 1999, the 80th year of his birth.

PARESH R. VAIDYA

FOR India, 1999 has been a year of important landmarks in the field of space science. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed three satellites in orbit using a single spacecraft – two of them launched for other countries on commercial terms. Towards the end of the year, an Indian-built satellite of the Indian National Satellite (INSAT) system will be launched using the most powerful Indian rocket, the Geostationary Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV). In this context, it will not be misplaced to remember the pioneer of the Indian space programme, Dr. Vikram A. Sarabhai. August 12, 1999 was his 80th birth anniversary.

Although work in India in space-related subjects was started by Dr. Homi J. Bhabha in the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), it was Sarabhai who established growth centres in space science. Bhabha handed over charge of such work to Sarabhai, who as a scientist had already been contributing to the subject from his Physics Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad.

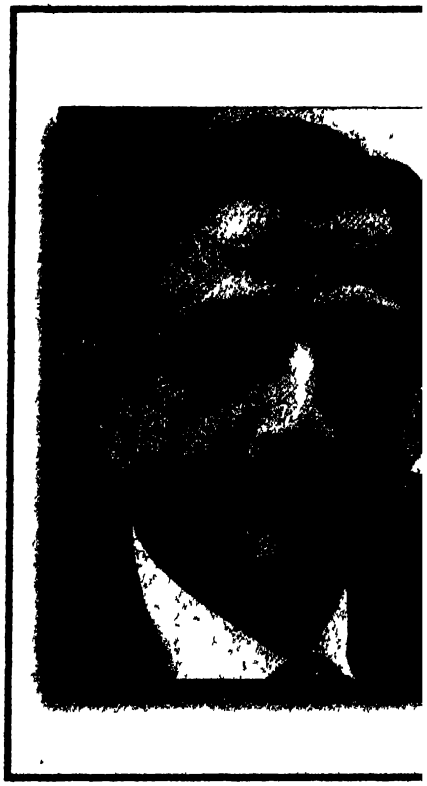
Sarabhai's professional career began in 1947 after he returned to Ahmedabad following a second stint at Cambridge. Earlier, he was at Cambridge in 1937 for his Tripos in physics and mathematics. He worked under Sir C.V. Raman on cosmic rays at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, before going back to Cambridge.

The eldest son of the industrialist Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, he had to plunge into the family's textile business on returning from England. He nurtured the business empire with a scientific approach, before moving to Mumbai. In order to solve the technical problems the textile industry faced, he founded in 1947 a textile research centre, the Ahmedabad Textile Research Association (ATIRA), which is active even today. He expanded the family business by establishing Sarabhai Glass Co. and Suhrid Geigy and Co., a pharmaceutical company. He was chairman and managing director of Sarabhai Chemicals Ltd., took over the Swastik Oil Mills of Mumbai and established Sarabhai Merck Ltd. and Operations Research Group, Vadodara (Baroda).

Yet his interest in science did not diminish. He started the PRL with financial help from the Karmakshetra Foundation, a trust launched by his father, and the Ahmedabad Education Society (AES). This laboratory became the centre for research in cosmic rays and atmospheric sciences. Sarabhai's work was mainly on diurnal variation in cosmic ray intensity. The PRL became an autonomous research institution in 1961 under the management of the DAE, the Gujarat Government and the AES, in an arrangement similar to that in the case of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Basic experiments in space science were taken up with Sarabhai himself guiding the students.

SARABHAI came on to the national scene when Bhabha invited him in 1963 to chair the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) under the auspices of the DAE. He was given a free hand to chart the course of India's space programme, which was in its nascent stage. The former Soviet Union and the United States had already placed tiny satellites in orbits around the earth three to five years earlier. The thrust of their research then was on romantic space travel, photographing the earth and the moon from the space, planning for moon-walk and so on. The pragmatist in Sarabhai addressed those areas of space research that would benefit society, leaving aside astronomy-related subjects.

In order to use satellites for telecommunications, three basic capabilities, namely, rocketry, satellite-building and a telecommunications system, and a telecommand system to control satellites, needed to be developed. The Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station (TERLS) and the Space Science and Technology Centre (SSTC), where rocket propellants were developed, were established in 1963 near Thiruvananthapuram. In 1967, an experimental Satellite Communication Earth Centre was started in Ahmedabad with funds from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This later helped launch a full-fledged centre at Arvi near Pune, which serves the purpose of international communication via satellite. Satellite-building capability was developed in Bangalore, a city which later became the headquarters of ISRO.



AS space research was part of a DAE programme, Sarabhai was appointed member of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). When Bhabha died in 1966, the Government had no difficulty in finding a successor. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made Sarabhai not only Chairman of the AEC but also

Secretary to the Government of India. Sarabhai accepted the dual responsibility at the cost of his family business; however, he did not give up his scientific contacts with the PRL or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, U.S., where he went as a senior visiting scientist to guide research in cosmic rays.

In the five years as AEC Chairman, Sarabhai laid out a wide canvas of activities, which left an imprint on work to be done in the future in space science and atomic energy. An acknowledged institution-builder, he organised all uranium-mining activities under an independent corporation, Uranium Corporation of India Ltd (UCIL), with its headquarters at Jaduguda in Bihar (*Frontline*, September 10). J.R.D. Tata once said that he and others associated with the AEC had thought that it was impossible to find a man who could adequately carry on Bhabha's work but Vikram Sarabhai rose brilliantly to the occasion.

Sarabhai gave a new direction to space science and atomic energy; his plans for applications of science and technology had the masses at their centre...his contribution to industry and management is as extensive as his involvement in the scientific field.

The importance of electronics in space science and atomic energy was not lost on Bhabha or Sarabhai. An electronics committee was set up by Bhabha, with Sarabhai as Chairman. Sarabhai was able to shape the Committee's report only after he became AEC Chairman. He established the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL) in Hyderabad and also prepared the ground for an Electronics Commission. Although ECIL has only a limited market share today, it should not be forgotten that it was the pioneer of the electronics industry that is the country's major strength today.

Sarabhai gave a new direction to space science and atomic energy; his plans for applications of science and technology had the masses at their centre. The year 1969 was the year of man's landing on the moon, which inspired the idea of a journey to Mars. But Sarabhai conceived the INSAT system, the satellites of which would be put in geostationary orbits to serve in the forecast of weather and in telecommunications. Even today, INSAT is the only multi-purpose satellite series in the world.

Sarabhai also toyed with the idea of reaching the villages through a television network for developmental education. For this, ISRO signed an agreement with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the U.S. to place a U.S. satellite (ATS-6) over India. (In 1969, all space-related activities were put under a single umbrella, ISRO. Later it became independent of the DAE.) Fourteen districts in six States enjoyed the privilege of educational telecasts much before many State capitals had a Doordarshan Kendra. The popularity of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in the target villages was tremendous.

Sarabhai even came up with a plan to build agro-industrial complexes around nuclear reactors, which would use electricity, heat and steam from the reactors. Two such complexes were proposed – in the Ganga basin and in the Kutch-Saurashtra region. Owing to financial difficulties, the plan did not get off the ground.

In 1970, Sarabhai gave the nation a document titled "Profile of Decade (1970-80) for Space and Atomic Energy Research Programmes." This showed him to be a man in a hurry. At a time, when the concept of the geostationary orbit had been barely tested, he predicted that India would launch an INSAT satellite in 1975 using an indigenous Geostationary Satellite Launch Vehicle. Similarly, he expected the country to have an installed capacity of 2,700 MWe of nuclear power by the turn of that decade. Both these goals proved too high to achieve, partly because of technological embargoes. Sarabhai died in 1971 near Thiruvananthapuram. The goals may be achieved this year.

Sarabhai ably represented the country on the international scene. During his tenure as the head of the atomic energy programme, the vexed issue of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came up. He met the heads of government of the nuclear powers to discuss the possibility of non-nuclear countries being provided with a nuclear umbrella when they are under threat from a nuclear-weapon state. The talks brought no results, and India did not sign the NPT; the stand remains unchanged even after 30 years.

In 1967, Sarabhai was elected Scientific Chairman of the U.N. conference on exploration and peaceful uses of outer space, and in 1971 president of the 14th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency. For five years he was Chairman of the COSPAR consultative group on the harmful effects of experiments in space. He submitted a report to the U.N. on the usefulness of space programmes to developing nations.

Sarabhai's contribution to industry and management is as extensive as his involvement in the scientific field. He was instrumental in establishing the Indian Institute of Management, at Ahmedabad, in 1962. He convinced the Harvard Business School to provide its expertise and persuaded the Ford Foundation to extend financial grants to the institution.

His interest in education endorses the fact that he was truly a multi-faceted person. There was a small group at the PRL working to improve science education in schools. This slowly grew into the Community Science Centre, which gave hands-on experience to students and the public. Today, the centre is a standing memorial to Sarabhai, with the new name of Vikram Sarabhai Community Centre.

Sarabhai never lost the qualities of being kind and cordial. The best proof of this is the fact that he agreed to become the president of the textile technicians association in Ahmedabad, a unique case of an industrialist becoming a union leader. This was at a time when he simultaneously headed several high-value institutions.

Sarabhai's approaches and choices showed his upbringing. He once told a British Broadcasting Corporation interviewer: "The influence of (Mahatma) Gandhi on my family was very strong indeed, so that all through my childhood I was brought up doing what one felt right rather than what necessarily society thought was appropriate." ■

Nuclear power and safety issues

Engineers at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre are involved in an ongoing effort to redesign nuclear reactors, incorporate improved safety features and conduct extensive tests, all with the aim of ensuring total safety in the country's nuclear power generation system.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Trombay

FROM the outside, Engineering Hall 7 at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay, near Mumbai, looks fairly nondescript. But inside, the cavernous hall is the centre of advanced research and development (R&D) in both engineering and safety in nuclear electricity generation. This R&D applies not only to the extant Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) in the country but the planned Advanced Heavy Water Reactors. Inside Hall 7, experiments are conducted in laboratories and tests done on scaled-up models to ensure the safety of PHWRs.

There are eight PHWRs in the country – two each at the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS), the Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS), the Narora Atomic Power Station (NAPS) and the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS). The second unit (220 MW) at Kaiga in Karnataka will join the list soon.

The design of PHWRs, which use natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as both moderator and coolant, has evolved over the years; there has also been a steady improvement in the technology itself. Among the improvements incorporated are double containment of the reactor building, changes in end-shields of reactors, introduction of a new concept of suppression tanks, the filling of the calandria vault with 400 tonnes of light water (ordinary water) and the use of zirconium niobium alloy in the manufacture of pressure tubes.

Dr. V. Venkat Raj, Associate Director, Reactor Design and Development Group, BARC, said, "PHWRs are uniquely placed. We have multiple echelons of safety provisions to take care of severe accidents. Even if the emergency core cooling system fails in a loss of coolant accident (LOCA), fuel will not melt. We have a lot of systems and instruments to detect any such accident."

According to Dr. Anil Kakodkar, Director, BARC, "Reactor safety requires analysis of the behaviour of the full plant. We must have all protective mechanisms in place, and we must make several postulates and identify possible conditions for abnormal behaviour (of the reactor)." Kakodkar is the architect of the Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR) that will use uranium-233 as fuel and thorium as blanket.

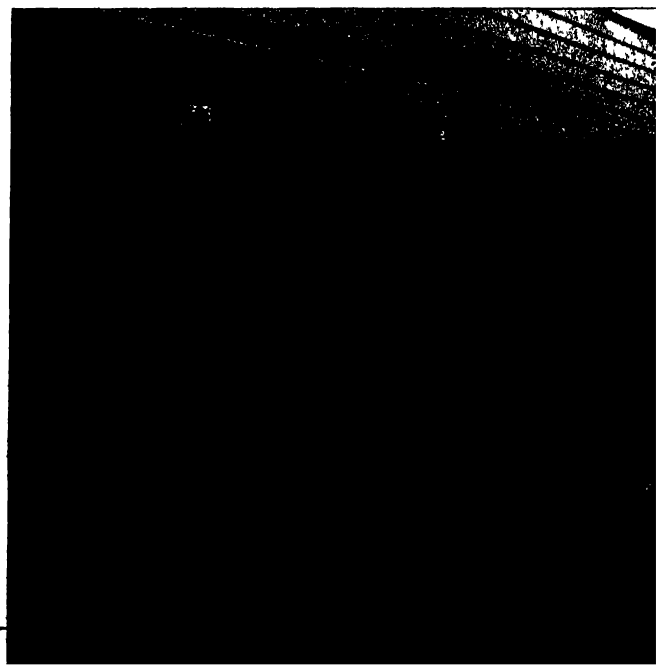
Kakodkar said that the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) had a comprehensive programme to deal with waste safety, and had studied the physical and chemical transformations that take place in waste, its dispersal, and so on. "They have become specialised branches of science," the BARC Director said. Kakodkar added: "We have done a lot of work on radiobiology – how radiation interacts with living matter."

Y.S.R. Prasad, Chairman, Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPC), which operates all the nuclear power stations in the country, said that safety depended on those who designed, operated and maintained the reactors. Apart from engineered safety features and a variety of systems to minimise chances of accidents, the NPC had a training and retraining programme for its plant personnel.

THE crux of reactor safety is the cooling of the fuel core. All safety systems are aimed to prevent the eventuality of the core losing its cooling, the fuel melting down and losing its shape, and a fire breaking out. The emergency core cooling system (ECCS) is one of the safety systems that aims to ward off a LOCA. It was a LOCA that occurred at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island; in the latter case there was no release of radioactivity into the atmosphere.

During the operation of a reactor, hydrogen embrittlement, that is, micro-cracks, may sometimes develop in the coolant (pressure) tubes that house the uranium fuel bundles. If these cracks cut across the thickness of the coolant tubes, they may sag and touch the calandria tube, around which is the coolant heavy water. This can lead to a loss of coolant from the primary system, and inadequate cooling of the fuel in the core.

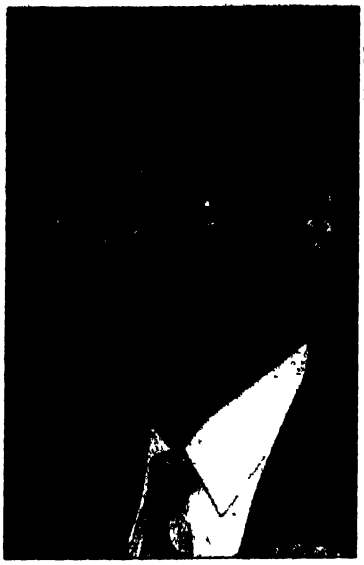
According to top NPC officials, three stages of ECCS were provided in the reactors. There were instruments and systems to sense a rupture in the primary circuit and a fall in pressure. Heavy water would be immediately injected over the core by opening valves. The second stage involved the use of ordinary water from the storage tanks. These would take care of the initial LOCA. In the third stage several hundred tonnes of water would be available in the basement of the reactor building for



suppression cooling.

Venkat Raj explained the changes and improvements in design that had been incorporated over the years. The first unit at RAPS was built by Canada, and the second unit by the DAE. The RAPS units had a dousing tank on top of the reactor building, with a large quantity of light water to condense the steam in the primary coolant circuit. Since the primary coolant was under high pressure, pressure in the containment (the concrete dome over the reactor building that is intended to prevent radioactivity from escaping into the atmosphere) would go up. But the RAPS reactor building was not designed to withstand high pressure.

In the event of a LOCA, water from the dousing tank would cascade and douse the steam. But if there was a spurious signal, water would come down needlessly. To avert such eventualities, said Venkat Raj, from MAPS onwards, the dousing tank was removed from the top of the building and the water was stored in a suppression tank in the basement of the reactor.



M MOORTHY

Dr. Anil Kakodkar, Director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay.

In the dousing tank, valves had to be opened to let the water down, and this needed time. The suppression tank did not require the opening of any valves. "This is an improvement we made," said Venkat Raj. Further, in the event of a LOCA, using the suppression tank poses no threat to containment integrity.

ANOTHER improvement incorporated in the design was the building of double containment from Narora onwards. Kalpakkam had partial double containment – the cylindrical portion of the reactor building had two walls but the dome on top had a single wall. From Narora, all reactors were provided with double containment, including the dome.

The inner (primary) containment was designed to withstand high pressure in the event of a LOCA. The large space between the inner containment and the outer (secondary) containment, called annular space, was maintained at below atmospheric pressure. During normal operations, the space in the inner containment was kept at a pressure even lower than that in the annular space in order to prevent any radioactivity from escaping into the atmosphere. If an accident occurred, the inner containment would get pressurised, but whatever radioactivity reached the annular space would not escape because of the higher atmospheric pressure outside.

Changes were also introduced in the calandria vault and the end-shields. The calandria is a huge cylindrical stainless steel vessel with massive steel plates called end-shields on either side. The calandria has 306 coolant tubes housing the fuel bundles, surrounded by high-pressure, high-temperature heavy water which is the coolant. The calandria tube is surrounded by low-pressure, low-temperature heavy water which is the moderator.

From Narora onwards, the calandria vault was filled with about 400 tonnes of ordinary water (earlier, it was only air); this has an important bearing on safety. This is in addition to about 150 tonnes of heavy water, the moderator, in the calandria, as in all other reactors. From the second unit at Kakrapar, the pressure tubes were made of zirconium niobium, which is less prone to hydrogen embrittlement effect unlike zircaloy, which was used earlier. The existing zircaloy tubes in all reactors in the country are now monitored periodically and are being replaced with tubes made of zirconium niobium.

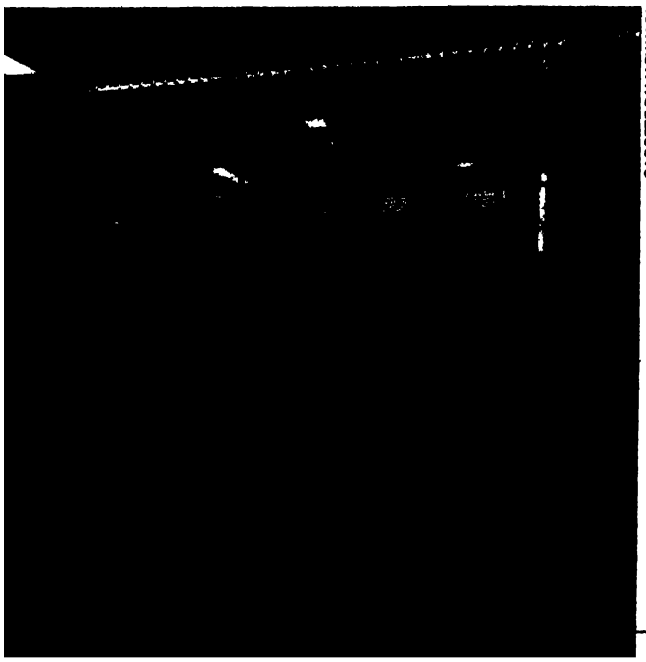
Up to Kalpakkam, low-pressure moderator injection was used for ECCS. From Narora, this was improved to high-pressure, heavy water injection followed by medium-pressure light water injection and long-term circulation by pumps.

Computerised control systems have also been introduced to strengthen the safety aspects. For the two reactors at Kaiga, there are now two control rooms, situated side by side but totally independent of each other. This was consequent to a fire incident in the first unit at Narora, which led to a black-out. Venkat Raj said: "We learnt our lessons from Narora. If the ventilation system is common, smoke entering one control room will invade the other room."

BARC engineers also simulated a LOCA. First they worked out a theoretical analysis, and to make sure that this was right, they did experiments with 1:10 scale models. Venkat Raj said, "These experiments validated both the theoretical analysis and the computer code used for the calculation of the containment pressure rise."

Although an operating PHWR station has many systems and instruments to detect a LOCA, there is always the lurking fear that the instruments might fail. BARC therefore set up a test system called LOCA Environment Simulation Facility. The cables carrying electricity and signals, which might also fail, could be tested in this facility.

BARC had designed computer codes to analyse accidents such as LOCA. To validate these codes BARC built test facilities at a cost of crores of rupees to simulate the working of reac-



SAGGERE RAMASWAMY

The computerised control rooms for the two reactors of the Kaiga Atomic Power Project in Karnataka. The control rooms operate independent of each other, a provision intended to ensure greater safety.

Questions, and some answers

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

QUESTIONS of safety relating to nuclear installations in the country have come up time and again, and those who raise them put the blame on lack of transparency on the part of the nuclear energy establishment. They say that the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has not made public data about the levels of radioactivity released by nuclear stations and facilities, or about the cumulative exposure of each employee at the various nuclear power stations, the uranium mines in Bihar or the Nuclear Fuel Complex in Hyderabad. These sections state that if the natural radiation levels recorded at a site by the Environmental Survey Laboratory (ESL) before work begins on a nuclear power project are made public, it will help measure any increase in radiation levels after the plant is commissioned.

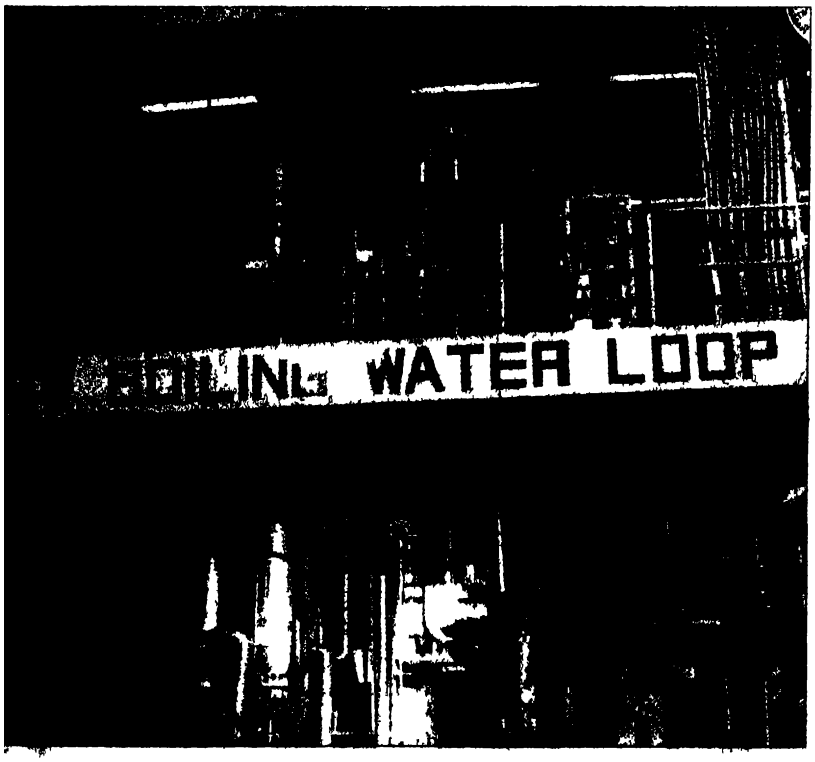
Sceptics say that in cases where heavy water leak from a Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) occurred, no information was given out on whether it was the coolant heavy water or the moderator heavy water that leaked. (The radioactivity release from moderator heavy water would be much higher than that from coolant heavy water.)

Issues relating to the decommissioning of ageing nuclear reactors are a cause for concern among environmentalists. In normal circumstances, a reactor is decommissioned 30 to 35 years after it attains criticality. On this criterion, two units of the Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS) are candidates for decommissioning as they started generating electricity in 1969. Further, the high cost of decommissioning is not factored into calculations of the total cost.

There are also fears about waste management. Nuclear waste may be vitrified, encased in metal cans and stored in underground repositories, but there is a risk that in the event of an earthquake, they may seep into the soil and water.

Whenever a nuclear power project is planned, it arouses fears among the local communities. This is especially so when the site is in a seismic zone (as is the case with the Narora Atomic Power Station) or in a densely forested area (the Kaiga Atomic Power Project) or on a coastal site (Kudangulam Atomic Power Project). In the case of Kudangulam, local fishermen were concerned that the coolant water let into the sea from the reactors might affect marine life. Besides, the local population feared that the drawal of water from the Pechipara dam for the requirements of the plant and the township would deplete the availability of water for their irrigation and drinking water needs.

DAE officials, however, dismiss all fears. Top officials of the Health, Safety and Environment Group at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) say that Environmental Survey Laboratories (ESL) are open to the public and the data they collect are in the public domain. The officials say that when heavy water leaked into the reactor vault of the second unit at the Madras Atomic Power Station (MAPS), Kalpakkam, on March 26, 1999 (Frontline, April 23) details about the amount of heavy water that had leaked (and the fact that it was coolant heavy water that had leaked), the extent of



COURTESY BARC

he 3 MW Boiling Water Loop machine at the Reactor Engineering Division at BARC. It was designed for heat transfer and safety-related experiments under conditions of reactor coolant flow, temperature and pressure.

tors and coolant systems The predictions were first projected, subsequently the exercises were done The test results were compared with the predictions to see whether the computer codes had been validated Many cycles might be gone through in updating the computer codes

Early this year, the Reactor Design and Development Group built a Facility for Integral System Behaviour Experiments (FISBE). This simulated PHWR coolant systems in a scaled manner. A feature of FISBE is that it simulated the full elevation – 40 metres – of the equipment as in a reactor.

Engineering Hall 7 also has a huge 3 MW Boiling Water Loop machine. Venkat Raj designed and constructed this about 15 years ago for heat transfer and safety-related experiments under conditions of reactor coolant flow, temperature and pressure. (Venkat Raj has now taken charge as Director, Health, Safety and Environment Group, BARC, in place of Dr. Umesh C. Mishra.)

LOCA simulation experiments demand acquisition of data very fast, every 100 microseconds. The fast data acquisition machine in the hall can scan 10,000 parameters every second. An Indian company developed the machine about ten years ago and it is still going strong.

tritium released and the number of workers affected were made available to the press.

As for the issue of decommissioning, DAE officials said that the department had "broadbased experience" in this area. A dedicated group had studied the decommissioning prerequisites and made detailed plans for Indian plants. According to these officials, decommissioning costs account for less than two per cent of the project cost and they were factored into the tariff.

Man-rem exposures were less than 0.1 per cent of those caused by natural background radiation.

The DAE, the officials said, had expertise in both liquid and solid waste management. High-level solid waste would be stored in deep repositories in locations where it would not come into contact with ground water. It would be vitrified in the form of glass, and any leaching of plutonium from glass would be negligible even over thousands of years.

At Kaiga, the reactor plant, the buildings and other facilities occupied only about 25 hectares of a total of 120 ha of forest land that was acquired. Compensatory afforestation was undertaken, and when academics from Mangalore University, who set up a nursery at Kaiga, studied the flora and fauna of the area, they discovered some rare species of plants, which the DAE was preserving.

At Kudangulam, the DAE officials said, the entire area acquired was uninhabited. The local fishermen were given assurances that no radioactive substance would be let into the sea, and that the coolant water let into the sea would not affect fish life there. Only 120 mcft of water a year would be drawn from the Pechipara dam: this would form only about 0.6 per cent of its annual yield of 14,500 mcft, and according to the officials, this will not affect local irrigation interests in any way. ■

PHWRs which operate in the country have several safety systems to withstand earthquakes For each nuclear power station site, the levels of earthquake are defined depending on the seismicity of the area Two levels of earthquake are defined: the operating basis earthquake, and the safe shutdown earthquake. In the first level, all operating systems in a nuclear reactor are designed to withstand the seismic shocks, and the reactor will continue to operate. The level of a safe shutdown earthquake is higher than that of an operating basis earthquake, but the probability of its occurrence is lower. At this level, safety systems such as the ECCS, containment and reactor shutdown systems are so designed that the reactor can be shut down safely and the cooling maintained to remove heat from the fuel. In the event of an accident, any reactor should meet three important safety functions – it should shut down safely; there should be provision for continued core cooling to remove decay heat; and containment integrity should be maintained. So long as these requirements are met, radioactivity will not escape into the atmosphere.

BARC engineers and scientists have undertaken complicated analyses to determine how earthquake shocks impacted on reactor equipment. Venkat Raj said, "We developed theoretical models. To confirm them with experiments, there are special test facilities abroad called shake tables, which would shake the equipment as an earthquake would." The engineers also mount the equipment on a diesel engine and run it on railway tracks; this has the same vibration effect as would be experienced in an earthquake. ■

The first article in a two-part series on issues of nuclear safety.

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Some monkey business

Experiments and testing procedures involving animals in laboratories across the country come to a standstill in the wake of protests by some organisations.

R.RAMACHANDRAN

ACTIVISM by animal lovers in the country is assuming militant and controversial dimensions, and facing the brunt of this upsurge are the scientists of national laboratories and the pharmaceutical industry involved in biomedical research and in the development of drugs and vaccines. Unfortunately, the stand of Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Maneka Gandhi on the subject is seen to provide a certain official stamp to the doings of the animal rights organisations.

The issue of a gazette notification, the Breeding of and Experiments on Animals (Control and Supervision) Rules, 1998, ignoring the views within the Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA) and objections from the research community, led to an outcry among scientists (*Frontline*, November 6, 1998). Maneka Gandhi was the chairperson of the 17-member CPCSEA, which was tasked with the framing of the regulations. The CPCSEA, which was originally under the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), was brought under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) when Maneka Gandhi moved there.

Representations to the Minister of Science and Technology and the Prime Minister led to the constitution of a committee under Dr. P.K. Dave of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). However, some of the recommendations of the Dave Committee were not incorporated in the final notification, and the scientific community is trying to get the final notification amended and the other recommendations incorporated in it. Meanwhile, Maneka Gandhi carries on with her anti-vivisectionist agenda with the support of animal activists and organisations such as the Blue Cross and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

The forced release of 52 monkeys from the animal house of the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), which comes under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), into the Kagaznagar forest by activists led by Blue Cross functionary Amala Akkineni on August 9 brought the controversy to a head. This incident has held up animal testing of the new genetically engineered 'alpha-interferon' drug developed by the Hyderabad-based Shantha Biotechnics Ltd. The testing was being conducted on 34 rhesus monkeys at the NIN facility as a requirement for the grant of marketing approval by the Drug Controller of India.

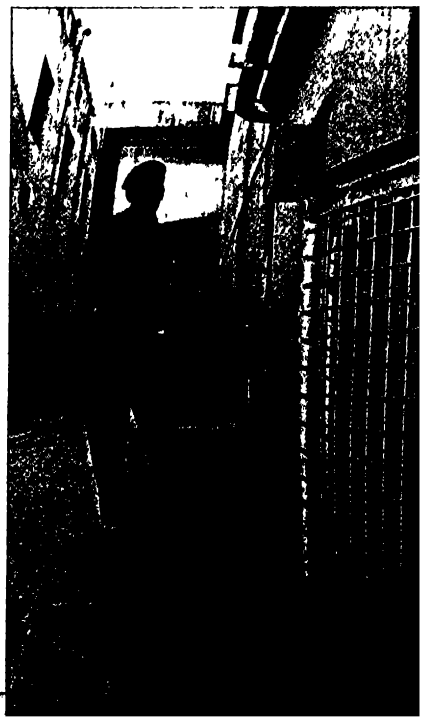
A meeting was held at the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) on September 1 in the context of the controversy to take a fresh look at the Academy's "Guidelines for Care and Use of Animals in Scientific Research" issued in 1992 which has essentially served as the ethical basis for animal testing in Indian institutions. At another level, a representation was made to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office constituted yet another committee, under Prof. P.N. Tandon, neurosurgeon at the AIIMS, with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) as the nodal agency, to go into the matter.

Experiments on animals have come to a halt all over the country because the NIN, the main supplier of animals to laboratories, stopped supplies after A.P. Singh, MSJE official and member-secretary of the CPCSEA, directed the NIN to release all the animals, saying that the NIN had failed to register itself with the CPCSEA as required. However, the NIN insists that it had sought a registration although the bureaucratic machinery was slow to act.

According to Dr. Kamala Krishnaswamy, NIN Director, the supply of 780 BALB/C mice, 670 Swiss mice, 100 nude mice, 50 C57BL/6J mice, 750 W.NIN mice, 75 SD rats, 63 hamsters, 375 guinea pigs and 41 rabbits to 20 different institutions and pharmaceutical concerns had been held up. However, she said that breeding as well as regular supply of animals were being resumed.

The mandate of the Tandon Committee, which met on September 2, was to recommend amendments to the BEA Rules within two weeks, for the implementation of which no guidelines have been issued. No meeting of the CPCSEA has been called by the chairperson since November 1998. Meanwhile, the CPCSEA secretariat has resorted to punitive measures such as taking away monkeys from the NIN.

According to a source in the PMO, when the Prime Minister referred the matter to Maneka Gandhi, her reply was misleading. For example, one of the statements made, according to the source, is that the NIN is not a scientific institution but one that makes most of its money selling animals to laboratories. The NIN, of course, is a major research institution, and maintaining an animal house and supplying animals is only one of its many functions. Indeed, the NIN facility is a Centrally funded national facility called the National Centre for Laboratory Animal Sciences (NACLAS). NACLAS' annual budget is Rs.2 crores today while its external earnings during the last 42



years adds up to Rs.1 crore.

A senior ICMR official said: "If you shut down the NIN animal house, which supplies animals to over 180 laboratories in the country, you put an end to all biomedical research in the country. While this might suit animal activists, it also clearly suits the multinationals. The country can hardly afford to resort to this sort of fundamentalism when the demand of the day in the wake of Trade Related Aspects of the Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is to strengthen our drug development and pharmaceutical industry."

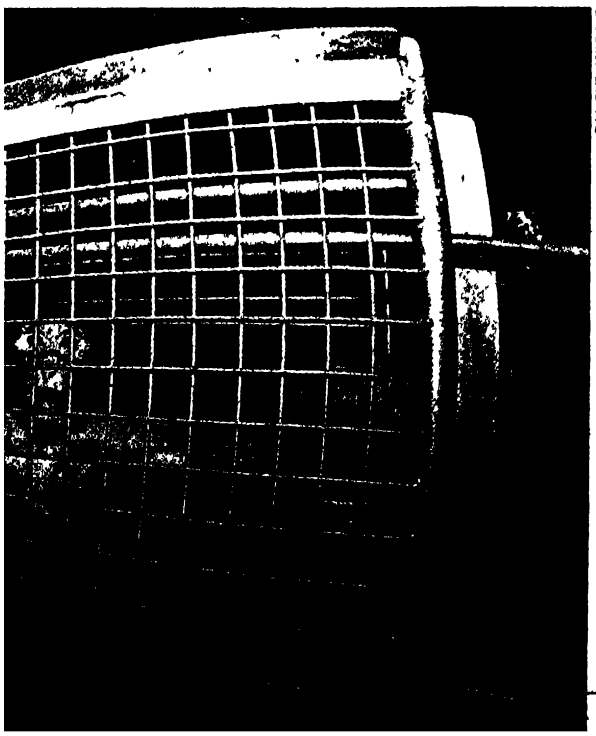
THE NIN developments date back to July 1997 when Maneka Gandhi got the Committee to authorise the visit of teams from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to laboratories that conducted animal experiments. The first visit to the NIN facility by an NGO took place in February 1998 but the NIN or even the scientist-members of the CPCSEA are yet to see any report of this visit. A report by Dr. Iqbal Mallik, primatologist and founder of an NGO called Vatavaran, apparently commissioned by the CPCSEA, was published last year, but it has not been given to the scientist-members to evaluate.

On April 7, 1998, the NIN sought permission from the MoEF (under which the CPCSEA was then) to import Zucker (fat) rats from the United States to carry out some obesity studies. Since the draft rules that were being framed then, which called for the registration of the facility as well as permission to carry out the experiment, the Ministry asked for the submission of registration forms, along with the request for import. These were forwarded through the ICMR on July 16, 1998, and then again on August 9, 1998. According to the NIN, there has been no response to this from the CPCSEA. Meanwhile, the CPCSEA moved from the MoEF to the MSJE.

A similar request, to import three pairs of black and white mice from New Zealand in order to test a DNA vaccine developed by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, was made on January 21. Again, the NIN has received no permission from the CPCSEA. Although in the interim the BEA Rules were issued, the ICMR and the NIN received copies of the notification only in February 1999. Since this called for fresh registration, the NIN sent to the ICMR a new set of registration forms on March 23.

Meanwhile, the NIN signed a memorandum of understanding with Shantha Biotech, and interferon testing on 34 monkeys started in June. A.P. Singh sent a fax to the NIN on June 24 accusing it of violating the BEA Rules and asking it to release the animals, which numbered over 30,000. It also said that Amala Akkineni of the Hyderabad Blue Cross had been asked to submit a compliance report to the CPCSEA.

When he was told that the application for registration had been sent nearly a year earlier, A.P. Singh said that new forms would be required after the BEA Rules came into force. The NIN then filed new forms and explained the impracticability of releasing 30,000 animals which have been bred and domesticated for several generations and cannot survive in the natural environment.



P V SHIVAKUMAR

One of the monkeys that was taken away by a group of animal activists from the animal house of the National Institute of Nutrition on August 9.

On his part, the Director-General of the ICMR, Dr. N.K. Ganguly, constituted a committee of experts comprising directors of four Hyderabad-based institutes – the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT), the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics, and the Owaisi Hospital and Research Centre – to inspect the NACLAS and submit a report. The Committee, contrary to the earlier NGO report which said the animals in the NACLAS were poorly housed and badly treated, gave a clean chit to the facility.

As directed by A.P. Singh, Amala Akkineni visited the NACLAS facility along with two SPCA officials on July 1 and submitted her report on July 3 in which she said that "the animals were maintained in good condition but for a sad cause." On July 6, A.P. Singh visited the facility along with Amala Akkineni and other animal rights activists, Vasantha Vadi, Krishna Vadi and Dr. Laxmi from the Blue Cross. The team was critical of the primate colony which housed the 52 monkeys, of which 12 had been there for four to eight years and a batch of 36 monkeys were caught recently for the testing needs of Shantha Biotech. The team felt that the size of the cages was inadequate and suggested that the monkeys be kept in cages for only three weeks and that after tests they be rehabilitated and released into the forest. The team said that the procurement of monkeys from the wild is illegal.

The Blue Cross maintains that the size of the cages used in the NIN is 60 cm x 60 cm x 82 cm, which is not in accordance with INSA guidelines of 4,000-6,000 sq cm floor area for monkeys with an average weight of 10 to 12 kg. But according to the NIN, the size is about 65 cm x 65 cm x 82 cm – implying a floor area of about 4,200 sq cm. The NIN also points out that the average weight of the monkeys is about 7 kg and, in fact, the newly caught 34 monkeys that were being used for interferon testing were only about 4 kg each.

The NIN concedes that what is perhaps inadequate is "monkey runs", larger space for movement into which the monkeys are let out periodically; a resource crunch has prevented the NIN from building such a facility. Following a recommendation of the ICMR committee, monkey runs of 6 sq cm per monkey are being created at a cost of Rs.34 lakhs, as against the international norm of 1.75 sq metres.

"Why three weeks?" asks Dr. D. Balasubramanian of the L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, with reference to the team's suggestion. "Animal testing can go on for



The National Institute of Nutrition in Hyderabad.

over a year, particularly for something like interferon," says Dr. Satyajit Rath of the National Institute of Immunology (NII), New Delhi. Then, rehabilitation and release into the wild are problematic because once caught for experiments the monkeys are on an entirely different kind of diet and acclamatisation and would be unable to survive in the wild. Indeed, some of the monkeys released by the Blue Cross on August 4 into the Kagaznagar forest are reported to have died. Catching monkeys from the wild is not illegal, and it is done by licensed trappers.

After his visit, A.P. Singh reiterated the demand for the release of the monkeys. Alternatively, he wanted the NIN to improve the facility by creating monkey runs and evolve a programme for rehabilitation. He also wanted the registration forms to be sent again. This was done again on July 9.

A.P. Singh sent another fax message to the NIN on July 16 demanding the release of all the animals. On August 4, Dr. Reddy of Shantha Biotech was informed by Amala Akkineni that she would inform the CPCSEA and Maneka Gandhi about continuing tests on monkeys for the interferon drug. Then came the final assault. Animal activists headed by Amala Akkineni and Vasanthi Vadi, armed with an order from the CPCSEA (which has no authority to do so), and with the help of the Circle Inspector of Osmania University Police Station, went to the NACLAS premises and took away in trucks all the monkeys housed there. According to Dr. Reddy, all this happened while he was having discussions with the CPCSEA in Delhi.

This forced Shantha Biotech to file a case against the government in the Andhra Pradesh High Court on August 23 seeking to restore the animal toxicology tests of the drug under the memorandum of understanding (MoU) and the contract at the NIN or any other similar facility, and Rs.1,000 crores in damages. The court heard the petition the next day and ordered a stay and directed the NIN to facilitate the toxicological tests of interferon. It also directed the CPCSEA, Amala Akkineni and the police not to interfere with the conduct of the tests on monkeys.

The NIN and the ICMR now face serious problems. The damage has been done. Shantha Biotech will lose about one year – because monkeys have to be made completely free of any infections, they have to be acclimatised to the controlled conditions necessary for testing and brought to appropriate nutritional status – there are no monkeys available for the asking, according to Dr. N.K. Ganguly of the ICMR. The NIN is on a countrywide hunt to procure 30-odd monkeys. This could take three to four months, besides the cost (of anywhere between Rs.15,000 and Rs.40,000 a monkey), Dr. Ganguly says.

It is not clear how and when the Tandon Committee's recommendations will be considered and the BEA Rules amended. While Dr. Sharma sounds hopeful that actions would be taken, scientists such as Dr. Sandip Basu, Director, NII, are highly sceptical.

One of the key issues of concern for scientists is that the rules have become a major impediment to the import of animals for experiments. A Ministry of Commerce notification of October 29, 1998 – which was re-issued at the urging of Maneka Gandhi even before the final Rules were enacted – has equated experimental animals with those meant for zoos and circuses and put their imports under its negative list.

MANEKA GANDHI has also sought to take a series of steps that could further hinder animal-based biomedical research. She has forwarded a set of amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, to the Cabinet. These seek to equate voluntary organisations such as the SPCA with government bodies and vest them with extraordinary powers. For the supervision of experiments involving animals, it calls for the formation of a committee giving representation to scientific bodies. The Ministry of Science and Technology is now formulating its objections to the proposed amendments.

At another level, the MSJE issued an advertisement on June 17 for the appointment on contract of three expert consultants who "will be required to examine the applications of breeders and establishments for registration as well as for carrying out experiments using animals". They will also represent the CPCSEA on institutional ethics committees which will periodically inspect laboratories and animal facilities. But what are the qualifications? A master's degree in medicine or life sciences and "at least three years of relevant experience and a known concern for animal welfare".

The scientific community's objections are that master's degree holders are hardly exposed to animal-based research and are, therefore, not competent to judge its needs. The phrase "known concern for animal welfare" gives room for the regulatory authority to be usurped to pursue the personal agenda of animal rights activists. In fact, already letters have begun to be forwarded by some of these contractual expert consultants on MSJE letterheads to animal facilities. The NIN has received one such letter from a Chennai-based activist. The NIN is in a quandary as to whether it should take cognisance of this letter when members of the CPCSEA have not been informed of such appointees.

"All these are part of a theology of animal liberation, with no understanding of scientific needs whatsoever, least of all scientific research meant for human welfare, not to mention animal welfare itself, by testing vaccines for animals," says Dr. Rath. ■

Rooted in realism

The cinema of the Kaurismaki brothers is minimalist cinema at its best, but at the same time rooted in Finnish realism of the times.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

"WHY should people go out and pay money to see bad films when they can stay at home and see bad television for nothing?" That remark really sums up the attitude of the Finnish film-making duo, the Kaurismaki brothers – Mika and Aki Kaurismaki – and good cinema is what they will offer come hell or high water. "I am just a medium-class director," Aki Kaurismaki once told the British film journal, *Sight and Sound*. "I may never make a masterpiece but if I make many good films, together they are something." The opening remark is also a dig at the state of cinema and the state of the medium of television in this electronic age.

The sample of six Kaurismaki films – five by Aki (the younger of the two) – shown as a "Retrospective of Films by the Kaurismaki Brothers" by the Embassy of Finland in New Delhi in August provided ample evidence of their oeuvre, but only a fraction of their prolific output of 38 films in the span of 18 years – 18 by Mika, 20 by Aki and one jointly directed. The films on view were: *Calamari Union* (1985), *The Match Factory Girl* (1989), *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989), *Zombie and the Ghost Train* (Mika; 1991), *La Vie de Boheme* (1992) and *Drifting Clouds* (1996). Four of these have been seen at various festivals in the country besides *Ariel* (1988), *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses* (1994) and *Tatjana* (1994).

The two started collaborating in 1981 – they invariably collaborate on the script – dividing their work according to a carefully observed schedule. To save scarce funds and optimise the use of time, equipment and crew, they alternate as directors, one starting a project as soon as the other is through. Even though Mika began making films earlier (1981) and Aki's first independent directorial venture was in 1983, the latter's films seem to be exhibited more often. One wished that the package included a better representation of Mika's work. The current package has since been shown in Agartala and Calcutta and will travel to Hyderabad where it will be seen during September 23-25.

FINNISH cinema? Never heard of it. The Kaurismakis? Who are they? These are likely to be the responses of nine out of ten people in India, or anywhere for that matter. For most Indians, Finland is a country somewhere up there and, with its total population being half that of Delhi, it is, in some sense, a wonder that films get made there at all – about a dozen every year – and some of them, like the Kaurismaki films, win critical acclaim. Over the years they have grown in popularity both at home and abroad and have put Finland on the international film map. In fact, some of Aki's films have acquired a cult following in the West. The only Finnish film makers who had made a mark in international cinema were Mauritz Stiller during the silent era and Jorn Donner much later in the 1960s and 1970s. But both of them worked from Sweden. In these parts, however, the Kaurismakis are still not as well known even in the art-film, film society and film critic circuits.



Aki Kaurismaki and (right) Mika Kaurismaki.

Indeed, some years back Mika Kaurismaki was present at an International Film Festival of India held in New Delhi, with his film *Tigrero*, a remarkable film set in the Amazon which attempted to retrace Samuel Fuller's unfinished project (for a film of the same name) and was at the time a tribute to Fuller's cinema as it were. But Mika was spotted just wandering around the Siri Fort Auditorium because the media spotlight was on the big names. The Directorate of Film Festivals (DFF) – given its perception of cinema – had not thought it fit to give him proper publicity and prominence. The directorate had not even bothered to introduce him – a customary practice – before the screening of his film, not to speak of having a press conference arranged after the screening.

"This is what happens if the organisers do not have any passion for cinema," Mika had wryly remarked then. (The passion of the Kaurismakis for cinema is so great that they actually run special film theatres in Helsinki to screen quality cinema from all over the world.) In his characteristic irreverence to the establishment and its bureaucratised invitation to him, Mika had spent his time imbibing Delhi's atmosphere and watching Hindi films. Even this time, the DFF, co-sponsors of the event, called it a Festival of Films from Finland rather than highlight the fact they were films by the Kaurismakis.

Given the fact that Finnish cinema is almost non-existent and that the Kaurismakis are not exactly the most-sought-after directors, the quote at the beginning of this article might appear a bit audacious. Indeed, audacity is evident in all the films of the Kaurismaki brothers – Aki's *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* is, in fact, audacity all the way through. Their films cock a snook at the big budget multi-starrers and the established industry. Even as their approach, partic-

ularly Aki's irreverent cinematic style, gives the feeling that they are just having us on, you suddenly realise the realism that the films are rooted in

The Kaurismaki films are about ordinary Finns, ordinary stories of survival, simply and directly told but in a detached manner, understated and without frills, without pretensions and fuss. And the depiction is as cold as the Finnish climate. The near absence of people in the streets of Finland heightens the depression and the longing for human contact runs as an undercurrent in most films – the lack of audience for rock bands (*Leningrad Cowboys*) or the rock band which is never seen to be playing (*Zombie Ghost Train*) carry that metaphor. The cold and detached depiction (there are hardly any close-ups, for example) and the static style might seem as pitiless as the society that the films portray. But the compassion for the characters that the directors have comes through strongly – through the use of careful compositions, closed spaces, subdued lighting and colours with an emphasis on blue.



A scene from *The Match Factory Girl*.

For example, in the film *The Match Factory Girl*, the only emotion reflected by the camera, which is otherwise static throughout, is when the protaganist Iris learns that she is pregnant. The camera zooms in just a little. Of course, Aki, whose films seem to be more irreverent, says that he prefers static shots because "it is a nuisance when you have a hangover, and camera movements tend to be shaky". Their cinema is minimalist cinema at its best, but at the same time rooted in Finnish realism of the times, a stylisation that seems appropriate for the bleak and grey Finnish landscape.

In an interview Aki once said: "I have no esteem for films in which people are slaughtered with guns and this is called entertainment. A film is always drawn into a certain scale. If one starts to shoot about and play with explosives, then nothing will be enough. If the film is tuned on a minimalist level, even the sound of a cough is dramatic. If the main character slips and falls into a gutter, the viewer is already worried about what is going to happen to her or him, even though in other films people are dropped from aeroplanes and they survive without single scratch." The starkness in *The Match Factory Girl* is extreme, of which Aki, in characteristic vein, remarked: "I decided to make a film that would make Robert Bresson seem like a director of epic motion pictures."

There are no pretty faces or carefully chosen dresses either. The decor is tacky. The person-on-the-street-looking actors, perhaps in their daily wear (Matti Pellonpaa, one of the Kaurismaki regulars, apparently usually did this), may well themselves be the characters they are acting out. Despite the distancing style, this ascetic approach enables – paradoxically, it would seem – identification with the characters. This may be particularly true in the Indian context as Finland's problems during the recession seem to echo today's Indian situation. And there is this undercurrent of droll and wry humour, which is almost black, that compliments the realism.

Take *Drifting Clouds* for example. Lauri loses his job in the transport department after a lottery draw for retrenchment! The out-of-job chef in the same film says: "I am on my journey to the end of vodka" – his world has been reduced to the bottle he carries in his pocket. Or *The Match Factory Girl*, in which Iris after getting rid of her tormentors by poisoning them, casually poisons a stranger in the bar.

The above two films are clearly the pick of the current package. Both continue with a recurrent theme of Aki's films: the problems of the working class. *Shadows in Paradise* (1986) and *Ariel* (1988) had explored the theme earlier. *Calamari Union* (1985) is the earliest film being shown in the package. Though it may appear a bit dated today, it is a kind of moral fable (and a kind of joke as well) about a group of 17 young men in a Helsinki workers' quarter (all called Frank!) who set out on an odyssey towards Eira (the posh suburb of Helsinki), none of whom makes it. This was Aki's version – in the road movie mould – of the Finnish El Dorado of longing which becomes yet another central theme of Aki's films.

Both the theme and the motif – the El Dorado and the road movie – recur in a different form in *Leningrad Cowboys*.

Devoid of gigs and audiences, the "worst rock band in the world" from the Tundra sets out for the United States, which Aki calls "the country where everything is for sale". *Leningrad* works at various levels. Besides being the ultimate road movie at its simplest, it is also, on the one hand, against authoritarianism – allusions to the totalitarian state and rebellion are there – and, on the other, an absurd spoof on the kinds of music that get produced in the name of pop and rock by some groups in the West.

Rock band itself would seem to be a recurrent motif in Kaurismaki films, so much so that reality and cinema have got mixed up after *Leningrad Cowboys*. The lead performers of the band in the film were part of a rock band called Sleepy Sleepers in the 1970s who had brought out an album called Leningrad Cowboys from which the title of the film was borrowed. But with the success of the film, the rock band's name itself was changed from Sleepy Sleepers to Leningrad Cowboys.

It is not surprising that the artist-as-bohemian motif figures frequently in the films of the Kaurismaki brothers who are themselves known to be leading bohemian lives. *Zombie and the Ghost Train* (1991) and *La Vie de Boheme* (1992) are examples. The latter was made in French (in black and white). After its success, the two have begun to work abroad more often with multinational funding and casting. The latest on the anvil is a Russian-Finnish co-production on Lenin with Karl Maria Brandauer in the lead. In most Kaurismaki films, the "bohemian" was personified by Matti Pellonpaa, who himself had apparently lived a good part of his life in that manner (sleeping on restaurant benches, for example), and *Drifting Clouds* pays tribute to him (through his childhood photograph in the film) because he died in 1995 just two weeks before its shooting began. ■

Questions of contempt

The subject of the application of contempt powers by courts has re-emerged as a matter for public debate. A look at the international position with regard to the issue.

ZAHID F. EBRAHIM

In entertaining possible contempt of court punitive action against the writer Arundhati Roy for her essay, "The Greater Common Good" (published as the Cover Essay in *Frontline*, June 4, 1999), and against the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), the Supreme Court of India is on slippery ground. With obsolete approaches to the purported offence of 'scandalising the court' and 'eroding public confidence in the judiciary' and unsound and unsustainable efforts to shield judges from criticism, both sharp and moderate, the matrix of freedom of expression, which is strongly protected in Article 19 of the Indian Constitution, could come under pressure and threat. **Zahid F. Ebrahim**, a Pakistani lawyer and legal scholar, presents an unusually insightful and clear-headed analysis of the international position on matters of contempt of court in this article contributed at the invitation of *Frontline*.

– Editor, *Frontline*.

IN 1937, Justice Cardozo of the United States Supreme Court described freedom of expression as "the matrix, the indispensable condition, of nearly every other form of freedom." Accurate as it is powerful, Justice Cardozo's matrix theory lies at the heart of all defences of the right of freedom of expression. Yet, in many countries, the courts of law, the ultimate guarantors of free expression, have found it difficult to come to terms with free speech critically directed at the courts themselves.

The laws of contempt are primarily designed to balance the freedom of expression with the judiciary's quest to maintain its authority and safeguard public order. Broadly speaking, contempt of court falls into three general areas: (i) violation of an order of a court, (ii) interference in the judicial process, and (iii) criticism of a judge, his or her judgment, or the institution of the judiciary.

The contemporary law of contempt, which seeks to prohibit the criticism of the judge, his or her judgment or the institution of the judiciary, now re-emerged as a matter for public debate with the Supreme Court of India's ire being directed at the Booker Prize winning author of *The God of Small Things*. The matrix is under threat.

The offence of 'scandalising the court'

The criticism of a judicial officer, his or her judgment or the institution of the judiciary is generally recognised in the Commonwealth countries as the offence of scandalising the court. Contemporary scholars, such as Geoffrey Robertson and Andrew Nicol, view the offence of scandalising the court in England as "...an anachronistic relic of 18th century struggles between partisan judges and their vitriolic critics". Echoing such views, Eric Barendt suggests that the offence of scandalising the court is "now so unimportant in practice that it may appear fruitless to spend much space in debating its justification."

However, across the world, 'scandalising the court' continues to pose significant challenges to the rights of free expression guaranteed by national constitutions and international covenants. Even in such hostile environment, credible defences have evolved, and at times have even been adopted by the courts.

The 'courtesy and good faith' defence is one such defence. In the words of the Queen's Bench in England, "no criticism of a judgment, whatsoever vigorous, can amount to contempt of court, providing it keeps within the limits of courtesy and good faith." In many jurisdictions, the courtesy and good faith defence has allowed scholars and legal practitioners the ability to launch significant criticism and gain new ground for free expression.

The letter from a Kenyan lawyer, Feroze Nawrojee, which became the cause of a contempt action against Nawrojee, is a good example of how courtesy and good faith may be artfully woven in with powerful critique. Frustrated by a judge's delay in deciding a motion to stay proceedings in a traffic offence case in which a prominent critic of the Kenyan government had been killed, Nawrojee wrote in protest: "It is unusual that in the meantime the same learned judge has dealt with several hundred matters as duty judge and left this one matter as yet uncompleted. Such delay amounts in law to a refusal to adjudicate...These departures from the usual, the indefinite delay, despite reminders and the willingness to specify a fixed date, may create the impression that the ruling is being tailored...I convey my anxiety at the unusual treatment of this or any applicant to our courts, and the belief that trust in our judges is a major contributor to the security of that trust. The events taking place in this case tend to the erosion of that trust."

The aggrieved judge attempted to prosecute Nawrojee for the offence of scandalising the court. However, the Kenyan High Court determined that "courts could not use their contempt power to suppress mere criticism of a judge or to vindicate the judge in his personal capacity, but rather could use it only to punish scurrilous abuse of a judge when necessary in the interests of justice." The High Court stressed that "a judge must scrupulously balance the need to maintain his or her authority with the right to freedom of speech," and refused to find Nawrojee in contempt.

The public confidence in the judiciary argument

Courts have vigorously punished offensive speech directed at the judiciary on the grounds that intemperate criticism of the court leads to erosion of public confidence in the judiciary. Throughout history, courts have concluded that public confidence in the judiciary is both vital and fragile and therefore requires special protection from offending free expression. As David Pannick explains, "The grandiloquent fear that criticism of the courts may endanger civilisation has, in the 20th century, continued to lead to the punishment of persons who have insulted members of the judiciary or impugned

their impartiality."

Does immunity strengthen the judiciary?

But the very basis of the public confidence has been laid bare by David Pannick as he argues that "public confidence in the judiciary is not strengthened by the deterrence of criticism." After all, Lord Atkin in the Privy Council case of *Ambard v. Attorney-General for Trinidad and Tobago*, had ruled that "the path of criticism is a public way: the wrong-headed are permitted to err therein: provided that members of the public abstain from imputing improper motives to those taking part in the administration of justice, and are genuinely exercising a right of criticism, and not acting in malice or attempting to impair the administration of justice, they are immune. Justice is not a cloistered virtue: she must be allowed to suffer the scrutiny and respectful, even though outspoken, comments of ordinary men."

Questioning the presumption that judges are beyond bias

The threat to public confidence argument is predicated on the assumption that the judiciary is incapable of bowing to outside influences and immune from bias or prejudice. Courts are loath to admit that they may be susceptible to political, economic and moral prejudices that hold favour in a society.

When the Chief Minister of Kerala publicly proclaimed that "Marx and Engels considered the judiciary as an instrument of oppression and even today...it continues to be so," he was charged with contempt of court in the case reported as *E.M.S Namboodiripad v. T.N. Nambiar*, AIR 1970 Supreme Court 2015.

The Chief Minister had also alleged that "judges are guided and dominated by class hatred, class interests and class prejudices and where the evidence is balanced between a well-dressed, pot-bellied rich man and a poor, ill-dressed and illiterate person, the judge instinctively favours the former."

Reasoning that "the likely effects of his words must be seen and they have clearly the effect of lowering the prestige of judges and courts in the eyes of the people...," the Supreme Court of India ruled that "...there is not a semblance of doubt in our minds that the appellant was guilty of contempt of court." The possibility that the Chief Minister's charge had any grain of truth did not receive consideration by the court, since truth is not a defence when proceeded against for contempt.

Judicial independence

Some jurisdictions have had to contend with the dangerous area of bias within the judiciary where the judiciary finds itself chastened by government efforts to cajole and browbeat it into falling in line with state-diktat. Consider, for instance, the case of Tanzania, where according to M.K.B. Wambali and C.M. Peter, "the government and the party play a vital, if not a decisive, role in determining who will man various positions in the judiciary. This in a way has a bearing on the work of this important institution." Although the "Constitution also provides safeguards to the judges (to maintain their independence)...experience has shown that these safeguards are formal enactments and are not all that water-tight. Judges have been transferred from the judiciary and given other responsibilities in government service. The very fact that the executive makes appointments has at times tended to make members of the judiciary subservient to the executive and the party."

Tanzania is no solitary example, and in other countries too newspapers and journalists who expose and protest against efforts to make the judiciary subservient to the executive have found themselves muzzled by strident prosecution under contempt laws. As Robertson and Nicol note, "in certain Commonwealth countries there does exist an unhealthy relationship between the judges and the government that appoint them..." When the Belize *Times Press* published an article entitled "Predicament of Change", stating that "the courts have been reshaped. Both the Chief Justice and the sole Puisne Judge had been replaced. The courts which represent the seat of justice and fair play, the institution where arbitrariness and tyranny may be checked and controlled, had been transformed by the new administration," it faced a successful action for the offence of scandalising the court. It is a moot point whether this was, in fact, a statement in support of judicial independence.

The Malaysian Supreme Court has gone even further and cast its vote against even temperate criticism. In *Attorney General and Others v. Lee* (1987) LRC (Crim) 580 Mal SC, it has gone as far as to hold: "For the present, except possibly – and we say this with great reservation – for the limited purpose of proving it in actual court proceedings, any allegation of injustice or bias, however couched in respectful words and even if expressed in temperate language, cannot be tolerated, particularly when such allegation is made for the purpose of influencing or exerting pressure upon the court in the exercise of its judicial functions."

With this, the Malaysian Supreme Court not only determined that even temperate criticisms are not protected if these are motivated by intent to influence the court, but, more dangerously, ruled that intent can be found by reading into what the court referred to as "implicit threats". Development of jurisprudence where implicit threats are read into the written word, and even temperate criticism is outlawed on that basis, confirm that the offence of scandalising the court continues to gain hazardous new ground.

Beyond 'public confidence', the quest for deference

In a startling decision, the Indian Supreme Court in *Sanjiv Datta & Ors*, (1995) 3 SCR, not only relied on the erosion of public confidence in the judiciary argument to justify restricting free speech but also argued that the deference in which the judiciary is held must be equally safeguarded. In the Sanjiv Datta case, contempt proceedings were initiated against Sanjiv Datta, Deputy Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) of the Government of India, for filing an affidavit critical of the court's interlocutory order in a case where the Supreme Court had permitted a multinational broadcasting corporation to broadcast a cricket match by generating its own signals. Although the decision of the Supreme Court was complied with in letter and spirit by the MIB, Datta filed an affidavit expressing grievance at the court's decision to allow a foreign broadcasting company to generate its own signals in India. Datta's affidavit protested that the Supreme Court had "...erred in law by entertaining this petition and thereafter passing interim orders with undue haste... thereby causing irreparable damage to the respondents (MIB) by making a mockery of the established policy of the Government of India by permitting a foreign corporation to undertake broadcasting from India against the national interest and thereby undermining the sovereignty of the (nation)..." The Supreme Court promptly initiated contempt proceedings against Datta and he was served with a show cause notice asking him to explain why he should not be proceeded against for con-

tempt. In reply, Datta pleaded that he was "truly and sincerely sorry" and tendered an unconditional apology for such utterances.

The Supreme Court, however, was not forgiving. It reasoned that Datta's statements were "...a malicious attempt to cast aspersions on and attribute motives to the court." According to the court's deductive reasoning, "if such trends as are displayed in these proceedings by the contemner are allowed to go scot-free, there is a danger of the erosion of the deference to and confidence in the judicial system... and an invitation to anarchy." Datta was found guilty of contempt and was sentenced to pay a fine of Rs.2,000 and, in default, to undergo simple imprisonment for one week.

Although Datta's criticism is vigorous, the "invitation to anarchy" discovered by the Supreme Court in Datta's affidavit is beyond comprehension. Equally important, and here is perhaps the more troubling aspect, the court claimed that Datta's statements were eroding the "deference" in which the court is held. Thus the Supreme Court edged towards yet another standard under which freedom of expression would be chastened.

An unequivocal challenge to contempt

A more powerful challenge to the public confidence argument was advanced by Justice Amua Sekyi of the Supreme Court of Ghana who wrote the dissenting judgment in the *Republic v. Mensa Bonsu* case. In *Republic v. Mensa Bonsu*, a newspaper columnist, an editor and the printer/publisher were prosecuted for contempt of court for publishing a letter which accused a judge of making wrong attributions and changing orders that had earlier been dictated in open court. The majority of the Supreme Court of Ghana reasoned that "imputation of lack of impartiality by the judge and statements describing him as a liar and one guilty of criminal behaviour amounted to scurrilous abuse imputing improper motive...It was therefore contempt of the Supreme Court when scurrilous abuse was directed even at one member."

In contrast, Justice Sekyi of the Supreme Court of Ghana argued in his dissenting judgment in the *Mensa Bonsu* case that "courts must have regard to the right of every person to express himself freely and openly on all matters of public concern whether pertaining to the actions of the executive, the legislature or the judiciary. The ordinary laws of libel were the only check on any abuse of the right of free speech in circumstances such as these."

Joined by two judges, Justice Sekyi made three important points: first, that the judiciary should not demand immunity that is not accorded to the legislature or the executive; second, that any aggrieved judge has access to the ordinary laws of libel to prosecute defamatory speech, if the criticism is malicious and unjustified; third, that robust debate on matters of public interest must not be interpreted as efforts to obstruct the course of justice.

Cultural relativism holds back challenge to contempt

Unfortunately, even minority voices such as that of Justice Sekyi continue to be pushed back by judgments advancing anachronistic arguments of cultural relativism. In 1899, the Privy Council ruled in the case of *McLeod v. St Aubyn* that "committals for contempt of court by scandalising the court itself have become obsolete in this country. Courts are satisfied to leave to public opinion attacks or comments derogatory or scandalous to them. But it must be considered that in small colonies, consisting principally of coloured populations, the enforcement in proper cases of committal for contempt of court for attacks on the court may be absolutely necessary to preserve in such a community the dignity of and respect for the court."

Almost a hundred years later, in 1998, the Privy Council reiterated this opinion in its judgment in *Gilbert Ahnee v. D.P.P.*, in an appeal from the Supreme Court of Mauritius. After gingerly iterating that the offence of scandalising the court exists 'in principle' to maintain the public confidence in the judiciary, the Privy Council went on to consider whether such offence is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. The Law Lords reasoned that "in England such proceedings are rare and none have been successfully brought for more than 60 years. But it is permissible to take into account that on a small island such as Mauritius the administration of justice is more vulnerable than in the United Kingdom. The need for the offence of scandalising the court is greater on a small island."

Advancing the 'public confidence' rationale to curb critical speech

The European Court of Human Rights, in a narrow 5-4 decision in the *Prager & Oberschlick* case, adopted the public confidence argument while upholding the charge of contempt. In 1997, however, the European Court re-adjusted the balance in favour of freedom of expression in the case of *De Haes & Gijsels v. Belgium*. In this case, De Haes and Gijsels had published articles accusing four Belgian judges of bias and had been prosecuted for contempt in Belgian courts. In this case the European Court ruled that "although Mr. De Haes' and Mr. Gijsels' comments were without doubt severely critical, they nevertheless appeared to be proportionate to the stir and indignation caused by the matters alleged in their articles. As to the journalists' polemical and even aggressive tone, which the court should not be taken to approve, it must be remembered that Article 10 protects not only the substance of the ideas or information expressed but also the form in which they are conveyed."

Why the Supreme Court must rethink Contempt while trying Roy

It is imperative that the *raison d'etre* for retaining the offence of scandalising the court be re-examined. It may be necessary to review how public confidence in the judiciary has fared outside the Commonwealth and in Europe. The U.S., where courts long abandoned traditional caveats to free speech, is a strong candidate for such comparative appraisal. The U.S. Supreme Court's views are eloquently expressed in the words of Justice Black who wrote for the majority in 1941: "The assumption that respect for the judiciary can be won by shielding judges from published criticism wrongly appraises the character of American public opinion. For it is a prized American privilege to speak one's mind, although not always with perfect good taste, on all public institutions. And an enforced silence, however limited solely in the name of preserving the dignity of the bench, would probably engender resentment, suspicion and contempt much more than it would enhance respect."

History has proved Justice Black right. Also, the way forward may well lie within the words of Justice Amua Sekyi who reasoned that "the courts must have regard to the right of every person to express himself freely and openly on all matters of public concern whether pertaining to the actions of the executive, the legislature or the judiciary." ■

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■ COLUMN

A discredited Home Minister

L. K. Advani's record as Union Home Minister is studded not with achievements but with famous quotes.

A. G. NOORANI

DURING the course of the ongoing high-pitched election campaigning, one major factor that has been overlooked is the abysmal failure in governance on the part of the Bharatiya Janata Party. All its key figures in government have proved to be utterly incompetent. In effect, there have been two Ministers for External Affairs, one *de jure* and the other *de facto* – Jaswant Singh and Brajesh Mishra respectively. The latter is more powerful. Minister for Education (now called Human Resource Development) Murli Manohar Joshi detests liberal education. The egregious Kargil bungle apart, George Fernandes has singlehandedly impaired the morale of the defence forces and politicised a few of their leading officers. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is personally responsible for the misgovernance.

He is, however, not morally culpable – though he is constitutionally responsible – for the ignominious fall of his erstwhile rival, Lal Kishan Advani, Union Home Minister. Even those who despised Advani's communal outlook and immoral Ayodhya campaign fondly imagined that he would, at least, be a competent administrator. They did not know his record of incompetence as Minister for Information and Broadcasting during the period 1977-1979.

It used to be said that a press interview is an encounter in which the interviewer exploited the garrulousness of the politician and the politician took advantage of the ignorance of his interlocutor. Hardly anything is written on an encounter of graver consequence fraught with mutual deception. Every politician of moderate literacy, sociability and accessibility gathers around him an admiring crowd comprising journalists, academics, other professionals and even some who pass as "intellectuals". They delude him into believing that he is capable of great deeds. But, not before he has entrapped them into believing that he has the capacity and equipment for such tasks. Advani was both victim and perpetrator in this beguiling exercise from which both sides have emerged looking ridiculous.

The last hectic 18 months since he became Home Minister on March 19, 1998, provided him ample opportunity for proving his mettle and for demonstrating that he can perform better than the Home Ministers he had been attacking for the last three decades. But he lies before us a discredited figure; dreams shattered, incompetence exposed. He had told us repeatedly (December 3, 1989; February 24, 1991; June 18, 1991 and July 1992) that the BJP (that is, under his presidentship) owed its meteoric rise "from two seats in Parliament in 1985" to its Ayodhya campaign. Where lies that campaign today? The BJP is compelled to redouble its deception: assure the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal that it has not abandoned the Ram temple, and assure its allies and the nation at large that it has (see the writer's "BJP's real agenda", *Frontline*, September 24, 1999).

On September 12, 1998, shortly after he had endorsed the National Agenda for Governance on March 18, he told party workers in New Delhi: "We have taken up those components that are acceptable to all the allies. We will wait for the remaining components to be accepted... those who taunt us by saying that we have dropped the core issues, introducing a uniform civil code, abrogating Article 370 and Ayodhya, are *obviously* wrong." And, this from one who believes that "for a coalition to function and to endure, then there has to be a *dominant* partner in the coalition." (*Sunday*, November 2, 1997). None more pitiable than those willing to be deceived.

In the coalition Advani aspired to be the overbearing understudy to his Prime Minister, the one who ran the show. Having waded through blood on the route of the rath yatra in 1990, strewn with corpses of victims of the communal riots it caused, and secured the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992, he discovered that the "achievement" robbed him of his only plank. At the Mumbai session of the BJP National Executive in November 1995 he accepted the obvious – his lack of acceptability and credibility. So Vajpayee, he declared, will be Prime Minister, not he. Understandably, he expected reciprocity. Astute as he is, Vajpayee knew he did not owe his presumptuous benefactor much.

Now Advani as Home Minister is neither the driving force behind the Vajpayee government nor a respected Home Minister. On every count he has proved a failure – controlling the militancy in Kashmir, curbing the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), handling non-BJP States, and, of course, the communal situation. Like the ineffectual, loud-mouthed John Foster Dulles, Advani's record as Home Minister is



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studded not with achievements but with famous quotes.

Remember the one after Pokhran-II? It caused no end of trouble. But it reflected his utter ignorance of foreign affairs. India's status as a nuclear weapons state, he said in New Delhi on May 18, 1998, had brought about "a qualitative new stage in Indo-Pakistan relations, particularly in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem." This was based on the assessment that Pakistan would acquiesce in the new situation. Instead, it retaliated with its own bangs at Chagai, and the international community listed Kashmir among the demands it made of India.

Advani also made a pledge: "Our policy has to be pro-active, and we cannot restrict ourselves to reactive measures" against the militants in Kashmir. He did not rule out the possibility that the pro-active steps would include their "hot pursuit" by Indian forces across the Line of Control. An action plan was to be formulated by a task force, he said. The result? The situation there is far worse today than it was before he became Home Minister.

Advani was evidently given a tutorial about the realities. For shortly thereafter, he *ruled out* hot pursuit (*The Indian Express*; July 1, 1996) Amazingly, he asserted that "over the past two years the situation has been improving."

On November 16, 1998 he made a precise pledge: Pakistan's "ISI has spread its tentacles throughout the country but the previous governments did not do anything at all. We will now present a White Paper on the ISI during the winter session of Parliament". Ten months have elapsed; the White Paper is nowhere in sight.

ADVANI dilated at length on a case that aroused national concern. He said he had asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to conduct a thorough probe into the links Romesh Sharma had with politicians, bureaucrats and police officers. "The previous governments knew about Romesh Sharma's activities but he was not prosecuted even once. Earlier Romesh Sharma used to think that nobody would touch him because he had links *with those who governed the country*. He forgot that Atal Behari Vajpayee's Government was not like the previous ones." Advani was in full spate. He added: "Everybody was aware of his (Romesh Sharma's) links with Dawood Ibrahim who triggered off bomb blasts in India sitting in Dubai, but no action was taken against him."

The country is no wiser today about those links than it was earlier. Romesh Sharma's arrest and imprisonment were not due to any vigilance on the part of the government but, fortuitously, to a person who claimed to have been wronged. Where is the exposure of his links?

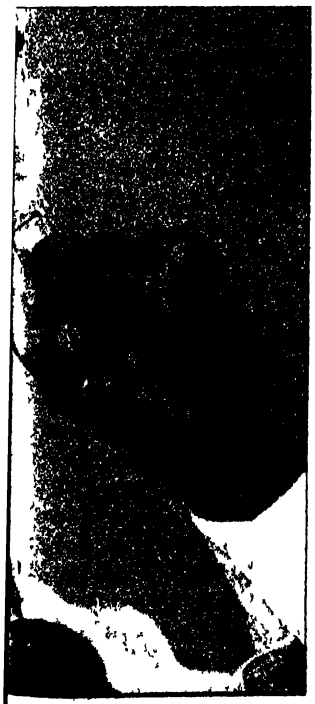
There was around that time another case that competed with this for the headlines. It concerned a senior official of Reliance Industries Limited, V. Balasubramaniam, against whom a case of violation of the Official Secrets Act had been registered by the CBI. He was not arrested, though. Replying to criticism, Advani said: "In these matters, it is the officials actually dealing with the issue who decide what is the best course of action." (In earlier such cases arrests *had* been made.)

By then the veneer had peeled off. The best expose came from Harish Khare in *The Hindu* (November 27, 1998). It bears quotation in extenso:

"Did the Vajpayee Government bite more than it could chew when raids were conducted on November 19 on the offices of the Reliance Industries Limited 'in connection with a case registered under the Official Secrets Act in Delhi against a company official, Mr. Balasubramaniam?' It would appear so, judging by the inexplicable eagerness of both the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister to give a clean chit to the Reliance Industries. Admittedly no government – and certainly not a beleaguered regime even if it includes self-proclaimed '*deshbakhta*' – can easily afford to annoy a powerful corporate group.

"Yesterday in Lucknow, the Prime Minister chose to comment on a case which is under investigation. Mr. Vajpayee was reported to have declared: 'no incriminating documents were found in the CBI raid'. The Home Minister, who fancies himself as Sardar Patel and wants to restore the efficacy of the Indian state, has gone to the extent of suggesting that the entire Official Secrets Act needs to be scrapped. He also pooh-poohed the excitement over the possibility of corporate criminality; he insisted on camera that 'it was a routine inquiry'. Was he trying to send a public message to the investigator to lay off?"

It is nearly a year since Advani said, on October 4, 1998, that some progress has been made in identifying those who had received kickbacks in the Bofors case. The last tranche of the papers is expected shortly, but there is little sign of investigations in India itself.



On every count the Home Minister has proved a failure – controlling the militancy in Kashmir, curbing the Inter-Services Intelligence, handling non-BJP States, and, of course, the communal situation.

LIKE the other accused, Advani is within his rights in asserting that the charges against him in the hawala case were not proved. It is, however, only fair to recall the remark made by his party colleague and lawyer, Arun Jaitley, in Calcutta on September 16, 1998, during *The Statesman*'s annual debate. "The accused in the Jain Hawala Case were let off not by the judiciary but by the investigative agencies which did not do a good job" (*The Statesman*, September 17, 1998).

What was the first task that Advani took up after he became Home Minister? It was to make good his pledge to the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader, Jayalalitha. He had personally forged the BJP-AIADMK pact with her in Chennai on December 17, 1997. Only two days earlier on December 15, 1997, Justice Y. Venkatachalam of the Madras High Court had passed severe strictures against her in the case relating to the disinvestment of shares of the Tamil Nadu



C RATHEESH KUMAR

Advani's crass incompetence as an administrator is coupled with a brazenly communal attitude... He has consistently turned a blind eye to the misdeeds of his Parivar in the States.

Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) in the Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation (SPIC). The Judge found "clear abuse of office" as Chief Minister.

Jayalalitha's intense wrath against Advani personally is explicable only if he had promised then to oust the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Government and ratted on it. The pledge *was* made; undoubtedly and immorally. Contrary to her perception, an effort was also made, undoubtedly and immorally, to fulfil it. The Supreme Court's judgment in the *Bommai* case, the national mood and the adroitness of the Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, foiled it. But Advani *did* try, less than a month after he became the Home Minister. A team of Union Home Ministry officials came down to Chennai. Their leader, Special Secretary Ashok Kumar, found the law and order situation to be satisfactory and said as much. He earned Advani's "displeasure" (*The Hindu*, April 18, 1998). Till they split, the BJP did everything to help her escape accountability to the courts of law. It stooped low to depths unfathomed even during the Indira Gandhi era.

A similar attempt was made in Bihar. In April 1998, S. S. Bhandari, a BJP stalwart, was appointed Governor of a non-BJP ruled State, flouting the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission Report. His task was obvious – topple the Rabri Devi Government. He freely gave interviews denouncing it. On September 22, 1998, the BJP Government advised K. R. Narayanan to impose President's Rule in Bihar, under Article 356 of the Constitution. The President asked it on September 25 to reconsider the advice. The advice was renewed five months later, unconstitutionally. The President signed the Proclamation on February 12, 1999. It had to be withdrawn because there was no hope of its endorsement by the Rajya Sabha. Small wonder that at the Inter-State Council meeting, on January 22, 1999, Advani spoke the way Indira Gandhi's Home Ministers did on the States' autonomy. But there was a sequel to it. Without waiting to see how his move fared in the Rajya Sabha, Advani shot his mouth off. He said publicly on February 16, 1999 that Bihar needed "a non-political dispensation backed by merit and experience". This was worse than a gross indiscretion. It was graceful to use another man to do a dirty job for him and discard him once the job was over. No man with a modicum of the culture of administration, let alone decency, would have behaved thus. He would have waited and transferred the Governor gracefully.

SUCH crass incompetence as an administrator is coupled with a brazenly communal attitude. On January 16, 1999 Advani went out of his way to assert that more than 70 per cent of private foreign donations in the previous three months were for Christian missionaries. There was no occasion for this off-the-cuff remark to presspersons at the Varanasi airport. Given the outrages that had been perpetrated against Christians since the BJP came to power, it was an incendiary remark. On January 20, he got the Home Ministry to issue a formal statement in his support.

On February 14, the Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities, Tahir Mahmood, recalled: "It is common knowledge that the VHP is getting billions of rupees from outside." It became known in March that on January 4, 1999 the Rules under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 1976, had been quietly amended to make it obligatory for religious bodies accepting foreign funds to state their religious identity (Seema Mustafa in *The Asian Age*, March 13). The Act is implemented by the Home Ministry.

Advani has consistently turned a blind eye to the misdeeds of his Parivar in the States. On August 2, 1998, he asserted in Baroda that "there is no law and order problem in Gujarat". Three days later, Director-General of Police C. P. Singh said that there was. On October 8, the DGP said that VHP and Bajrang Dal activists "were taking the law into their own hands, which posed a serious danger to peace in Gujarat."

Advani upheld the "prerogative" of the Maharashtra Government to reject the Srikrishna Commission Report on the Mumbai riots (August 9, 1998). He had not read it though (September 20, 1998). On December 16 he said that the film *Fire* did not "suit our culture", adding, "I have *not* seen the film. I wonder why those films are made." There is no dearth of "intellectuals" who enthusiastically certify to the man's breadth of outlook, wide reading and urbane culture.

The Archbishop of Delhi, Alan de Lastic, said on November 22, 1998 that attacks on Christians had increased "ever since this government came to power at the Centre". For this the Home Minister is primarily responsible. Advani has exposed the country to international opprobrium as no Home Minister ever did before. Witness the U.S. State Department's Report on religious intolerance in India (see separate story). He went down to Mumbai on January 22, 1999 to buy peace ("for this year only") with Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena boss, incredibly with a joint statement after the summit. Why? So that the Sena goons did not disrupt cricket tournaments. Advani's clean chit to the Bajrang Dal on the Staines murders on January 25 was not vindicated by the Wadhwa Report. The evidence cited in that document discredits both the Report and the Commission as well as Advani. His remark, "I have known these organisations for a long time and they do not have criminal elements", will haunt him for the rest of his career. Its decline has set in unmistakably, inexorably. ■

The Sangh School of Falsification

Whenever the Sangh Parivar is criticised for its sectarian intolerance and bigotry on the basis of facts, it resorts to slander and personal attack. Its treatment of *Communalism Combat* is the latest example.

■
BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

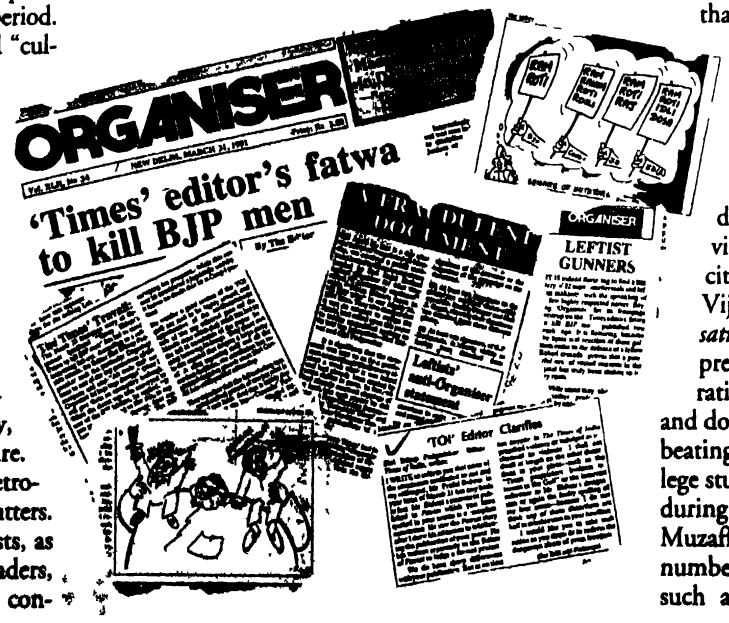


PRAFUL BIDWAI
■

HOWEVER one assesses Atal Behari Vajpayee's record – and this column admittedly takes a dim view – it is undeniable that the Bharatiya Janata Party is pursuing a much larger agenda than what is contained in the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) shoddily drafted, slogan-oriented, manifesto, "For a Proud, Prosperous India". As its own leaders have unabashedly said, the BJP is guided by a certain vision of India, which goes far, far beyond this or that policy or programme, this or that tactic or manoeuvre. This vision encompasses more than the mandir-Article 370-uniform civil code "trishul", which the BJP says it has for the time being put in abeyance, but which it also keeps raking up. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chieftain Rajendra Singh is the latest to revive the nasty demand that Muslims should hand over the Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi "temples" to Hindus. Parivar leaders have been raising these issues throughout the past month.

The RSS-BJP vision, with its unique coherence, is that of a primarily Hindu India, resurgent after centuries of "foreign domination", an India fiercely nationalistic, strong, in keeping with a tradition going back, according to its upholders, all the way to the vedic period. Whether this vision is called "cultural nationalism", civilisational patriotism, or plain Hindutva, it radically differs from our liberal, secular, pluralist Constitution. Its emphasis on hierarchical Hinduism, and on a puritanical interpretation of its texts, provokes understandable fears about Hindutva attitudes to issues relating to Dalits, adivasis, women, family, education, morality, knowledge, science and culture. After all, *sanatanism* has retrograde positions on all these matters.

No wonder social activists, as distinct from political leaders, have voiced such fears and concerns and often warned the larger public of the Hindutva menace and associated politics. The latest example of such a civil society or non-governmental initiative is the public education campaign launched by *Communalism Combat*, a Mumbai-based magazine, in the form of a series of 10 newspaper advertisements. These make a scathing critique of the BJP's claim to being "normal", tolerant or democratic. The campaign systematically demolishes a number of myths about Vajpayee, the RSS and the BJP. It cites unimpeachable facts – mostly their own quotes – to back its contentions. It ruthlessly exposes the BJP to be a party of bigots, male supremacists, rabid casteists, who are against non-Hindus, indeed against Hindus at the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. The BJP emerges as a party that is so cynical in pursuing power that it can communalise the armed forces. It lavishes undeserved concessions upon its cronies and is supremely indifferent to the masses. It is a threat to all that is healthy and valuable in Indian society.



The *Combat* campaign has been effective at least partly because it fights the BJP on the favourable terrain of the mainstream national media, with its predilection (for the most part) for soft Hindutva, and its fear of attacking the BJP, especially after it has bestowed such favours as FM radio channels upon it, and used questionable methods to pressure it. *Combat* does not hide the fact that the space bought is "sponsored", presumably by anti-BJP political and business interests. Such sponsorship may not be to everybody's taste: many non-governmental organisations would hesitate to accept it. But few would deny that the campaign has bite: Rajendra Singh could not have relished being reminded that he called Gandhi-assassin Godse's intentions "good", and "motivated by the idea of Akhand Bharat". Nor can Vajpayee deny that he said "the Sangh is my soul" and that he wrote to the colonial government denying that he played an active role in the 1942 Quit India Movement.

Combat is especially devastating on the Sangh's vile anti-women attitudes. It cites BJP vice-president Vijayaraje Scindia's defence of *sati* (1987), Mahila Morcha president Mridula Sinha's rationalisation of wife-beating and dowry (1983), and the recent beating up of an 18-year-old college student for raising a question during a Vajpayee rally in Muzaffarnagar. *Combat* involved a number of women's organisations, such as the Forum against the

Oppression of Women, Manushi, Kali for Women, Ankur and Women's Centre's (Bombay) in this campaign.

The *Combat* advertisements have stung the Parivar hard. But rather than factually disprove its well-substantiated charges, the Parivar has, characteristically, launched a personal, *ad hominem* attack on *Combat Communalism*'s editors and Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat who, it claims, is on the board of directors of the magazine. The RSS mouthpiece, *Panchajanya*, (September 12) carries vividly captioned "interviews" with, or quotations from, senior journalists like *The Indian Express*' Shekhar Gupta, and *The Times of India*'s Dileep Padgaonkar, to create the semblance that they agree with the Sangh Parivar's tendentious charges against *Combat*. On close examination, it turns out that unlike hardline *sanghis*, for example, Chandan Mitra, Kanchan Gupta, and N.K. Trikha, these journalists have refused to comment on the advertisements.

Panchajanya fails to answer even one of *Combat*'s 20-odd charges in its two-page feature, but instead maliciously says that the magazine is financed by shady interests. It questions *Combats*' credentials: an organisation "without address", and so on. But this is hardly more relevant than the provenance of the Parivar's own finances, some of which remain mired either in mystery or in North America. *Panchajanya*'s profile of *Communalism Combat* and its parent, Sabrang Communications, is that they are dark, semi-secret, "anti-Hindu" and "anti-national" organisations devoted to destroying communal harmony, and hence deserving of attack. (Such profiles have been used in the past to provoke Parivar fanatics into attack or abuse.) Remarkably, it is joined in this by the Samata Party's Jaya Jaitley, who adds her own anti-Bhagwat angle to the slander.

Now, *Combat* editors Javed Anand and Teesta Setalvad are both seasoned journalists. Anand was a staffer with *The Observer* group, and Setalvad broke one infamous story about the Bombay police's partisan role during the January 1993 riots, publishing transcripts of a conversation in which an officer asks his men not to rescue Muslims from a devastating fire started by the Shiv Sena. According to them, the *Panchajanya* feature is substantially wrong. Admiral Bhagwat is not a director of *Combat* or Sabrang. And the *Combat* motto is "Hate Hurts, Harmony Works".

VILIFICATION of secularists, based on wilful falsification, is an old, well-rehearsed, parivar tactic. It has repeatedly used it in its desperate attempts to muzzle and malign individuals. I speak from personal experience too. *Organiser* and *Panchajanya* have repeatedly attacked me. An example of this Sangh School of Falsification is their campaign in 1991, at the height of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, when I was a Senior Editor with *The Times of India*. On February 9 that year, I participated in a panel discussion organised by a small cultural organisation, Jana Sanskriti, in New Delhi, along with Professor K.N. Panikkar, Gyanendra Pandey and C.P. Bhambri, and Justice P. Subramaniam Poti.

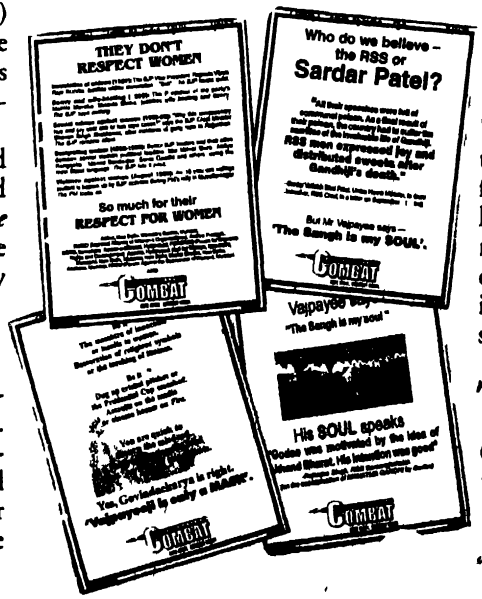
I sharply criticised the anti-Babri mosque campaign as majoritarian, hate-driven and against the very foundations of India's secular-democratic-constitutional order. I said its leaders must be dealt with firmly in accordance with the law and prevented from spreading hatred. Several newspapers reported my remarks. *Patriot* distorted them, its reporter adding his own twist that Parivar leaders must be "disciplined to the point of being killed". *Organiser* seized on this, and, without checking with me or Jana Sanskriti, flashed the front-page headline: "*Times* editor's *fatwa* to kill BJP men."

The story falsely linked the then *Times* editor Dileep Padgaonkar (alleging he too had "railed against" the *Organiser* on television) to the panel discussion and baselessly alleged that this was part of a larger plot: "Observers wonder whether the messianic zeal of the *Times* men is goaded... by their... proprietors' business interests in the Gulf countries and Pakistan..." It accused me of having "taken to public forums to preach murder against BJP 'obscurantists'...(and demanding) that BJP should be prevented from contesting elections..." This was a pure fabrication. The *Organiser* also equated secularists with "Islamic fundamentalists".

I was appalled. I published a clarification in *Patriot* on April 3, carried without comment or rebuttal. Padgaonkar sent a letter to *Organiser* refuting the malicious allegations against himself and me, which the journal published with a vile editorial "Leftist Gunners", which further compounded its error. It refused to publish a clarification from Prof. Panikkar and Justice Poti. Meanwhile, a number of scholars and writers launched a signature drive. It said the *Organiser*'s attacks are "irresponsible and odious", and reminiscent of "witchhunts and campaigns of character assassination" aimed at muzzling "critical voices". "Distressingly, Mr. Bidwai and others have received several physical threats and abusive calls too. No one who claims to believe in democracy and freedom of expression can condone such intimidation," it said.

The letter was signed by eminent persons, including Romila Thapar, Rajni Kothari, S. Gopal, Bipan Chandra, Prabhat Patnaik, L.C. Jain, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Swami Agnivesh, and Bhisham Sahni, Anil Agarwal, Lotika Sarkar, Madhu Kishwar, Habib Tanveer, Vivan Sundaram, and several other teachers and citizens. Instead of publishing it and apologising, *Organiser* maliciously claimed that the letter was "a fraudulent document" and a "forgery" – merely because the copy sent to it had some overlapping signatures, common in repeatedly photocopied circular letters.

This was exasperating. A manufactured story was published to malign someone. When 22 people of eminence protest against it, the letter is declared a "forgery". This would put to shame even the likes of Goebbels. Against such falsification, there is no defence – barring perhaps a prolonged criminal case. Such methods bear testimony to the fanaticism of the Parivar, and its paranoia about independently minded mediapersons and secular scholars.



THERE is a special edge to the calumny being hurled at *Communalism Combat* today. The BJP is no longer sure that it can pull off a victory in the elections. Its twin tactic of exploiting Kargil and attacking Sonia Gandhi on the issue of "foreign origins" has not worked. The party

is only left with the rather shop-worn appeal of Vajpayee's "image" which is confined to the upper middle class, which does not count much for numbers. Campaigns like *Combat*'s undermine even that appeal. They carry special weight because they are not directly launched by the BJP's party-political opponents.

The BJP has a huge stake in the present election. If it performs worse than it did last year, with say 20 to 40 seats less, its claim to lead the NDA decisively and hegemonically will be weakened. It is no good if the NDA does better than in 1998. To call the shots, the BJP itself has to do better. Anything less would give it the image of a declining force – no longer unstoppable in its decade-long "forward march". Parties like the BJP need the upbeat image for the "bandwagon" effect: many people vote for extreme right-wing forces because they are in the ascendant. If this changes, the BJP stands to lose more than just seats.

No wonder the BJP's campaign is a full-throttle, maximalist, no-holds-barred one. It is leaving nothing to chance. Unlike the Congress, which for a while fumbled, and made many tactical mistakes, the BJP has conducted itself in a planned, organised, purposive, manner. It can accept failure – indeed anything other than a big victory – only with the greatest of difficulty and with the least grace. What is on test is not only the party's appeal, but its will to power.

That is precisely why the BJP has polarised the political situation, packing educational institutions, breaching electoral norms, shamelessly trying to politicise the armed forces, and resorting to slander. In some respects, it has followed a political scorched-earth policy, doing many things on the assumption that it might not return to power. The BJP's legacy translates into a terrible choice for its successor, which will be called upon to dismantle the damage that the communalists have done – in ways that (wrongly) look like replicating the same methods. This culture of confrontation is not exactly what India needs, but there may be no alternative to it if Hindutva's soldiers battle on in their utterly unscrupulous ways.

The choice that confronts the Indian voter is in some ways simple, even stark: either a politics based on paranoia, calumny, half-truths and lies – necessary to sustain a hateful exclusivism – , or an inclusive, pluralist, secular and democratic politics that believes in healing social rifts, in caring and sharing, in building a humane future for our people. ■

■ COLUMN

Women in Indian politics

Women are as ever underrepresented in the election fray and in party structures, but in many ways, most of them qualitative, they have never been as important as they are today.

■ PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH

■

IT is scarcely news that women are underrepresented in Indian politics. The issue has come sharply into focus for some years now, partly because of the thwarted moves towards providing one-third reservation for women in legislative bodies including Parliament, along with the more successful moves to enforce such reservation in elections to rural panchayats. Of course such an issue naturally becomes more apparent during a period of elections as well.

What has emerged quite clearly in the current very long drawn out election process is how little has changed at one level since Independence. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still dominantly male: women account for only five to ten per cent of all candidates across parties and regions. This is the same broad pattern that has been observed in virtually the 12 previous general elections in the country.

This is the case despite the hullabaloo made over the Constitution (84th Amendment) Bill relating to women's reservation even last year. The very parties that were most explicitly in favour of pushing for such reservation have put up the same proportion of women as always, and certainly not more than other parties that had opposed the Bill. The Congress party, led by a woman and supposedly pushing for reservation for women, has only 10 per cent of women among the candidates announced so far. For the BJP the proportion of women candidates is even lower at 7 per cent. Even in the case of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), only 7 per cent of the candidates are women.

What may be more significant in terms of political power than the proportion of women fighting the Lok Sabha polls is the importance of women in inner party structures. Here women are by and large even less represented, in all parties. Only in the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) has there been a conscious move to bring many more women into decision-making levels and posts within the party.

In most parties, the women members are by and large thin on the ground if not invisible in the actual decision-making bodies and rarely influence the more significant party policies. Most often, indeed, they are relegated to the "women's wing" of the party, and made to concentrate on what are seen as specifically "women's issues" such as dowry and rape cases, and occasionally on more general concerns like price rise which are seen to

THE GENDER BIAS

The evolution of Indian democracy over the twelve Lok Sabha elections has witnessed a very slow improvement in the proportion of women representatives in Parliament.

General Election	Year	Total no. of seats	
First	1952	499	
Second	1957	500	
Third	1962	503	
Fourth	1967	523	
Fifth	1971	521	
Sixth	1977	544	19
Seventh	1980	544	28
Eighth	1984	544	44
Ninth	1989	517	27
Tenth	1991	544	39
Eleventh	1996	544	40*
Twelfth	1998	543	43

*One member was nominated by the President

KBK Polligraphics

affect especially "housewives".

Despite all this, only the foolhardy would suggest that women are unimportant in Indian politics today. In many ways, most of them qualitative, they have never been as important as they are today. This is most evident in the proliferation of women leaders and in the fact that, even though some of them may head parties that are relatively small in the national context, they simply cannot be ignored.

THE GENDER ADVANTAGE

BACK TO THE BALLOT

Though the number of women candidates in the Parliamentary fray has risen very impressively, their success rate (% of contestants getting elected) has always been higher than that of the male aspirants.

Year	No. of seats available	Total no. of contestants	Male			Female		
			Contested	Elected	% winning	Contested	Elected	% winning
1952	489	1,874	--	--	--	--	--	--
1957	494	1,518	1,473	467	31.7	45	27	60.0
1962	494	1,985	1,915	459	24.0	70	35	50.0
1967	520	2,369	2,302	490	21.3	67	30	44.8
1971	520	2,784	2,698	499	18.5	86	21	24.4
1977	542	2,439	2,369	523	22.1	70	19	27.1
1980	542	4,620	4,478	514	11.5	142	28	19.7
1984	542	5,574	5,406	500	9.2	164	42	25.6
1989	529	6,160	5,962	502	8.4	198	27	13.6
1991	521	8,699	8,374	492	5.9	325	39	12.0
1996	543	13,952	13,353	504	3.8	599	39	6.5
1998	543	4,750	4,476	500	11.2	274	43	15.7

Gender-wise data for 1952 not available

KBK Pellgraphics

WHAT is even more significant is that in many cases these women leaders have not emerged through the familiar South Asian paradigm of dynastic advantage. Sonia Gandhi, obviously, is a clear example of a dynastic leader, with an almost iconic relevance, but in fact in this respect she is in the minority among women leaders today. Thus, Jayalalitha and Mayawati may have originally based their rise in politics on their proximity to particular male leaders, but they are clearly now significant leaders in their own right, who can influence not only the decisions of their own parties but even the course of national politics. Mamata Banerjee, despite or indeed because of her controversial nature, is the leader of a party who can claim to have got where she is on her own, without male assistance in any of the more obvious ways.

Of course, one myth that is easily exploded by the role played by such women leaders is that political leadership by women is dramatically different from that by men. Nor is it necessarily more colourful, as some of the more extravagant male politicians like Laloo Prasad Yadav can establish.

Indeed, the truth is that most of our women political leaders are no better or worse than men, and in fact a bit of reflection would indicate that this is only to be expected. In fact, nor have women leaders been typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organisations or in the political process generally. Of course, the most prominent woman to have been in post-Independence politics – Indira Gandhi – was an especially clear example of this.

Barring striking exceptions where dynastic charisma is seen to matter more than anything else – most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within party hierarchies, and have managed to achieve clear leadership only when they have effectively broken out and set up parties on their own.

BUT there is one interesting question that is thrown up by this relatively new development in Indian politics. What is it that makes the political system receptive to the emergence and even dominance of certain women leaders, even as it continues to suppress the voices of ordinary women as party workers and citizens? Why is it that in terms of qualitative impact and media prominence women leaders are suddenly up front as never before? Clearly, the answer is not to be found in any dilution of the male chauvinism which runs deep in Indian politics. If anything, the campaign process so far has indicated a resurgence of patriarchy which has been exploited by those arguing both in favour of and against particular women candidates. Thus, for example, men have castigated women candidates (and one in particular) for being no more than housewives and doing no more for the country than bearing children. Such remarks are breathtaking both in their ignorance of the many complex demands of household management, child-bearing and child-rearing, and in their implicit assumption that male public activities necessarily do a lot "for the country". But several women candidates have just as eagerly presented themselves as "*bahus*" or "*betis*", therefore relying quite as much on traditional patriarchal notions of femininity and what criteria make women fit for political life.

What does seem to be the case is that – barring striking exceptions where dynastic charisma is seen to matter more than anything else – most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within party hierarchies, and have managed to achieve clear leadership only when they have effectively broken out and set up parties on their own. Jayalalitha and Mamata Banerjee are clear examples of this, but there are other less well-known instances as well. Yet once these women become established as leaders, another peculiarly Indian characteristic seems to dominate – that is the unquestioning acceptance by the (largely male) party rank and file of the leader's decisions.

What all this suggests, therefore, is that the political empowerment of women not only still has a long way to go, but finally may not have all that much to do with the periodic carnivals of Indian electoral democracy. This is not to say that the electoral representation of women is unimportant, but rather that it needs to be both deeper and wider than its current manifestation in the form of the prominence of a few conspicuous women leaders. ■

Recording media trends

The 1999 National Readership Survey, which has made a foray into rural areas, offers insights into media-audience relations along class, linguistic and regional lines.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Mumbai

THE release of the 1999 National Readership Survey (NRS 99) has provided new insights into the changing character of India's media landscape. Based on surveys in 818 urban centres and 2,058 villages, NRS 99 provides a comprehensive account of the state of India's media. It is particularly significant for being the first comprehensive survey of rural newspaper readership and television audience size in the rural areas. Each week, NRS 99 says, the print media reaches 242 million Indians, television 329 million and radio 174 million. These enormous numbers, the survey suggests, represent a chain of growth, driven both by expanding literacy and improved living standards.

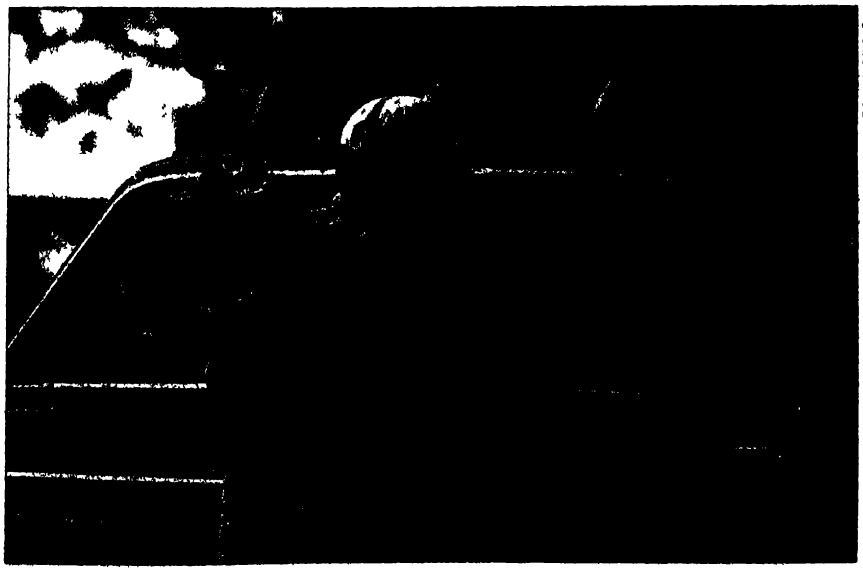
Broadly, NRS 99 shows that Indian newspapers and magazines have continued to grow in both urban and rural areas. Since 1997, when the last NRS report came out, the percentage of adults in India who read newspapers and magazines grew by four percentage points, from 45 to 49. Assuming a population of 620 million adults over the age of 15, as NRS 99 does, that means well over 25 million people have begun to read some newspaper or magazine for the first time in these two years. However, since NRS 97 based its readership figures entirely on urban residents, the real growth of print media audiences could in fact be larger than the data at first suggest. While 62 per cent of the 183 million Indians in urban areas read newspapers or magazines each week, NRS 99 records, only 29 per cent of the 437 million rural residents do so. This lower rural reach was not factored into NRS 97.

The number of adults who read a daily newspaper overall grew by one percentage point from 1997, reaching 42 per cent of all adults or some 260 million people. By contrast, evening papers, popular in urban centres, showed a decline in circulation. But the real growth in the print media was marked by magazines; many adult Indians took to reading a magazine for the first time. Magazine readers as a percentage of all adults rose from 25 per cent in 1997 to 28 per cent, which in absolute terms means there are some 174 million magazine readers today. The growth in magazine audiences was driven by news, general interest and subject-specific publications, while business magazines performed relatively poorly.

The largest publications in the country, true to the findings of earlier NRS surveys, are regional language publications, not their more high-profile English counterparts. Not a single English newspaper figures in the top 10 Indian newspapers (see table). The *Daily Thanthi* in Tamil comes out at the top of the NRS 99 list, followed closely by the *Dainik Jagaran* in Hindi, *Malayala Manorama* in Malayalam and the *Eenadu* in Telugu and the *Mathrubhumi* in Malayalam. The preponderance of publications from the south in the list illustrates the fact that high literacy rates drive circulation. Despite their huge potential audience, just three newspapers from the north figure in the top ten.

Exposure to television also grew more sharply through the period between NRS 97 and NRS 99. Some 69 million Indian homes, NRS 99 says, now have access to television and 276 million adults watch broadcasts in a typical week. In some senses, television has become the principal source of information and entertainment in most Indian homes. On a Sunday morning, an average Indian spends most of the three hours she or he has available for all kinds of media, watching television. NRS 99 data suggest that typically an average person spends 130 minutes watching television, 20 minutes reading newspapers and 30 minutes on magazines. Weekday figures are similar – 119 minutes a day for television, 23 minutes for newspapers, and 32 minutes for magazines.

Radio is the only major medium to have seen an erosion of its audience since 1997. Radio reached 29 per cent of adults in an average week in 1997. NRS 99 records that that figure has come down to 26 per cent. Given the growth of population, however, the audience size of 161 million may not represent a significant fall in absolute terms. The decline could possibly be linked to the growth of television in rural areas, with sections of the agrari-



PAUL NORONHA

A newspaper vendor at work. NRS 99 once again underlines the theory that growth in newspaper circulation has a close relationship with literacy levels.

an rich switching their allegiance to the new medium.

CINEMA, too, showed less than riveting results, despite some media hype about a renewed wave of blockbuster films. NRS 99 recorded that just 3 per cent of the adult population, both rural and urban, went to a cinema in an average week. Audience figures for cinema showed no increase from 1997. Internet usage has grown, but as yet only 1.4 million adults have access to it and they are concentrated mainly in the eight principal cities.

Did the large growth in television come at the expense of the print media? NRS 99 offers some interesting answers to this question. For one, it again underlines the argument that growth in newspaper and magazine circulations has a close relationship with literacy levels. In Kerala, a State with near-total literacy, 71 per cent read at least one newspaper or magazine. In Bihar, a State with just 45 per cent literacy, only 15 per cent of the population read newspapers or magazines. In urban Kerala, where 96 per cent of the adult population is literate, 80 per cent read publications, while in urban Maharashtra and Goa, where 84 per cent are literate, 53 per cent of the population read at least one newspaper or magazine. Growing literacy has clearly fuelled the growth of the print media.

But the presence of television makes the media picture more complex than it perhaps was a decade ago. Conventional wisdom has it that television caters to audiences in States where literacy levels are relatively low. But NRS 99 makes clear that that isn't the case. In Bihar, just 29 per cent of the adult population watches television. In Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, where 67 per cent of adults are literate, just 27 per cent access a newspaper or magazine, just above the national average, while 69 per cent watch television, a good 16 percentage points above the national average. In Assam and other north-eastern States as also in West Bengal, higher than average literacy rates again do not translate into high reach for the print media.

In some States and areas, both high television viewership and print-media reach go together. In Tamil Nadu, an average family spends some 3.3 hours each day watching television, while in Uttar Pradesh, such a family does so for two hours. But Tamil Nadu's figures for the percentage of adults forming the newspaper and magazine reading public are almost twice those of Uttar Pradesh. NRS 99 suggests that States like Tamil Nadu, which have seen a proliferation of satellite television channels, have seen a less sharp growth in newspaper circulation than those like Uttar Pradesh, where the spread of satellite television has been less marked. But the mere proliferation of television choices clearly does not explain the growth of certain media platforms – or the absence of it.

NRS 99 thus makes at least two major points clear. The first is that the growth of television has been the most marked in the relatively affluent States, not in those with the lowest levels of literacy. In one sense, therefore, if the growth of the print media is literacy-driven, that of television is affluence-driven. This tells us not a little about the breakdown of India's public service broadcasting paradigm, where the creation of state television was legitimised on the basis of the claim that it would make the medium available to the illiterate rural poor. The second point is that television has not in any meaningful way emerged as a substitute for print media, in the sense that the proliferation of channels and increase in television audiences has not led to a reduction in the number of people reading newspapers and magazines.

The broad brush strokes of NRS 99 are made up of an enormous mosaic of local-level data, offering insights into the relationship of the media with audiences sharply differentiated along class, linguistic and regional lines.

The Top 10 Indian Newspapers.

Name	
Daily Thanthi	6,404,000
Dainik Jagran	6,235,000
Malayala Manorama	5,210,000
Eenadu	5,205,000
Mathrubhumi	5,053,000
Dainik Bhaskar	5,002,000
Punjab Kesri	5,709,000
Lokmat	5,450,000
Dinamalar	5,045,000
Gujarat Samachar	4,875,000

Source: 1999 National Readership Survey

A wealth of further analysis based on the NRS 99 findings is certain to follow. As important as its findings, the report suggests that serious research on the structure of the Indian media is finally finding its feet. N. Murali, Chairman of the National Readership Studies Council, the parent body of the NRS, pointed out at the NRS 99 release in Mumbai on September 17 that such research has been painfully thin. Until the Advertising Agencies Association of India, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) and the Indian Newspaper Society revamped the NRS in 1994, there was little reliable data on who read newspapers or how many readers there were. "Research was seen as an expense", says ABC's Gautam Rakshit, "not as an investment."

NRS 95 and NRS 97 laid the foundations for this year's empirical treasure-trove. NRS 99 has several new features, among them sheer scale, spanning 192 newspapers and 265 magazines. Then, the survey has now gone six-monthly, with the next phase of NRS 99 being due by the end of this year. Two further NRS reports will be available by February 2001, enabling better trend analysis. The methodology used in the survey was also more rigorous than in the past, with three agencies, TN Sofre Mode, Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB), and AC Nielsen cross-checking each other's fieldwork. NRS 99 is available on floppies and CD ROMs, and search engines have been developed to enable researchers to disaggregate easily media audiences by their economic status, for example, or their purchasing habits.

It is important that such research be carried out by serious students of the media, and not just agencies whose primary interests lie in the commercial realm. The broad brush strokes of NRS 99 are made up of an enormous mosaic of local-level data, offering insights into the relationship of the media with audiences sharply differentiated along class, linguistic and regional lines. "It's almost as if there are several countries within the country," says the head of NRS 99's Technical Committee, Ketaki Gupte. "The variations are enormous." NRS 99 contains a vast amount of information on just where the Indian mass media is headed. With its signal inclusion of data on the media's rural reach and character, the poverty of empirical material that researchers on the Indian media have long felt is at last starting to be addressed. ■

To beat the Y2K bug

Governments, corporates and small businesses the world over are scrambling to beat a millennial deadline and overcome the Year 2000 problem relating to computer systems. What is the state of preparedness of public sector undertakings in India?

ANUPAMA KATAKAM
in Bangalore

ITS timing is predictable right down to the microsecond, but the precise consequences of the 'millennium bug', the computer glitch that may cause non-compliant computers and networks worldwide to malfunction on January 1, 2000, are as yet hard to fathom. Paranoid prophesies about an apocalyptic end to the world and rather more real fears of financial meltdowns and a collapse of public utilities have forced governments and corporations the world over to scramble to fix the Year 2000 problem – or the Y2K bug, as it is known.

In India, the Department of Electronics is spearheading a "Good Morning 2000" campaign targeted at Indian corporates, public sector undertakings, small businesses and the self-employed and with the aim of making India "Y2K OK". The campaign warns that failure to fix the bug could cause "serious business disruptions" and offers a "Y2K infopack" and help in getting businesses Y2K compliant.

But with only some three months to go for the crunch date, what is the state of Y2K preparedness of Indian corporates, public sector undertakings and other businesses?

A few international Y2K rating agencies have sounded a warning about India's lack of Y2K preparedness; some of them have categorised India, China and Russia as "risk-prone areas". However, Union Electronics Secretary Ravindra Gupta dismissed such fears and claimed that India's preparedness was "almost complete". Gupta said that the Gartner Group, an internationally recognised Y2K certifying authority that has drawn up a five-level scale to measure Y2K preparedness (see box), had acknowledged that India had reached the fourth level.

A study by *Frontline* of the state of preparedness of a few large public sector undertakings (PSUs) in Bangalore shows that while all the companies studied are aware of the problem and have taken on projects with the aim of beating the millennial deadline and having systems in place to avert the anticipated glitches, awareness about the magnitude of the Y2K problem has not quite sunk in.

Most of the companies plan to have their Y2K-compliant systems in place by end-September or, at the latest, by end-October. This does not give them much time to verify the systems, but in the race to meet the deadline and save themselves from a meltdown, optimism reigns. The companies do not foresee any major catastrophe, and officials who are in charge of Y2K projects say that all computer-based systems will definitely be up and running even after December 31. But as D-day approaches, many of those fingers that have been tapping away lightly at keyboards in these undertakings are increasingly being kept crossed. Hope hopes to triumph over Y2K hype.

THE Y2K problem is expected to affect any computer or network which works with programs that have date-related functions. It arose because decades ago, when "digital real estate" was scarce and computer memory expensive, programmers who wished to save space on the punch cards that served as data-storage systems used just six digits to denote the date: two for the day, two for the month and two for the year. Thus, 1969 was denoted as "69". Unless these programs are altered to provide for four-digit dates, the year 2000 will be denoted as "00"; to a machine reading the data, therefore, 2000 is indistinguishable from 1900. Today, a computer that calculates the age of someone born in 1950 would subtract 50 from '99 and arrive at 49. In 2000 it would subtract 50 from '00 and arrive at



COURTESY ISRO

At the Master Control Facility of the Indian Space Research Organisation, near Hassan. ISRO declared Y2K compliance of all its computer-related systems on August 15, 1999. Not all public sector undertakings in Bangalore, however, have met the targeted deadlines for total compliance.

-50 – and assume that the person is not born yet!

Even a small problem in the system because of the date change could cause the whole computer system to crash or machines to malfunction. Apart from large networks, such as those used in the banking sector, which use dates for all transactions, date-related chips can be found embedded anywhere – in elevators, modems, fax machines and home personal computers. However, not every microprocessor or embedded device will be bitten by the Y2K bug. For example, Motorola processors use four digits to denote the year, and will therefore be untouched by the problem; the same is the case with Macintosh-based operating systems.

In India, several PSUs rely on computerised networks for their daily activities, and date-related applications are used in almost every section – manufacturing, maintenance, inventory control, supplies, payroll and personnel records. Be it banking, aviation, heavy machinery or sophisticated electronics, the public sector plays an important role and touches the lives of tens of thousands of people every day. "PSUs are the nervous system of India: if they collapse we will be paralysed," says Dewang Mehta, president, National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), in a Y2K preparedness and status report published by the association recently. NASSCOM's report states that government departments and several public sector undertakings are still lacking in Y2K compliance preparations. However, Planning Commission member Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who heads a government-appointed, high-level Task Force that is reviewing the Y2K preparedness of several sectors, told newspersons recently that PSUs were better prepared than the private sector. The Task Force, which recently conducted a first round of in-depth reviews of 11 critical infrastructure sectors, reported that 90 per cent of the banking and financial sector was Y2K compliant.

At a national conference on "Preparing India to face Y2K", organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), it was announced that Y2K compliance would be attained by end-September in seven of the 11 infrastructure sectors identified by the government – space, aviation, banking and finance, railways, atomic energy, petroleum and insurance. The remaining sectors, including power, defence, ports and telecom, will be ready by October.

Information technology professionals who are working to remedy the Y2K problem in the PSUs that *Frontline* surveyed say that verification of the debugging process requires several months of laborious testing of computer code. In some cases the code is so old that the companies which programmed it may no longer exist, so software engineers have first to understand the program before testing it.

The inability to predict exactly what might go wrong has added to the concern triggered by the unseen, unpredictable "enemy". The most critical areas within the companies, these professionals say, have been able to rid themselves of the millennium bug; even so, most people will not know – until the dawn of the new millennium or perhaps even months into the new year – whether the Year 2000 problem will affect them or not.

Clearly, however, the PSUs are not taking any chances. Armed with contingency and back-up plans, the companies say they are better prepared than they were, say, three months ago. Yet there is the lurking fear that they have perhaps left things a little too late or that they have failed to account for all contingencies.

NASSCOM believes that lack of enough information on and complacency about the millennium bug are the major reasons for slow progress on the Y2K front; others say that paucity of funds and a shortage of human resources have made the task of compliance considerably more difficult.

Estimates for the cost of fixing the Y2K bug at the global level range from $50 billion to $600 billion. The National Informatics Centre (NIC), based in New Delhi, has projected that India will need a minimum of Rs.2,000 crores to combat the problem. NIC has asked government departments to direct PSUs to set apart at least 1-3 per cent of their budgets to find Y2K solutions and for contingency plans.

"It's not just the money we need; it's also the manpower," says Dr. S. Rangarajan, director of the INSAT Master Control Facility at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). "We have used almost 300 people for two months exclusively on our Year 2000 conversion projects."

ISRO, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), ITI and Canara Bank were among the entities in Bangalore that *Frontline* surveyed. According to them, they are well prepared to face any eventuality that the millennium problem might bring. However, in the opinion of Prof. N. Balakrishna, director, SuperComputer Research Centre at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, such a view reflects complacency and a failure to grasp the enormity of the problem.

"I don't think we realise the magnitude of the problem," says Balakrishna. He, however, concedes that because a large number of industries and institutions in India are not completely reliant on computers, the millennium bug might not affect them much. All the same, Rangarajan notes, "if we do not solve the problem completely, several big comput-



S. THANTHONI

At a branch of a nationalised bank in Chennai. Computer systems in banks use numerous date-related functions, and fears of an enormous crisis if the Year 2000 problem is not addressed have propelled the banking sector to make rapid progress in Y2K compliance.

er networks in the country could shut down and we could be facing a huge crisis."

ISRO has developed India's completely viable and self-reliant space programme. Having designed, built and launched satellites, ISRO has established the INSAT system, one of the largest domestic satellite systems in the world today. The National Stock Exchange, telecom networks, satellite television broadcasters, banks and corporate houses, meteorologists and disaster management systems are among those that depend on ISRO satellites on a daily basis.

Unlike many companies which woke up a trifle late to the problem and are struggling to meet the deadline, ISRO began its "campaign", as Rangarajan calls it, almost two years ago. "We took on the project on a war-footing," Rangarajan says. An apex body comprising a senior-level committee and review teams set guidelines, cleared a budget and enlisted technical support.

ISRO's network has almost 5,000 personal computers, 800 workstations and 300 embedded devices working with satellites, ground controls and launch vehicles, all of which could be affected. The critical areas which needed immediate attention, Rangarajan explains, were satellites, ground controls and launch vehicles. "We need to be able to send a command at the right time on a particular date and the satellite must be able to recognise it." Telephones and banking are among the critical services which may be affected if a satellite has a problem. ISRO went through the long and tedious process of checking operating systems, "walking through" lines and lines of source code and then taking an inventory of all machines that needed upgrading.

The machines used by the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA), systems at the Sriharikota launch-pad and all the networks across the country and in bases in Mauritius and Indonesia have been also extensively tested, Rangarajan says. Even now it may not be possible to predict what may happen, he adds, but each and every critical device and computer-based equipment has been tested, re-tested and certified Year 2000 compliant. By declaring compliancy on August 15, 1999, ISRO has met all its targeted deadlines.

IF ITI does not accelerate the pace of its Y2K compliance, a variety of utilities and services – from complicated telephone networks to systems that prepare regular bimonthly phone bills – could go haywire, if the bug is as bad as is made out to be. Earlier this year, an NIC report stated that the telecom industry was lagging behind on the Y2K front. ITI began bracing itself against the bug only early this year. It has as yet not completed the verification process, but officials say that the systems will be ready on time.

With a turnover of Rs.1,300 crores, ITI has contributed to the setting up of about 70 per cent of India's telecom infrastructure. Founded as a telecom manufacturing and research entity, ITI supplies digital switching systems, transmission equipment and microwave fibre optics, among other equipment, to the telecom industry. Out of India's total installed switching capacity of 2.60 crore lines, ITI has so far provided 1.91 crore lines. It also provides a variety of telecommunication services, including VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) services, video conferencing and satellite communications.

According to ITI information systems executive director K.A. Seshu, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) gave clear directives to achieve a level of compliancy. "Although we do not expect a catastrophe, we cannot leave anything to chance," Seshu says. "Several telecom networks across the country are dependent entirely on us for daily transmission. Besides, our own billing and accounting system is in jeopardy if we do not become compliant." He estimates that ITI has spent about Rs.1.5 crores in upgrading machines and carrying out internal and external audits.

ITI uses more than 1,000 personal computers, of which about 290 have been identified as being those involved in critical functions Some IBM mainframe and data processing computers are among the equipment that are yet to be made compliant, says Seshu. As part of the upgradation efforts, the OCB 283 exchange and the Alcatel E10B exchange were revamped, and mock runs (which were successful) were conducted, says Seshu.

Even though ITI appears to be dragging its feet over completing the Y2K-

The levels of preparedness

ANUPAMA KATAKAM

THE United States-based Gartner Group, an internationally recognised Y2K certifying authority, researches, analyses and conducts surveys for governments, enterprises and other organisations on the level of Year 2000 preparedness of their computer-related systems.

In a recently published world report that was presented to the U.S. Congress, the Gartner Group states that India has made significant progress in becoming Y2K compliant.

The Gartner scale, called COMPARE (COMpliance Progress And Readiness), is used in some areas in India to quantify the level of Y2K preparedness of industries.

The COMPARE scale has five levels of [illegible]

Level 1: Awareness – Enterprises begin [illegible] the necessity of deciding how [illegible]

[illegible] will have been [illegible] technology and [illegible] and determined [illegible]

[illegible]

resources committed – At this level, mission-critical systems will have been identified, remedial strategies will have been drawn up and needed resources committed.

Level 4: Operational sustainability – At this level, mission-critical technology has been remediated from Year 2000 risks.

Level 5: Fully compliant: At this level, all technology within the enterprise and within the business partners will have been made complaint.

According to the Gartner Group, not one industry at the global level has reached Level 5. Banking, telecommunications, insurance, aviation are among those sectors that have attained Level 4 compliance.

In India, the NASSCOM has adopted a similar rating scale. According to it, Level 2 indicates that extent of Y2K preparation is good, but that challenges remain. Level 3 indicates sufficient awareness, but which risk of business [illegible] Levels 1, 4 and 5 on [illegible] rating are similar to Gartner's.

According to Gartner, India is at Level 2 along with Israel, Japan and Singapore.

compliance verification process, contingency plans are in place. Under one such plan, ITI, along with Alcatel Modi Networks Ltd, will monitor an exchange each in Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai and Calcutta for 72 hours beginning noon on December 31, 1999. Since Indian time is nearly four and a half hours ahead of French time, Alcatel of France will benefit from ITI's experiences of what happens when the date changes.

Such sharing of information is not uncommon. In fact, technology suppliers are expected to provide fixes for the products they have sold. They are legally bound to share with their customers solutions that they have found.

WITH the clock ticking away, officials at BEL are giving top priority to getting their systems Y2K ready. "It's very important that we become compliant because our machines are used in critical operations such as aviation," says H. Ramakrishna, chief scientist, Central Research Laboratory, BEL.

With an annual turnover of approximately Rs.1,400 crores, BEL is India's only manufacturer of radars, sensors, sonars and antennae equipment for defence surveillance requirements. The company also makes communication, lasers and display devices, and optical and night-vision devices for defence. Approximately 90 per cent of the equipment required by Doordarshan and All India Radio is made by BEL.

To combat the Y2K problem, an impact analysis was conducted, inventories were taken and equipment were classified on the basis of the degree of compliance. An external audit will be completed in September. According to Ramakrishna, contingency plans have also been prepared to meet the Y2K problem.

ACCORDING to the NIC report, the aviation sector is in the lead in testing its machines, components and systems for Y2K compliance. HAL is also targeting completion in September.

A Rs.2,000-crore company, HAL is the country's premier defence aerospace manufacturer. The company designs, builds and maintains light combat, advance fighter and combat aircraft, helicopters, commercial aircraft, jet engines, aircraft systems, equipment and avionics; it also manufactures ground control equipment for defence and commercial use.

HAL has an extensive computer network. officials say that the critical machinery are compliant but that some of the application software in other equipment and computer networks are yet to be verified. The delay, they claim, is owing to the fact that some equipment and machinery procured by the company has not been certified by the vendors. HAL has conducted an impact analysis, inventory collection and computer code walkthroughs.

STRICT directives from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and fears over the enormity of the situation have propelled the banking sector to make rapid progress in Y2K compliance. The NASSCOM report stated that as on July 31, about 92 per cent of the public sector banks in India were Y2K compliant; this number was expected to rise to 97 per cent by September 30.

Canara Bank, one of the larger public banks with a deposit base of Rs.42,000 crores and a total income of Rs.5,000 crores, claims that it is fully prepared for the millennial changeover. Deputy general manager, information systems, R. Muralikrishna, says that the state of readiness has improved dramatically in recent months. "We had sleepless nights four months ago, but with our systems now in place the tension has eased," he says. Software engineers had to work over weekends after banking hours. "We couldn't shut down the bank to become compliant." As a large part of banking transactions are date-related, it took endless hours to go through computer codes. "We think we are safe, but we can never say what may happen," he cautions. In a worst-case scenario, records of savings accounts may be wiped out, loans or mortgages to be paid may show negative figures. However, bank officials are confident that nothing so catastrophic will occur.

Even so, contingency plans have been drawn up. Extra cash will be kept ready to deal with unusually large withdrawals on December 31. Print-outs will be taken and back-ups made of all transactions from December 28, 1999 to January 1, 2000. Procedures of manual operations are being brushed up, and Y2K workshops for employees are being held. Bank officials will work through the night of December 31, 1999, and security will be stepped up. Towards the end of the year, mock drills will be carried out routinely.

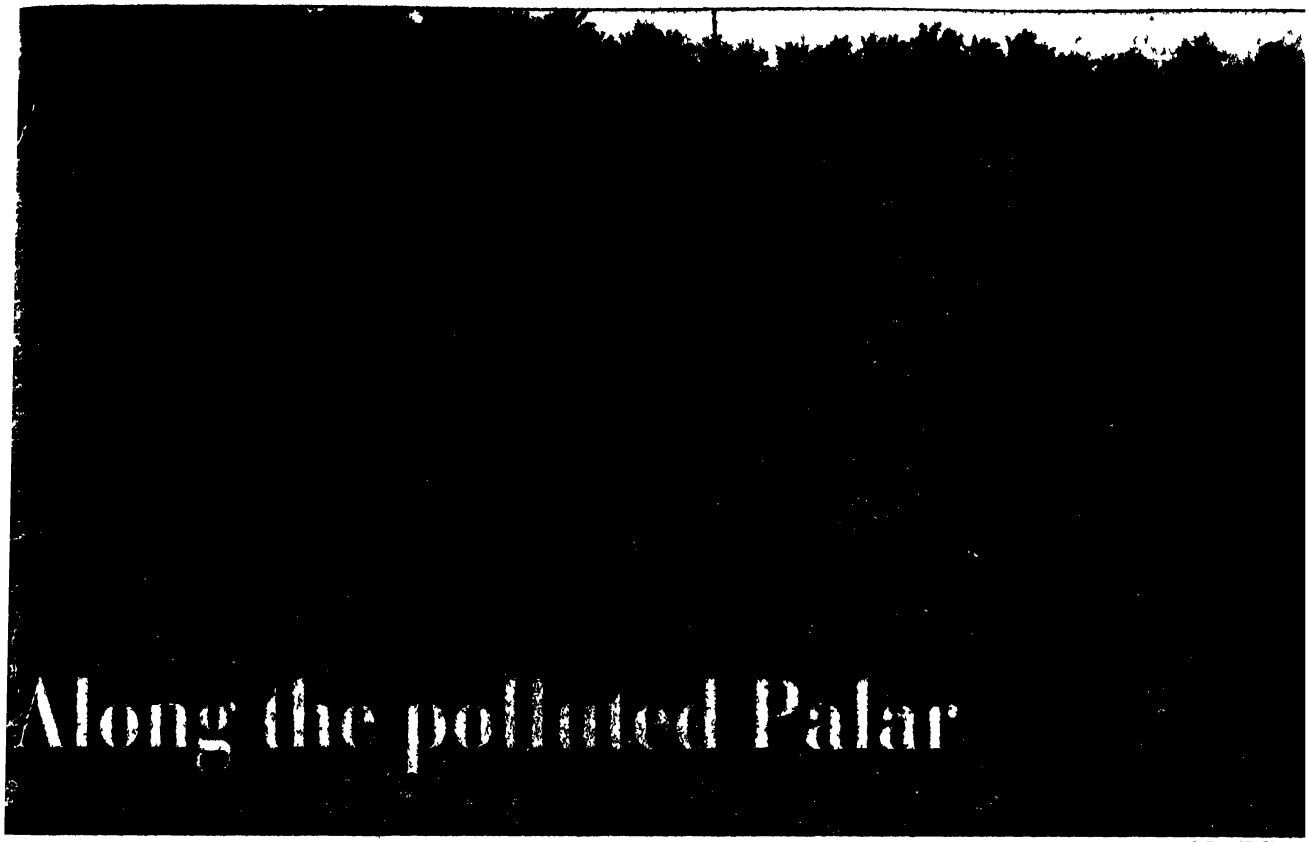
Muralikrishna feels that if the RBI wants all systems to be fully ready at the earliest, it must declare January 1, 2000, a Saturday, a bank holiday in order to enable banks to correct systems if there are problems. However, the RBI has announced that January 1 will be a full working day so that systems could be tested and all problems rectified by Monday, January 3.

(The draft of a Year 2000 Ordinance formulated by the Y2K Task Force headed by Montek Singh Ahluwalia, states that the offices of all user organisations, whether in the government, public or private sector, must remain open on January 1 and 2 (Saturday and Sunday) and that all Information Technology products should be tested for Y2K compliance.)

AT least a few of the PSUs have not exactly been fast off the block in responding to the situation. Nitin Wagh of Merant Solutions Private Limited, a Year 2000 verification and validation company says: "Many public sector companies are only now coming to us for quotations." Even those companies that had completed testing their critical machines and equipment, says Wagh, had not quite tested their accounting, payroll, supply and provident fund data bases. In his view, none of the companies can be said to be fully compliant. "In fact," he says, "there is no such thing as 100 per cent eradication. Anything can go wrong anywhere." Furthermore, only after securing outside vendor certification can a company claim to have become "fully compliant".

In addition to identifying, analysing and fixing the applications which need to become compliant, Merant provides a detailed record and audit trail of the compliance effort. "It is not difficult to become Y2K compliant," Wagh says. "Testing tools are now highly efficient and unless one opts for date expansion (that is, changing the date from '99 to 1999 in the entire operation program), not much manpower is required." To heighten awareness about the magnitude of the crisis, Merant has volunteered to conduct a verification of 25,000 lines of code for free.

THE countdown is on, but no one knows precisely what will happen at the appointed time. Countless cities are planning millennial bashes for the occasion, but not everyone is in the party mode: in some industrialised countries of the West, there are reports that entire communities and families are preparing for digital apocalypse – to dig caves and bunker themselves underground with stockpiles of foodstuffs. Clearly, some of those responses are alarmist, but if at least some of the panic has prompted governments and corporations to get their systems in order in time, some good will have come of it. ■



Along the polluted Palar

S THANTHONI

Despite the 1996 Supreme Court order which restrained polluting tanneries, related problems continue to haunt North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu.

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR
in Vellore

FOR the 50 lakh people living along the banks of the Palar in Tamil Nadu's North Arcot district, their lives and livelihood devastated by pollution from the hundreds of tanneries that line the river, a 1996 Supreme Court order brought hopes of a better quality of life. But those hopes are unlikely to be realised in the foreseeable future.

The apex court had slapped a stiff fine on the polluting tanneries and closed many of them, but hardly anything has changed on the ground yet. Hundreds of hectares of farmland still remain unfit for cultivation and the groundwater used by lakhs of people is not potable. The people suffer from diseases. On the other hand, the closure of many of the tanneries has caused unemployment and slowed down the local economy.

Processing more than 700 tonnes of leather every day, tanneries in the Vaniyambadi-Ambur-Pernambut-Ranipet belt of North Arcot district accounted for 40 per cent of the country's and 80 per cent of Tamil Nadu's leather exports, and earned over Rs. 2,000 crores in foreign exchange annually.

There are conflicting claims on the number of tanneries. The South Indian Tanners and Dealers Association claims that there are 553 units in the district, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) says there are 573 units and the Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum honorary secretary P.S. Subramanian asserts that there are nearly 2,000 units.

The industry came to the region 100 years ago, and warnings about the pollution hazards it posed came as early as 1939. However, it witnessed a phenomenal growth in the 1970s as the demand for leather increased, especially abroad, and the Centre introduced a pro-export policy. In order to meet the demand, tanners switched to a chromium-based process from an eco-friendly process that used tree bark and vegetable extracts. The new process, which used 176 chemicals, reduced the time and space required for tanning, but generated highly toxic effluents, especially the extremely harmful hexavalent chromium. Only about 40 per cent of the chemicals used was absorbed by the material being processed. The rest of it – a high concentration of sodium chloride, sulphides and chromium compounds – was letout into the open in a raw state.

(Top) A wilted paddyfield in North Arcot, a district devastated by pollution from hundreds of tanneries.

The industry required water in huge quantities – converting 1 kg of raw hide into finished leather consumes 40 litres of water. Tanneries were set up along the Palar. This served two purposes: water could be taken from and the effluents dumped into the river.

According to the TNPCB, 25 tonnes of solid wastes and over 30 million litres of effluents are generated every day by the tanneries in the district; this amounts to three-fourths of the tannery effluents discharged in the State. The standards set for treated effluents by the TNPCB do not come anywhere near the norms drinking

water set by the World Health Organisation (WHO). For instance, the total dissolved salt (TDS) limit allowed by the TNPCB for treated tannery effluent is 2,100 mg/l, while the WHO norm for drinking water is 1,000 mg/l; hexavalent chromium 2 mg/l (TNPCB) and 0.5 mg/l (WHO); chlorides and sulphates 1,000 mg/l and 250 mg/l for both; and arsenic 0.2 mg/l and 0.1 mg/l.

Although there has been no study on the subject since 1982, when a Tamil Nadu Agricultural University team found that 14,164 hectares of farmland had become unfit for cultivation, the district's Deputy Director for Agriculture S. Ganesan thinks that the extent of affected farmland may have gone up to 20,000 ha even by modest estimates.

According to A.G. Krishnamurthy, a farmer in Solur village, 20 years ago, sugarcane yield was 99 tonnes/ha but now it is not more than 24 tonnes/ha. He shifted to rainfed cotton, whose yield has also been deteriorating and he has been incurring heavy losses in the last four years.

In Karvazhi village, two crops of paddy used to be grown annually until 1970. After that, deteriorating yields and losses forced farmers to shift to dry crops such as cotton or coconut or to sell their land. Ambur Farmers' Agricultural Association president R. Narayanaswamy Naidu, who until 1970 had 18 ha that produced not less than 6 tonnes/ha of paddy every year, is a devastated man today. As his losses mounted, he sold 16 ha in 1986 at a throwaway price. He is unable to sell the remaining land, which is unfit for cultivation.

According to Ambur Farmers' Agricultural Association vice-president C.A. Vadivelu, paddy yield declined from 6 tonnes/ha in the 1970s to 3.7 tonne/ha in the 1980s; it is less than 2.5 tonne/ha now. Such is his anguish and frustration that he says: "I hope the problems continue for the next 2-3 years so that we are all wiped out. Then at least I hope that the government will sit up and do something about retrieving this district from decay and death."

A recent study by the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, found that the level of chromium, which causes respiratory and liver problems, in the treated effluents to be 40 times the limit set for drinking water, and the pH levels to be very low, leading to high alkalinity and causing eye and skin problems. According to a doctor at Ambur, cases of gastroenteritis, annoeclaisis, giardiasis and other water-borne diseases, besides lower respiratory tract infection, asthma and eyelid ulceration are common in the area. Continued exposure to chromium can cause lung cancer.

According to Ambur municipal councillor G. Yeganathan, as most wells in the villages along the 10-km Palar basin are unfit for use, the municipality provides drinking water to every village from the upper reaches of the river. In these villages water flows in municipal taps only for one hour every morning. The government's top priority is to provide potable water to the area. Ganesan says that there is a plan to bring water from Hogenakkal, 500 km away in Dharmapuri district.

THE only silver lining is that the tanners have begun to realise the need to clean up the mess that they have created. They are willing to invest for effluent treatment and to conform to the TDS limits set for farming and drinking.

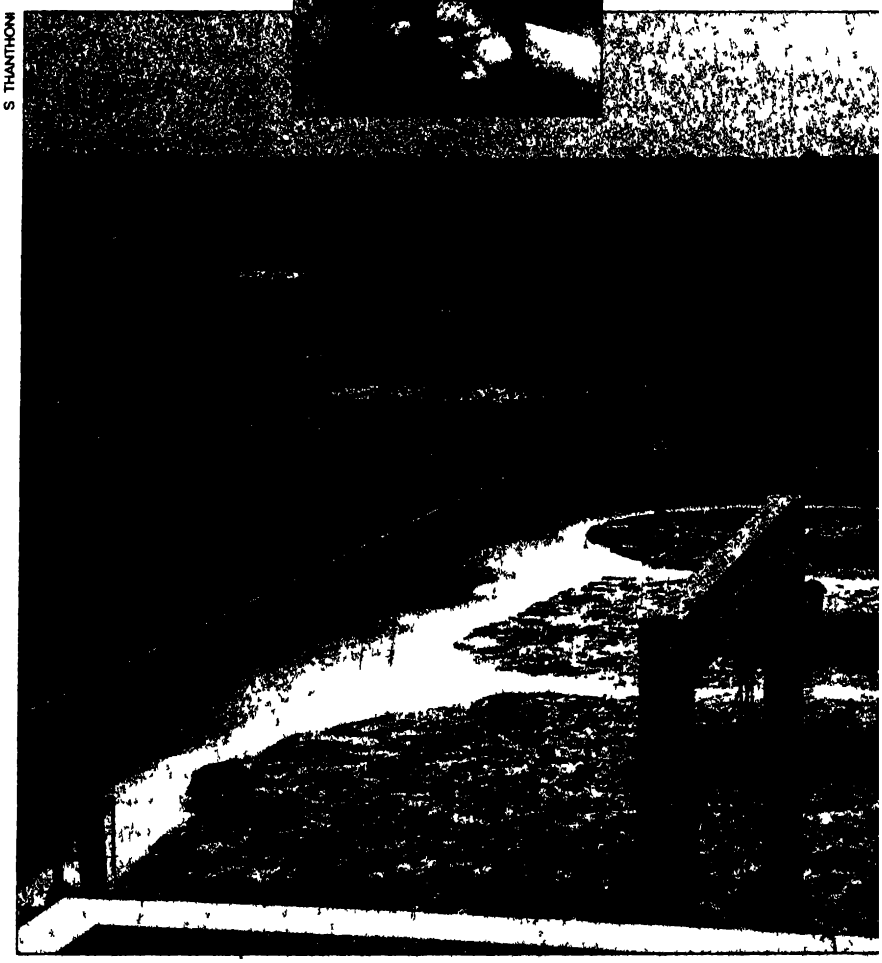
After the Supreme Court order, some tanneries shifted to Andhra Pradesh or Karnataka. Some that were ordered closed are confining themselves to dry leather processes after obtaining the TNPCB's consent. According to Taurus Leather managing director A. Thangaraj, the tanneries are coping with the situation, although profit margins have come down.

Ganesan says that the impact on employment has been low as only the small units were closed. Some areas such as Vaniyambadi, which had a large number of small units, have been hit hard. According to North Arcot District Tannery Workers Union president K. William, at least 1,500 workers have lost their jobs after the Supreme Court order. While many have migrated to adjacent districts and States as construction workers, some work for other tanneries and the rest are doing odd jobs.

Some tanneries have their own independent effluent treatment plants (IETPs) and are doing their best to reduce the TDS content in the effluents to about 4,000 mg/l. This, according to Shafeeq Ahmed & Co managing director N. Mohammed Sayed, is possible because they get fresh



S. THANTHONI



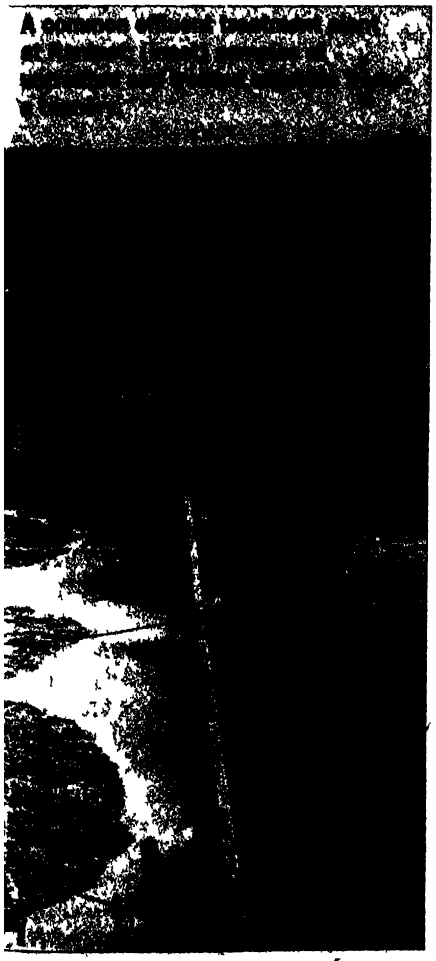
S. THANTHONI

water for tanning from the higher reaches of the Palar.

Ganesan says that the number and intensity of the problems have increased after the Supreme Court judgment Earlier the effluents were let out just outside the tannery and it was a local problem Now the treated effluents (which still contain the highly toxic inorganic wastes) are let into the Palar with the sanction of law as the Supreme Court allows the tanners to drain the treated effluents into the river This seeps into tanks and drinking water sources in the area, further harming the people and their livelihood

Besides, the 118 closed tanneries are small units and so the quantity of effluents let out has not decreased significantly Owing to poor rainfall in recent years, the Palar does not flush out the effluents and the groundwater recharge in the basin is poor, while the tanneries draw 70 million litres every day According to A Thangaraj, it is only because the riverbed sand is 20 m deep (which allows the retention of large amounts of rainfall) that the people are sustaining themselves

And, fourth, without enough staff and without sufficient powers, the TNPCB is not able to monitor the treatment plants TNPCB officials make 'surprise visits' to each unit once in two months They take samples of the treated effluents and send them to the Board's headquarters in Chennai, and wait for orders



There are complaints in Somalapuram, Solur and Chanankuppam villages that some tanneries and common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) let out untreated effluents at night and that some tanneries operate even when the CETP stops working during load-shedding But the TNPCB assistant engineer in Vaniyambadi, M. Murugan says it is not easy to let out untreated effluents at night

South India Tanners and Dealers Association secretary C M Zafarullah says: "In the past two decades the government concentrated on exports, not bothering about creating the infrastructure the industry needs" This view is shared by the other industry associations.

According to soil scientist G Theekaraman, the TDS levels can be brought down only by bringing in large quantities of fresh water from the upper reaches of the river This will be expensive and time consuming Ganesan says that the government has identified some land to dispose of the sludge and is also considering various alternatives, such as the reverse osmosis process, high rate transpiration systems for crop use and disposing in the sea treated effluents that do not conform to drinking water standards

Of these, taking the treated effluents to the sea through a closed channel is considered the most appropriate method But P S Subramanian, on whose writ petition the apex court took up the case, opposes this scheme saying it would pose great danger to the marine environment

The Ecology Authority set up a year ago by the State government is expected to submit by October its report on the payment of compensation for the affected people ■

Positive intervention

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

ON May 1, 1995, the Supreme Court, on a public interest petition filed in 1991 by P.S. Subrahmanian, advocate and secretary of the Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum, ordered the closure of 57 tanneries in North Arcot district which had no system of effluent treatment in place. The court gave another 496 tanneries three months to set up a treatment facility.

On September 8, 1995, the apex court ordered the closure of 162 tanneries which had made no progress in the construction of a treatment facility, and gave three months notice to 299 tanneries to complete the process. On April 9, 1996, it closed 34 tanneries which had set up independent effluent treatment plants (IETPs) but whose treated effluents did not conform to the norms.

In its final judgment on August 28, 1996, the apex court transferred the case to the Madras High Court, and directed it to constitute a Green Bench to handle all issues relating to the environment and pollution in the State, and also set up an Ecology Authority to assess the loss to the environment in the affected areas, identifying individuals, families and farms affected by tannery pollution.

The Green Bench was set up on September 13, 1996. The Ecology Authority was notified on September 30, 1996, but was set up two years later, on September 23, 1998.

The sweep and severity of the Supreme Court judgment not only sent the industry into a tailspin, but forced the government and the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB), to act. The TNPCB closed units that neither had an IETP nor were connected to a common effluent treatment plant (CETP). Of the 19 CETPs in the district, only eight are working, and of the 573 tanneries only 455 have an IETP or are connected to a CETP.

Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Central and State governments decided to remove the ceiling on the grant of subsidy for the setting up of CETPs and each decided to give 25 per cent of the cost. (Earlier, it was 25 per cent of the cost or Rs. 50 lakhs, whichever was lower.) The tanners made their contribution for the CETPs or set up IETPs. All these steps have helped check the level of pollution to a great extent. But the region has to go a long way to recoup its environmental health. ■

Slander campaign

The ongoing electioneering is the most abusive and vulgar in the electoral history of independent India ("Slander campaign", September 24). Populism and political expediency now form the bedrock of electoral politics.

In a parliamentary democracy, electioneering provides an opportunity to the political parties to tell voters about their socio-economic and political agenda and motivate them to participate in the task of combating the problems of the country. But politicians are using this opportunity only to denigrate individual leaders and thus set a bad precedent for the future. The erosion in the political culture is the result of many political parties giving up their ideological commitment. For them, nothing matters except the vote.

Sanjai Kumar

Hazaribagh, Bihar

Nuclear issues

The articles on nuclear issues (September 10 and September 24) are critical or at least highly sceptical of the draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine. Once a country becomes overtly nuclear and decides to target real or potential adversaries, it is assumed that there is a policy that will make it clear under what conditions nuclear weapons will be used. The five nuclear states have readymade pleas to use their weapons.

In "Questions about capabilities" (September 24), you carried a quote from the Chinese about the danger posed to South Asia's stability by India's nuclear doctrine. In what way does the huge Chinese arsenal contribute to peace and stability in East Asia or the world? How did the Chinese formulate their own nuclear doctrine and in what way is their policy more enlightened and thorough than that of India? The very fact that China tested and produced so many bombs is an indication that it has an intention of using them in certain situations.

Varun Shekhar

Islington, Canada

India and Israel

The article "India, Israel and Arab fears" (September 24) was thought-provoking. It is not surprising that the government run by the Sangh Parivar, which is guided by an anti-Islamic ideology, extended the hand of friendship to Israel. Policymakers of the day are taking the country closer to Israel, even though India has traditionally supported the Palestinian cause. Seeking Israeli military help will have dreadful consequences for the Indian subcontinent.

Some people may cite the fact of Arab countries having diplomatic relations with Israel to justify India's ties with Israel. But it is undeniable that people in Arab countries are against their governments' policies in this regard. It is also true that most Arab nations support India's position on Kashmir. External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh has himself commended the role of Saudi Arabia in helping solve the Kargil crisis.

Mehaboob Ali Balganur

Sindgi, Karnataka

Power and politics

This refers to the article on the Dabhol power project ("Dear power," September 10). One of the election promises made by the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance four years ago was that it would throw the project into the Arabian Sea. But its coalition government gave the go-ahead to the Dabhol Power Company to set up shop "in the interest of the people of Maharashtra".

The argument floated in favour of the construction of 55 flyovers within a span of two years (a world record, perhaps) in Mumbai city was that the flyovers would help streamline vehicular traffic and thus save over Rs.1,000 crores on fuel. A far-sighted plan indeed! But this gain will be offset by the annual loss the Maharashtra Government is expected to incur in the purchase of power from the DPC at a cost of Rs. 5.50 a unit against the agreed cost of Rs. 2.40.

Rajan Ramarao

Mumbai

Uranium production

In "Villages and woes" (September 10) it is mentioned that the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) has made arrangements to control radon emission, a radioactive gas that is emitted in the process of mining uranium. It has been demonstrated the world over that without protective clothing and appropriate masks, which of course are beyond the scope of Indian industry in general, miners are exposed to small quantities of radiation that in course of time will irradiate lung cells. It is estimated that this results in the death of 50 per cent of people exposed to such radiation. According to Dr. Helen Caldicott, an Australian paediatrician and well-known nuclear activist, this may not happen immediately but after 15 years of the actual period of exposure.

Technicians who operate x-ray machines wear a lead-lined apron and stand behind a lead screen in order to avoid exposure to radiation. Although the amount of radiation is small in this case, the cumulative effect of regular exposure is harmful and may lead to cancer in the long run. Doctors from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre surely know this, but then we are dealing with mere tribal people who are voiceless and are considered expendable. These poor citizens of India who live near the tailing ponds are exposed every day to small doses of radiation. No wonder they suffer from cancer, blindness, sterility and a host of other diseases that are difficult to treat.

The only way to tackle the problem is to bury the wastes in selected areas, using appropriate methods. But, of course, it is expensive and will cut into the profits of UCIL. A much cheaper option is to relocate the tribal people from their homelands, their sacred groves, their burial sites and their habitat. To rephrase Mark Twain, all life is sacred in India, except human life.

Dr. Harikumari John

Chennai

Islam and journalists

There is a dearth of basic knowledge of Islamic beliefs, Islamic terms and Islamic organisations within the general journalistic community. Journalists tend to use the words *jihad*, *ulema* and Shariah as derogatory terms. Their information on Islamic organisations is still worse. Even *Frontline* is not totally immune to it.

In "Arrest of an ISI gang" (September 10) Tabligh-i-Jamaat has been described as a revanchist organisation, implying that it is a politically motivated extremist organisation. The facts are totally the opposite. (This writer is not a member of Tabligh-i-Jamaat.)

Tabligh-i-Jamaat is a non-political organisation aiming to improve the character and spirituality of Muslims through a six-point programme. Those six points are – renewal of the basic creed of Islam, five-times daily prayers, religious knowledge, sincerity, respect of other Muslims and spending money/time/life in the way of Allah.

As is clear from this, the agenda of the Tabligh-i-Jamaat consist of the spiritual improvement of Muslims. It is not a polit-

ical organisation. It even draws criticism from some other Muslim organisations which think that it is too moderate and that it is not doing missionary work among non-Muslims. It is an open organisation and has organised large annual international gatherings, many of them in India. The temporary association of some lumpen elements should not be used as an excuse to tarnish its image.

Mohammed Ayub Ali Khan
Chicago

Ban on smoking

The judgment of the Kerala High Court directing the State Government to enforce Section 278 of the Indian Penal Code to prevent smoking in public places is commendable ("Smokers under siege," September 10). The level of social awareness of the people of Kerala has prevented them from resorting to any agitation against this because prevention of smoking will affect the beedi and cigarette industries.

S. Muthuswamy
Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

Pakistan's claim

Pakistan's demand for compensation for the loss of its maritime surveillance aircraft, which was shot down by a MiG-21 aircraft of the Indian Air Force last month ("A confrontation in the Kutch," September 10) cannot be accepted. The Pakistani plane intruded into Indian air space. If India is to pay compensation for it, then Pakistan will have to compensate India for the losses incurred owing to acts of terrorism abetted by it in Jammu and Kashmir.

N. Vijayaraghavan
Chennai

Dowry deaths

Parvathi Menon's report "Dowry deaths in Bangalore" (August 27) speak volumes of the neglect of women in this country. It reflects a gradual erosion of our values. This attitude to women also runs counter to the objective of empowering women. Despite legal safeguards, violence against women has assumed alarming proportions. The question is where exactly we have gone wrong and what must be done to root out this evil.

It is agonising to note that even educated women are victims of this trend. The apathy of the government, the inability of the judiciary to deal firmly with the criminals and the hypocrisy of the police force – all have contributed to the worsening of the situation.

The situation demands a dispassionate analysis. A mass movement is needed to combat the problem.

Shahnaz Begum
Darbhanga, Bihar

Plantation workers

This has reference to the article "A bitter harvest" (August 27).

It appears that unfortunately, communication was not established between the author and our management and therefore the article missed the point of view of the management. We would, therefore, wish to focus on the following facts so that your readers can get a just and balanced perspective:

1. The various allegations made by J. Hemachandran, president, CITU, Tamil Nadu, against us are totally false. All along, he has not only been an active party in wage negotiations between the Planters' Association of Tamilnadu and various industry unions, but was also a signatory to all the settlements. Having agreed on the wages, he cannot now question the fairness of the wages.

2. In all its 134 years of existence, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Ltd. has strictly adhered to the provisions of legislative acts including the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Our workforce is provided with housing, perquisites, retirement benefits, holidays, free medical care, creches with free food for children, conservancy and sanitation, etc., in conformity with the Act.

3. The photograph published with the article depicts an illegal attachment to the existing housing provided and is not officially allowed. This is why it appears shabby. The management did not remove this illegal extension even though it should have, purely on humanitarian considerations.

4. The accusation that workload has increased over the years is baseless. All the daily tasks or specified output are determined by mutual consent on lines similar to other estates.

5. The call for a three-fold increase in wages is unreasonable, unaffordable and uneconomical. Factors such as global competitiveness, free markets and the possible onslaught of low-cost imports from Sri Lanka and Kenya do not allow any further increase in wages. India's plantation industry is one of the most manpower-intensive ones. It will face a bleak future if economics is mixed with politics. The wage levels and welfare benefits provided to plantation workers in Tamil Nadu are superior to those in the rest of the country and amongst the highest in the world.

6. The estate colonies are essentially private housing colonies and not public places. Thus they are bound by rules and regulations of employment and prevailing standing orders. The workers' benefits accrue according to contractual obligations. Under the Plantation Labour Act, there is no provision for making available kitchen gardens and cattle rearing facilities.

7. The annual production of the Singampatti Group is 2 million kg and not 8 million kg as indicated. Likewise, the annual coffee production of this group is between 15,000 and 20,000 kg and not 1 million kg.

Arun C. Vakil
Chief of Public Relations and Corporate Communication,
The Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited,
Mumbai

Kargil

It is a shame that former Army Commanders such as Lt.-Gen. Moti Dar should be speaking against the very establishment that nurtured them, while glorifying their own era in the service ("The Army leadership has been politicised", August 27).

Will someone please remind the former Vice-Chief of the Army Staff of the intrusion of "Dalunag" when he was a Brigade Major at Kargil (1967-71)? Commanders like him are very much to blame for the state of the Army today. While at the helm, they never took any steps to improve the forces. Owing to the self-gratifying life-styles of some senior officers, junior officers lost respect for their seniors. These are the reasons behind the fall in the morale of the armed forces.

It is ridiculous to compare the situation in the valley in 1983 to the present-day situation. There was hardly any insurgency then. The role of the Army has changed in many ways since then. Moti Dar should look back and ask himself: how much of all this did his generation anticipate? And if it did, what did it do about it?

Col. Kadan (retd.)
New Delhi

Correction: In the article "Chandra, the most advanced", part of the feature on the orbiting X-ray observatory (September 24), the apparent diameter of the moon was erroneously mentioned as 31 feet; it is 31 arc-minute (31'). Similarly, the imager part of the device, High Resolution Camera-I, is a single array 9 cm x 9 cm with a 31'x31' field of view, and not as published.

Pointing fingers

Whatever the outcome of the inquiries into the Kargil conflict, it is increasingly evident that military officials make easier scapegoats than politicians.

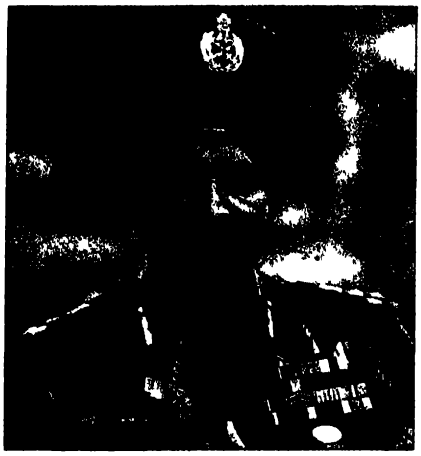
PRAVEEN SWAMI

THE summer war on the Kargil heights has come to an end, but the forces it unleashed are still unspent. The growing mass of evidence emerging before the official Committee of Inquiry investigating the war, the proceedings of a military inquiry in Leh into the leakage of official documents detailing military failures, and fresh media disclosures on the Union Government's failures in strategic management are starting to snowball. Should this gather mass, more than a few who have claimed credit for a glorious victory in Kargil could find themselves buried under its political debris.

Brigadier Surinder Singh, the commander of the Kargil brigade who authored a series of warnings on possible Pakistani intrusion through the area, continues to be at the centre of the controversy (*Frontline*, September 4). He is facing an inquiry ordered by 3 Infantry Division Commander Major-General V.N. Budhwar into his alleged role in the leakage of official documents to the media. The military inquiry, conducted by 3 Infantry Division's Deputy-General Officer Commanding, Ashok Duggal, along with Brigadiers C.M. Nayar and Devinder Singh, has been conducting hearings almost each day over the last fortnight.

Sources told *Frontline* that the bulk of the questioning so far has revolved around Surinder Singh's links with Congress(I) spokesperson and lawyer Kapil Sibal. Surinder Singh told the military inquiry that he had indeed met Sibal to discuss a legal challenge against a series of transfers. This challenge was eventually moved in late August, though not through Sibal. Surinder Singh refused flatly to disclose the content of his discussions with Sibal, arguing that these were privileged, covered by the special confidentiality codes governing conversations between lawyers and their clients. He, however, made it clear that no documents were made available to Sibal. Sibal was the first to make public news of Surinder Singh's warnings, although the file numbers he cited proved incorrect.

A second line of questioning directed at Surinder Singh has been on leaks of correspondence to the media. Surinder Singh admitted to the military inquiry that he met *Outlook* magazine's Nitin Gokhale at Secunderabad, but pointed out that all conversation took place in the company of a Colonel-rank witness. Surinder Singh said that he offered Gokhale a soft drink,



PANKAJ RISHI KUMAR

Brigadier Surinder Singh.

but refused to discuss the Kargil issue. Gokhale, the inquiry was told, subsequently left, saying that he had only come to cross-check information already in his possession. Brigadier Surinder Singh had earlier told the court that since the Kargil documents were also in the possession of the Chief of the Army Staff General V.P. Malik and other top officials, they could just as easily have been leaked from there. His demands that Malik and other officials therefore also be examined, however, has met with no response.

Major-General Budhwar, for his part, appears to have decided that Surinder Singh in fact leaked material to the press, and that his subordinate officer is being used by the Congress(I). In an interview to *India Today*, Budhwar claimed Surinder Singh "perhaps does not know he is being used by vested political interests". He also claimed Surinder Singh was "fabricating letters in the army records or someone else is doing it on his behalf". "He is quoting letters", Budhwar concluded, "which do not exist." If that is indeed the case, Budhwar's decision to order an inquiry into the leakage of non existent documents can only be described as mystifying. More interesting, since Budhwar is the immediate superior of those conducting the Leh military inquiry, its impartiality is now in more than a little doubt.

Just why the military inquiry at Leh is focussing on Sibal is not difficult to comprehend. The government's own committee of inquiry into the Kargil controversy made up of K. Subrahmanyam, B.G Verghese, Lieutenant-General (retired) K.K. Hazari and the head of the National Security Council's secretariat, Satish Chandra, now has a fairly good picture of the large number of intelligence warnings that preceded Pakistan's intrusion. Officials of the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) both in Leh and Srinagar, along with other senior administration and police figures, were examined by the Kargil committee in August and September. Surinder Singh was examined at length on the basis of his June 19 letter to Malik, marked 29734/SS/Confd., which traces the entire sequence of events.

Sources told *Frontline* that Surinder Singh's deposition before the committee lasted an entire day. Among the documents the committee was particularly interested in was a letter dated January 5, 1999, marked 102 GS Ops Recce, despatched to the 3 Infantry Division Headquarters by Captain Vikram Vohra, then officiating for the 121 Brigade's Brigade Major. The letter asked that at least one helicopter "be positioned permanently at Kargil" for surveillance operations, and that a decision to downgrade air reconnaissance over the Mushkoh Valley be reviewed "in view of the No of int(elligence) reports sent by your HQ listing out militant activity" in this area. The letter asked for "sanction of (one) WASO (surveillance flight) per week for vigil over Mashkoh Nala, Mumar Shung and Tololing Nala."

These were precisely the areas through

which infiltration eventually took place. In the event, no additional flights were sanctioned, and the helicopter at Leh, as one senior official put it, "was used as a taxi for joyrides". Vohra's letter also pointed to troop withdrawals leaving the Yaldor area open to attack. "There have been int reports indicating militants using routes in (the) area east of Batalik which led to the d(e)pl(o)y(ment) of a Co(mpan)y plus str(ength) in Yaldor A in (an) anti-infilt(ration) role", paragraph five pointed out. "After the t(roo)ps ex 9 MAHAR (Regiment) are deinducted, these Nalas become vulnerable as infilt(ration) routes. To keep and check, there is a req(uire)m(en)t of weekly WASO over Yaldor, Garkhun and Hanuthang Nalas also."

Unsurprisingly, there appears to be more than a little apprehension among a small circle of officials that the Kargil committee could end up pointing fingers. Should that happen, any future government, in particular a Bharatiya Janata Party-led formation, would be under pressure to punish those who may be indicted. It would be easier to make scapegoats of military officials, for obvious reasons, than politicians. The Union Government, hit hard by former Pakistan Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik's revelation that it was engaged in engineering a covert deal on Jammu and Kashmir, has been conspicuously silent on the Surinder Singh affair. It has maintained a studious silence on this and other evidence that some Army officials first ignored and then sought to conceal evidence of Pakistan's aggression in Kargil.

Among the major consequences of the growing panic has been the emergence of a fissure between the Union Government and sections of the Army. On September 15, *The Tribune* of Chandigarh broke news of an unsigned background paper, evidently produced by public relations officials at Army Headquarters in New Delhi, demanding that Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee defend the organisation against attack. Most important of the paper's alleged charges was the argument that Vajpayee chose to ignore possible RAW and I.B. warnings "in the context of (the) Lahore bus ride". The Union Government, the paper continued, "must ensure that the Army is not maligned as is being done. This may destroy its apolitical culture and ethos. The PM must make a statement to this effect."

Vajpayee personally intervened to bring an end to the rift between the BJP and the Army establishment that was signalled by the report. An official press release clarified that "the entire news report is baseless". The press release continued: "It is unfortunate at a time when the people of this country have recognised the efficiency with which the Kargil operations were conducted and when the cohesion of different government agencies has resulted in a significant victory for the country, some people continue to try to divide different segments of the government... The Prime Minister leaves it to the professionalism and good sense of the press to see the larger interests of the country and not to undertake these attempts at creating dissension within the country."

Army Headquarters, however, made available a more intriguing response. *The Tribune*'s article, it said, was "presented with a view to tarnish the apolitical image of the army." No effort to explain this somewhat opaque reference was made, but the denial continued to suggest that the article



PANKAJ RISHI KUMAR

Major-General V.N. Budhwar.

was "sponsored/published by an aggrieved party for self-motivated reasons best known to the individual sponsor." Again denying that any paper of the kind existed, the Army claimed all documentation it processed was marked with file references. But the operative portion of its statement reiterated the position pushed by the Leh military inquiry: that the Surinder Singh episode was part of a political campaign manufactured by the Congress(I), and his efforts to defend himself against charges of incompetence were bereft of legitimacy.

The angry rebuttals provoked by *The Tribune* have done little to put the controversy to rest. The fact remains that several top officials have begun to realise that the BJP is unlikely to put its political credibility at stake by defending those indicted by the Kargil committee. Whether or not the Army Headquarters paper exists as a formal document, *The Tribune*'s defence correspondent in New Delhi is unlikely to have manufactured its contents.

More important, *The Tribune* report mirrors voices in the Army that the ultimate responsibility for Kargil may now be placed at Malik's door, ignoring the BJP's disastrous post-Pokhran-II failures of strategic judgment which underpinned secondary military errors. If warnings like those issued by Surinder Singh were ignored, it was because the BJP had lulled the Army into a false sense of security.

Why that sense of security had come about has been put in stark relief by Naik's revelations, made to the Pakistan newspaper *Jang* last fortnight, on a covert India-Pakistan deal on Jammu and Kashmir. Naik told the newspaper that the Pakistan Army had acted to scupper an almost-completed deal, presumably to defend vested interests, including its own and those of the Inter Services Intelligence. Naik's charges provoked a furore in India and Pakistan. Although the former Pakistan Foreign Secretary later denied having made any allegations in the first place, his retraction carried little credibility. What the contours of such dialogue may have been is unclear, but several proposals, including wide autonomy bordering on independence to the Muslim-majority areas of Jammu and Kashmir, have been energetically pushed by the United States.

The whole truth about Kargil is yet to become clear. Documents that have become available during the war, and after its end, make clear that intelligence warnings were ignored. The reasons for this apathy were rooted in international pressures brought to bear on India in the wake of the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. Desperate to deflect such pressure, the BJP launched its bus diplomacy. In the event, it was taken for a ride by right-wingers in Pakistan. But its bomb-sized self-delusion on what continues to be described as the Lahore Process led the Army to lower its guard. Now, it appears, the Lahore Process may have involved some larger, and wholly unscrupulous, deal on Jammu and Kashmir.

In the months after the Kargil war, General Malik and the circle of officers around him, energetically, and controversially, joined in the BJP's defence against charges of incompetence and dishonesty. Now, with the Kargil committee proceeding apace, they could discover the real meaning of the maxim that warns against putting faith in princes. ■

Correction: "Warnings in vain" (September 24) mentioned the rank of the General Officer Commanding, 3 Infantry Division, as Lieutenant-General. V.N. Budhwar is a Major-General.

Tetchy exchanges

In the post-Kargil phase, India and Pakistan have been bogged down in petty tussles over exercises that should have been resolved without complications, such as the exchange of prisoners of war.

JOHN CHERIAN

TWO Indian soldiers who were captured inside Pakistani territory on the night of August 29-30 in the Shyok-Turtok sector in Jammu and Kashmir and were in Pakistani custody for 17 days were finally released on September 16. Lance Naik Ram Singh and Sepoy Bajinder Singh were handed over to Indian High Commission officials in Islamabad by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Pakistan had earlier threatened to delay the release of the two soldiers after New Delhi objected to Pakistan's violation of internationally accepted norms relating to the handover. In order to gain propaganda mileage from the incident, Pakistan wanted the soldiers to be released in the presence of media-persons. India insisted that the soldiers be returned with "dignity" and without converting the event into a "public spectacle".

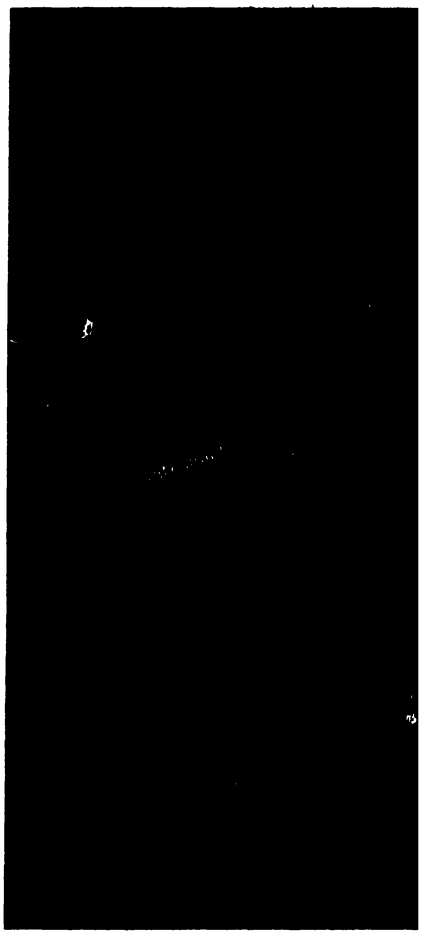
Pakistan claims that the two soldiers were captured when 400 Indian soldiers launched an attack in the sector opposite Turtok in order to capture the dominating heights in the area. According to Pakistan, India has been trying to capture high ground so as to open fire on Pakistani positions. India has said that a six-member patrol team was reported missing in the Turtok sector on the night of August 29-30, but Islamabad dismisses this claim as a "fabricated" one.

The Indian Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO) officially asked his Pakistani counterpart on August 31 to return the members of the patrol team if they had inadvertently strayed into Pakistani territory. According to the Indian authorities, the patrol team consisted of an officer and five jawans of 3 Rajput Battalion. Pakistan has admitted to the capture of only two jawans; the fate of the other soldiers is unknown.

The Indian Army attaches great strategic importance to the Turtok sector because of its proximity to the southern Siachen Glacier. For India, military control of the area is essential in order to protect the supply lines by road to the southern Siachen Glacier. In the wake of the Kargil conflict, India and Pakistan have been increasing their military presence along the Line of Control (LoC). Each has accused the other of making abortive attempts to capture tactically important patrol positions with the aim of altering the alignment of the LoC. There have been frequent reports of soldiers on both sides being killed in skirmishes and shelling along the LoC. Before the winter snows come, the Pakistani side is also keen to push in as many infiltrators as possible into the valley.

In the aftermath of Kargil, what should ordinarily have been uncomplicated exercises such as the exchange of prisoners of war (PoWs) are getting bogged down in petty, time-consuming tussles. Islamabad was livid when New Delhi alleged that the bodies of one army officer and six jawans that were handed over on June 9, at the height of the Kargil conflict, bore evidence of torture. These allegations were seized upon by political and media commentators in India to portray the Pakistan Army as a "barbaric" one and to raise patriotic fervour in India to a fever pitch. International agencies involved as intermediaries in the exchange of prisoners are of the view that if torture had indeed been inflicted on the Indian soldiers and their bodies mutilated, the Pakistani Army would have disposed of their bodies quietly within Pakistani territory and kept the news of their death a secret. Reports about the alleged "mutilation" have since died down.

According to international agencies working in the field, New Delhi's initial response on the PoW issue was a little confused. Initially it declared the Kargil conflict as being the consequence of an act of "aggression" by Pakistan; then it characterised the situation as "war-like". New Delhi did not foresee a situation in which an Indian soldier would be taken a PoW, but when Flight Lt. K. Nachiketa, an Indian Air Force pilot, was captured by Pakistani troops after his plane was shot down in May, New Delhi changed its stance. The ICRC was given the green signal to secure his release, and the Pakistani side handed him over.



Lance Naik Ram Singh (left) and Sepoy Bajinder Singh of the Indian Army, who were captured by Pakistani troops inside Pakistani territory on the night of August 29-30 and were handed over to Indian High Commission officials in Islamabad on September 16.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's telephonic conversation with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on June 13 seemed to re-introduce a measure of civility to the exchanges between the governments on the issue of swapping of PoWs. On July 4, the Indian Government announced that it had captured a Pakistani soldier. Under international conventions, the ICRC must be informed about PoWs as soon as they are captured. According to sources, both India and Pakistan find this universally accepted convention expendable. Both countries seem inclined to get the maximum political mileage from exercises relating to the release of PoWs.



TANVEER MUQALI/AP

The tendency appears to be to keep PoWs as bargaining chips, even though a surrendered soldier is not to be treated as an enemy. After the 1971 war, about 90,000 Pakistani PoWs were in India for more than three years; this led many to speculate that they were being used to gain additional leverage at the Shimla talks.

Islamabad, on its part, refused to accept the bodies of two soldiers which India tried to hand over on July 17. There is speculation that this was because the bodies were of soldiers who belonged not to the regular Pakistan Army but to the Northern Light Infantry, which comprises non-Punjabi fighters from tribal areas. At the same time, on August 27, the Pakistan Government accepted the return of eight Pakistan PoWs without much of a fuss. These bodies were handed over to Pakistan High Commission officials in New Delhi; mediapersons were not present at the handover.

Islamabad implied that its insistence that mediapersons be present during the release of the two Indian soldiers in September was motivated by the fact that the media would be witness to the physical and mental well-being of the released PoWs. Evidently, India's allegations about the "mutilation" of the bodies of Indian soldiers still rankles. The ICRC doctor who examined the two captured soldiers found them to be in an "acceptable" state of health. The two PoWs reached India by road from Islamabad a day after they were released.

MEANWHILE, New Delhi denied in the third week of September that it had finalised any "secret deal" with Islamabad under which the Kashmir issue would be resolved within a "fixed time-frame". Pakistan Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz had said in the course of a debate in the Pakistan Senate on September 16 that both countries had agreed to resolve the Kashmir issue within a time-frame of between nine and 12 months. Aziz attributed this "breakthrough" to the "back-channel" diplomacy between the two countries.

Since Vajpayee's visit to Lahore early this year, back-channel diplomacy seems to have supplanted the more formal diplomatic channels. Among the informal diplomatic forays that have become public knowledge are the visit to Delhi of former Pakistan Foreign Secretary Niaz Naik and the top-secret trip to Islamabad of Indian journalist R.K. Mishra, at the height of the Kargil conflict. Naik was reported by the *Jang* newspaper as saying that India and Pakistan were heading for a settlement on Kashmir when Kargil intervened. Naik's comments whipped up controversies in both India and Pakistan. In India, the government came in for criticism for negotiating a "secret deal" on Kashmir; and in Pakistan, there were reports that the military establishment had taken exception to Naik's remarks. Naik subsequently denied some of the remarks attributed to him.

The Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman denied Aziz's "fanciful" assertion that the two countries had envisaged a time-frame for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

In a related development, Pakistan's Minister for Railways informed the Upper House of Parliament that Pakistani sugar was being exported to India until May 18. If that is true, it means that India was importing sugar from Pakistan even when the Kargil conflict was on. On the campaign trail, Vajpayee has repeatedly stated that "not a grain of sugar was imported during the Kargil crisis". The Congress(I) and other parties have alleged that the Vajpayee government had continued to import sugar primarily to favour sugar mills in which Sharif's family have an interest. ■

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ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL



KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THREE northeastern States – Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh – are going to the polls on October 3. While Assam will elect 14 Lok Sabha representatives, the other two States will choose two members each. Arunachal Pradesh witnesses simultaneous elections to its 60-member Assembly.

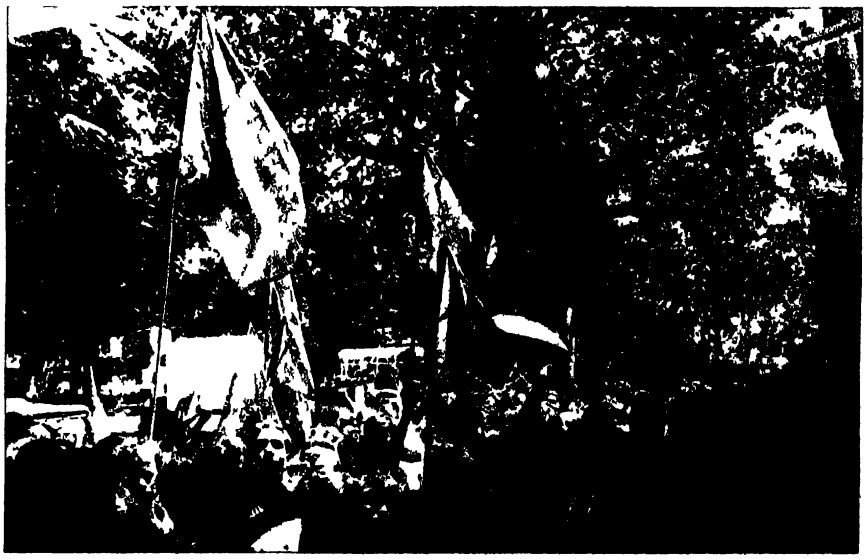
The contest in Assam will be chiefly between the Congress (I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Congress(I) is contesting all the 14 seats, the BJP 12, the Nationalist Congress Party 10 and the Asom Gana Parishad eight. As a part of an electoral understanding, the AGP has allotted two seats to the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and one each to the Communist Party of India and the United People's Party of Assam.

State Congress(I) president Tarun Gogoi told *Frontline* that the BJP had emerged as its chief rival in view of the non-performance of the AGP Government. In 1998, the Congress(I) won 11 seats. The BJP won one, but finished second in eight constituencies. The AGP was totally defeated and the party has since not improved its position. Gogoi is confident that the Congress(I) will not only maintain its strength but improve its performance. The only setback the party suffered in 1998 was the defeat of its heavyweight, former Union Minister Santosh Mohan Deb, by the BJP's Kabindra Purkayastha in Silchar. This time, Santosh Mohan Deb is locked in a three-cornered contest with Purkayastha and his own brother, Subhash Mohan Deb, who is contesting on the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) ticket. Senior politician Golam Osmani, who joined the Congress(I) along with a breakaway group of the United Minorities Front, will contest from Barpeta.

The NCP leader, P.A. Sangma, has failed to consolidate his party's position in the northeastern States despite a hectic campaign tour and month-long parleys with various regional parties. Political observers feel that the NCP will not pose a challenge to the Congress(I) or the other parties. The NCP's candidates include Pradip Gogoi, former AGP Minister, and Bolin Kuli, former Congress MP, from Lakhimpur.



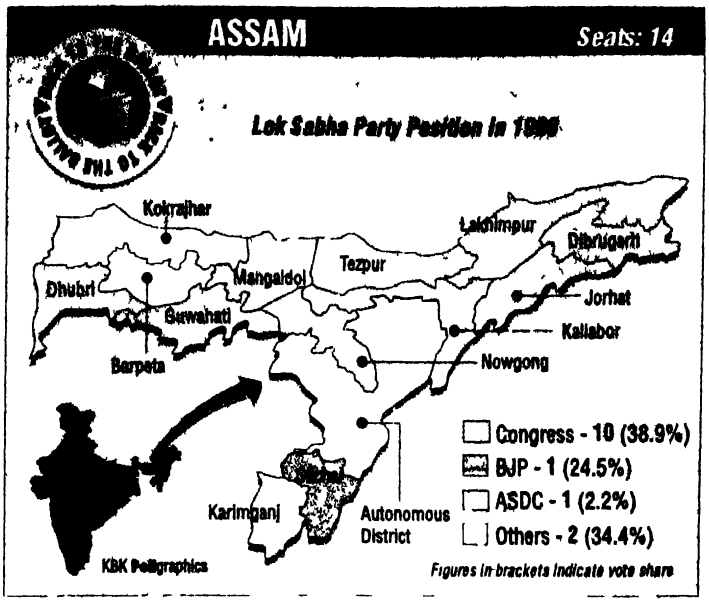
A peace rally by AGP supporters. The party's election symbol is "elephant".



BJP supporters at an election rally in Guwahati.

THE BJP has supported the candidature of Elwin Teron of the All-Party Forum for the Autonomous District (Scheduled Tribe) seat, and that of Samsuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, who has the backing of the All-Bodo Students Union, in Kokrajhar (S.T.). The party's State unit president, Narayan Chandra Borkotoky, said that this decision was taken in order to protect the interests of the tribal people of the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar and to avert the "divisive policies" of the Congress(I) and the Left parties that had led to socio-political tensions. The BJP, in order to be acceptable to the people of the Brahmaputra Valley, has opened its doors to disparate political elements; Shiv





P.K. Mahanta campaigning for AGP candidate Durgadas Bodo (right), who is contesting from Guwahati.

Shambhu Ojha, who was a Minister in the Hiteswar Saikia government, has been nominated in Dibrugarh, while former AGP MP, Bijoya Chakraborti, has been fielded in Guwahati. The two leaders joined the BJP recently. Ojha was perhaps selected because he wields considerable influence among the electorate in the Upper Assam districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. He is likely to give a tough fight to the sitting Congress(I) MP, Pawan Singh Ghatowar.



Assam Congress(I) chief Tarun Gogoi.

With nothing to lose, the AGP appears set to make a marginal gain despite the anti-incumbency factor. The party has fielded All-Assam Students Union (AASU) adviser Sarbananda Sonowal, in North Lakhimpur. Aware of the tough battle ahead, the party's poll managers have exercised caution in the selection of candidates. Former Union Minister Birendra Prasad Baishya has been nominated in Mangaldoi. The AGP and its allies have not put up any candidate in Kokrajhar and Diphu. Chief Minister P.K. Mahanta's wife, Jayasree Mahanta, who was defeated in 1998, has been denied the ticket to contest from Nagaon, Mahanta's home constituency. The Chief Minister had faced criticism from party leaders for nominating his wife last time. Jayasree Mahanta was elected to the Rajya Sabha recently.

The AGP decided to go to the people with the slogan of peace, prosperity and development. It has concentrated on a door-to-door campaign as the fear of the banned militant organisations has disappeared to a large extent and the United Liberation Front Asom (ULFA) is losing its influence. Mahanta told *Frontline* that in 1998, the Congress(I) had the backing of ULFA, and this had resulted in the rout of the AGP.

Sources said that the ULFA has already issued instructions to its units to assist the Congress(I) by encouraging pro-Congress(I) voters to vote and by intimidating the others, mainly AGP supporters. In 1998, the ULFA cadres forced some AGP functionaries to resign and abducted or killed AGP workers in the districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, Darrang and Nalbari. ■

TRIPURA

AT election time, a spectre of violence looms large over the tiny hill State of Tripura. For the sole purpose of disrupting the elections, militant organisations have stepped up their offensive, killing non-tribal people and political activists, ambushing security forces and abducting government employees, particularly those overseeing the electoral process. Since September 1, 17 people have been killed and 24 kidnapped.

Militants belonging to the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) abducted 16 government employees attached to the office of the Block Development Officer (BDO) at Manu in Dhalai district of North Tripura on September 6. Armed NLFT extremists stormed the office when a meeting was in progress, and forced the employees, who included 10 panchayat secretaries, to follow them at gun point. Before taking away the hostages, they fired indiscriminately. The following day, the militants shot dead two passengers in a State transport bus, both Communist Party of India (Marxist) activists, at Taichhama in South district. On September 2, they gunned down two employees at the Chalikhola panchayat office in Bishalgarh subdivision of West Tripura. On September 7, the extremists ambushed a jeep in which six Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were travelling at Rankang area near Amarpur subdivision. Two CRPF men were injured.

THE CPI(M)-led Left Front, which won a massive victory in the panchayat polls in July, is confident of repeating its performance in the parliamentary elections. The party has renominated Samar Choudhuri and Bajuban Reang in West and East Tripura respectively. But political analysts expect the CPI(M) candidates to face a few hurdles in their efforts to retain the seats.

The Congress(I) appears to have given up its battle in Tripura as its ally, the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), has snapped its ties with the party and attached itself to the Trinamul Congress. The Congress(I) has no electoral base in



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Senior Congress(I) leader Pranab Mukherjee addressing an election meeting in Guwahati. (Below) Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar.



RITU RAJ KONWAR

the tribal-dominated areas of West Tripura and had been depending on the TUJS since 1982 to muster tribal votes, which constitute 30 per cent of the total. Informed sources in the Congress(I) expressed grave concern over the emergence of the Trinamul Congress-BJP-TUJS alliance, as it appears to have cast a shadow over the party's future in the State. The Congress(I) nominee for West Tripura, Pijush Biswas, at one stage decided not to contest. However, he changed his mind on instructions from the party high command. The Congress(I) has fielded Khasiram Reang in East Tripura. The formation of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) unit in the State has also dealt a blow to the Congress(I).

Although the NCP is unlikely to make an impact in State politics, it has fielded Birballav Saha in West Tripura.

THE Trinamul Congress has fielded former Congress(I) Chief Minister Sudhir Ranjan Mazumdar in West Tripura. Before launching new State unit, its leader Mamata Banerjee said in Agartala that her party was spreading its wings across the States ruled by the Left Front.

The BJP State unit was unwilling to earmark the West Tripura seat for the Trinamul Congress. But the party's central leadership intervened to get the seat allotted to its ally. The BJP's State unit vice-president, Jishnu Deb Barma, is contesting in East Tripura.

After Mamata Banerjee's campaign tour of Tripura in the second week of September, the Left Front identified the Trinamul Congress, rather than the Congress(I), as its arch rival. A large number of Congress(I) leaders and eight Youth Congress(I) block committees pledged their support to Mamata Banerjee. The Youth Congress(I) split, and a tribal people's conference called by the Congress(I)'s tribal cell, turned out to be a farce. Youth Congress(I) president Billal Mia blamed Pradesh Congress(I) president Gopal Ray and Leader of the Congress(I) in the Assembly, Samir Ranjan Barman, for the revolt of the tribal leaders. The response to the Trinamul Congress was such that in several places Congress(I) signboards were removed and its offices were converted into Trinamul Congress offices.

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court has asked the Election Commission to set up special booths along the Mizoram-Tripura border to help Mizoram's 40,000 Reang refugees, living in camps in Tripura, to vote. The court responded to a petition filed by S.N. Saxena, chairman of the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. Saxena alleged that the Reangs, displaced from their homes since ethnic clashes broke out in 1996, were not allowed to vote during the last two Lok Sabha elections and in the Mizoram Assembly elections in November 1998. ■

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

IN Arunachal Pradesh, the ruling Congress(I) is well placed. Already four Congress(I) candidates, including Chief Minister Mukut Mithi, have been elected unopposed to the 60-member State Assembly. In all, 197 candidates are in the fray for the Assembly elections. The contest here is mainly between the Congress(I) and the Arunachal Congress of Gegong Apang.

Apang, who had served as Chief Minister for 19 years until Mukut Mithi assumed power on January 19, was opposed to the holding of Assembly elections along with the Lok Sabha elections. The Assembly was dissolved by the Governor, Lt. General (retd) S.K. Sinha, on July 27, on the advice of the Mukut Mithi Government, six months before its term was to expire. State Information and Public Relations Minister G.C. Teli said that the holding of Assembly elections separately in March, would have added to the financial burden on the State.

Apang opposed the holding of simultaneous elections saying that the situation was not conducive for free and fair elections. He suggested that the State be put under President's Rule until the time was ripe for Assembly elections. Apang said that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction), active in the Tirap and Changlang districts bordering Nagaland, had declared that only the Congress(I) would be allowed to contest the elections.

Apang accused Nagaland Chief Minister S.C. Jamir of fomenting trouble in Arunachal Pradesh with the help of the NSCN(K). He alleged that the Mithi Government, which came to power "as part of that conspiracy", had divided society along ethnic and communal lines. The Congress(I) was hand-in-glove with the rebels, he alleged. He pointed out that a recent meeting of the Union Territory Demand Committee of Tirap and Changlang districts, convened under the chairmanship of a State Congress(I) leader, had declared that the Arunachal Congress and the BJP would not be allowed to contest the elections under any

circumstance. These districts have 12 Assembly seats, one-fifth of the total strength of the House.

Arunachal Pradesh is traditionally a Congress(I) stronghold. In the 1995 Assembly elections, the Congress(I) won an overwhelming majority and formed a government with Gegong Apang as Chief Minister. Apang left the party following differences with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and formed the Arunachal Congress in September 1996 with the support of 54 MLAs. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the Arunachal Congress allied itself with the BJP. Apang's son, Omak Apang, was elected from Arunachal West constituency and was later inducted into the A.B. Vajpayee government.



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Mukut Mithi, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh.



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Arunachal Congress(I) chief Gegong Apang.

Several leaders of the party, even Apang's close associates, were not happy with the way he pushed for his son's entry into the Ministry, depriving senior party leader Rajkumar Wangcha, two-time winner from Arunachal East, of a chance to become a Minister. Rajkumar was angry and a revolt ensued. Five Ministers, including Mukut Mithi, who stood by Rajkumar, were dropped from the State Cabinet. Shortly thereafter, the dissidents, under the leadership of Mukut Mithi, formed the Arunachal Congress (Mithi) with 40 MLAs on their side. Subsequently, Mithi was installed as Chief Minister in January. In April, Arunachal Congress (Mithi) merged with the Congress(I), which had only four MLAs, and formed the Congress(I) Government. S.C. Jamir and NCP leader P.A. Sangma are said to have played an important role in bringing about the merger of the Arunachal Congress (Mithi) and the Congress(I).

Political observers say that an erosion of the Apang camp had been taking place since he was thrown out of power. Deserted by his trusted colleagues and associates at the organisational level, Apang is now not in a position to regain his political triumph.

The Congress(I) is contesting both the seats. It has fielded Jarbom Gamlin in Arunachal West and Rajkumar Wangcha in Arunachal East. The Arunachal Congress, a constituent of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), has renominated Omak Apang in Arunachal West and the BJP candidate, Tapir Gao, is contesting from Arunachal East. The NCP named Toko Kach for the Arunachal West seat.

THE Arunachal Congress and the BJP have not arrived at a clear understanding on the sharing of seats for the Assembly elections. The Arunachal Congress has nominated 42 candidates and the BJP 28. A spokesman of the Arunachal Congress said that a friendly contest would take place in 10 seats. Thirteen Arunachal Congress members of the dissolved Assembly, including nine Ministers of the Apang Ministry, have been renominated. Gegong Apang is contesting from his home constituency, Tuting Tingkiang, in upper Siang district. The NCP has fielded 18 candidates.

The Congress(I) is contesting all the 60 seats. The main advantage for the ruling party is that the anti-incumbency factor will not be in play as it came to power less than a year ago. ■



KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE ethnic issue is dominating the election scene in Sikkim yet again. The tiny State with an electorate of 2.5 lakhs, will witness simultaneous polls on October 3 for 32 Assembly seats and one Lok Sabha seat. Twelve Assembly seats are reserved for the Bhutia and Lepcha communities, two for the Scheduled Castes (S.C.) and one for the Sangha (monasteries). The remaining seats fall in the general category.

The majority Sikkim Nepalese population has traditionally had a monopoly over almost all the general seats and the two constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes. The Nepalese outnumber the Bhutias and Lepchas even in the constituencies that are dominated by tribal people. The three major political parties – the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) and the Congress(I) – are seeking to cash in on this complex divide. Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling has made several requests to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose government the SDF supports, to restore in the Assembly the 'Nepali seats' that were scrapped in 1979. In a memorandum to the Centre, he demanded that 16 seats be reserved for the Sikkim Nepalis. Reservation of seats is the SDF's main campaign issue. The Opposition SSP and the Congress(I) have also sought reservation of 'Nepali seats'. The parties are also seeking reservation of seats for Tsongs (Limboos), a Nepali tribe.

Another major election issue is the reopening of cross-border trade between Sikkim and Tibet. Border trade was stopped following the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962. The political parties are in favour of the restoration of border trade. Chamling has been mounting pressure on Delhi to resume trade with Tibet through the strategic Nathu La Pass.

AS the campaigning gains momentum following the release of the lists of contestants, it is clear that the major political parties are locked in a triangular fight for the Lok Sabha seat and for most of the Assembly seats. The main fight, of course, will be between the SDF and the SSP. The Congress(I), although it is only a third-ranking force, is not ready to give up without a fight. For the Lok Sabha seat, the SDF has renominated Bhim Dahal. The SSP has fielded Satish Chandra Rai, a new face in the State's political scene, and the Congress(I) has nominated Somenath Poudyal. Two independent candidates are also in the fray.

The Congress(I) and the SSP are contesting all the 32 Assembly seats. The SDF has fielded 31 candidates, leaving one reserved seat for the Sangha, not wishing to bring politics into the affairs of the



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling.



MALABIKA BHATTACHARYA

Sikkim Sangram Parishad leader Nar Bahadur Bhandari.

monasteries.

The SDF is relying on the performance of the Chamling Government to regain power. The SSP, on the other hand, is counting on the anti-incumbency factor. Judging by the personalised attacks by Chamling and the SSP president and former Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, against each other, it is evident that a bitter battle is ahead.

The State Congress(I) leadership is aware of the fact that the party will not be able to win a good number of Assembly seats. The Congress(I) wants to win at least five or six seats, so that it can strike a deal with the SDF or the SSP if the margin of victory narrows down. In the current Assembly, the SDF has 25 seats, the SSP three and the Congress(I) four. In 1994, the SDF won 19 seats, the SSP 10 and the Congress(I) three. The SDF's strength came down to 18, when one of its MLAs, P.T. Lucksom, was suspended from the party. Lucksom joined the Congress(I). The Congress(I)'s strength increased to five when K.N. Upreti of the SSP joined it after being suspended from the SSP. Later, six SSP MLAs and one Congress(I) MLA defected to the SDF, increasing its strength to 25.

The State Congress(I) president and Rajya Sabha member Karma Topden told *Frontline* that his party was certain to increase its strength. With the hope of capturing the tribal vote bank in the rural areas, the Congress(I) kicked off its poll campaign immediately after the announcement of poll dates by holding a rally in Gangtok, which was addressed by the Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi promised to accord reservation of seats in the Assembly for the Nepalis and various ethnic groups. "If the Congress(I) comes to power at the Centre, it will include the Tamangs, the Gurungs and the Rais in the tribal list, while the Bhutias and Lepchas will be given their own identities," she said.

The Congress(I) ruled the State for five years from 1974, when Sikkim merged with India. It started losing strength after the 1979 elections. Nar Bahadur Bhandari quit the Congress(I) and formed the SSP, which was elected to power in 1979. Bhandari ruled for three terms, barring a brief break in 1984 when the State was under President's Rule. In the 1985 elections, the SSP won 29 of the 32 seats. Its performance was astounding in the 1989 elections, when it got all the 32 seats. It was in 1993, a year before another round of Assembly elections, that Pawan Kumar Chamling, a Cabinet Minister in the Nar Bahadur Bhandari government, broke away from the SSP to form another regional party, the Sikkim Democratic Front. The SDF won an absolute majority in the 1994 elections.

For almost four years after his defeat, Bhandari, against whom a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe is on, has kept a low profile. Lately, he has come out of hibernation in a flurry of political activities. The SSP chief told *Frontline* that his party units in every corner of the State had been revitalised during the last one year. "I have myself toured 31 constituencies and found that the people of Sikkim are disillusioned with the performance of the Chamling government. For the last five years, the State has made no progress on any front. Moreover, the people are unhappy with the SDF's support to the BJD-led coalition at the Centre," Bhandari said.

At every election meeting, Chamling has launched a frontal attack on Bhandari saying that the latter has no moral right to contest elections as he faces a CBI chargesheet. The CBI cases against Bhandari, relating to the amassing of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income and misappropriation of public funds, have entered a crucial phase in the special court set up for the purpose. Amid attacks and counter-attacks, analysts notice one significant achievement of the SDF Government – lasting its full term proving wrong all predictions of its early end.

Political observers believe that the SDF's support base in the rural areas have remained intact. In a bid to win over the minority Buddhist Bhutia-Lepcha tribal community, who are likely to play a significant role in the elections, the party has demanded that one more seat be reserved for Sikkim in both Houses of Parliament. The SDF also demanded that Newars, Bahuns, Chhetris, or NBCs and Jogis, Sanyasis and Thamis be included in the list of other backward castes. If this is done, the SDF expects to get the support of a sizable section of the upper caste Nepalese in addition to that of the poor and those belonging to the backward communities. The fact that Chamling himself belongs to the OBC category, which constitutes the largest chunk of the electorate, is likely to prove to be an advantage to the SDF.

Nar Bahadur Bhandari is contesting from two constituencies – his home constituency of Soreng in West Sikkim for a fifth time and the Nepalese upper caste-dominated Rhenock in East Sikkim. Chamling is contesting from his home constituency, Damthang, for the fourth time in a row. ■



V. VENKATESAN

THE crowd that had gathered at Maharajpur's vast playground kept looking to the sky. Hours went by, but the expected helicopter was nowhere in sight. A group of Bharatiya Janata Party work-

ers lit a bonfire at a corner of the makeshift helipad to enable the pilot to identify and land near the venue with his star passengers, Vinod Khanna and Hema Malini. Some distance away, the security personnel controlled the surging crowd, and people vied to occupy the little space available on the roof of a school building to have glimpse of their stars.

A jeep fitted with a mike and a cut-out of Atal Behari Vajpayee was readied to transport the film personalities to the venue of the public meeting. As the arrival of the copter was delayed, the crowd lost its patience and interest. A group of people began debating the outcome of Doordarshan's exit poll. One of them remarked that he would not be surprised if the Congress(I) repeated its November 1998 performance in the State, which was possible owing to the Chief Minister's "effective management of the elections", wryly indicating the possible role of the official machinery in the victory. Another expressed confidence in the accuracy of the exit poll: the NDA may get a majority after all, he said.

The BJP MLA for Maharajpur, Ramdayal Ahirwar, was waiting with his followers. A drizzle turned into by a downpour. The film stars may not arrive, moaned a local BJP leader. The crowd dispersed. Rains had confined the stars to their hotel rooms in Bhopal.

MAHARAJPUR, an Assembly segment in the Khajuraho Lok Sabha constituency, was one of the many venues chosen to close the campaigning for the 14 constituencies in Madhya Pradesh that went to the polls on September 18.

The BJP's choice of Maharajpur in the Vindhya Pradesh region for the star blitz was curious. Maharajpur's main business is cultivation of betel leaves. Pan is exported to other countries from here, after meeting the domestic demand. The Chaurasia community (a Scheduled Caste), which is involved in pan-making, is traditionally known to have provided a fertile ground for the growth of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the rest of the Sangh Parivar. The local BJP MLA was elected for the fourth successive time last year from here. No wonder, the BJP considers this constituency a safe bet.

However, caste dynamics appear to have swallowed the Atal *lehar* (wave) here, as in the rest of the Vindhya Pradesh region, bordering Uttar Pradesh. The BJP is waging an uphill battle to retain the Khajuraho seat, last held by the firebrand



ANJ PUSHKARNA

Uma Bharti, BJP candidate for Bhopal.

leader and Union Minister of State, Uma Bharti. Bharti's decision to contest from Bhopal this time has seemingly disappointed the Khajuraho voters. Although she had said that she would not be able to bear the physical strain of campaigning in the predominantly rural constituency, her followers and critics suspect that she might have sensed defeat in Khajuraho, in spite of the BJP's remarkable victory in five out of eight Assembly constituencies in the November 1998 elections. The Congress(I) won two seats and the Samajwadi Party won one Assembly seat. Uma Bharti's disillusioned followers and many voters blame her for not visiting the constituency after winning the seat last year.

Uma Bharti's brother Swamiprasad Lodhi, the MLA from Malehara, has much clout within the local party unit. Through Bharti, Lodhi sought to sideline those who opposed him in the party. One such person was Baby Raja alias Surendra Pratap Singh, who resisted Lodhi's growing influence in the region. Baby Raja wanted to contest the Assembly elections last year, but Uma Bharti and Lodhi influenced the party leadership to deny him the ticket. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, Uma Bharti pacified Baby Raja and offered truce by promising him the ticket to fight the Assembly elections. That Baby Raja has since left the party and joined the Samajwadi Party is cause for worry to Uma Bharti. Baby Raja, who was a key member of the Sunderlal Patwa faction in the BJP, filed his nomination papers for Khajuraho on the Samajwadi Party ticket.

Indeed, Khajuraho offers an interesting spectacle of how parties other than the Congress(I) have embraced and rewarded defectors. Uma Bharti has been replaced by Akhand Pratap Singh Yadav, who has alienated several of Uma Bharti's followers. He was originally in the Janata Dal. Within a span of one year, he joined the Congress(I) and later the Bahujan Samaj Party, only to move on to the BJP. Akhand Pratap Yadav was a Minister in the Digvijay Singh Government during his first term in office. He is banking on the support of the Yadavs in the constituency, although the S.P. and the BSP candidate, Umesh Yadav, have also targeted the same vote bank. Umesh Yadav was the S.P.'s candidate in 1998. He quit the party as he was not renominated.

The Congress(I) candidate, Vinod alias Satyavrat Chaturvedi, is contesting the Lok Sabha elections for the first time. Besides enjoying the support of the minority communities and the Scheduled Castes, Chaturvedi is likely to secure the votes of the numerically second-biggest Brahmin community. The absence of faction fights in the party with all the groups working for his victory, is another advantage. Chaturvedi's mother, Vidyavati Chaturvedi, was elected to the constituency in 1980 and 1984. She lost it to Uma Bharti in 1989. Satyavrat's campaign was aggressive, with the Congress(I) putting up several posters and banners. The BJP candidate's posters, by contrast, were hardly visible. While Akhand Pratap Yadav's supporters attribute this to his eagerness not to exceed the ceiling on expenditure fixed by the Election Commission, his critics accuse him of hoping to win on an 'Atal wave' and save the money.

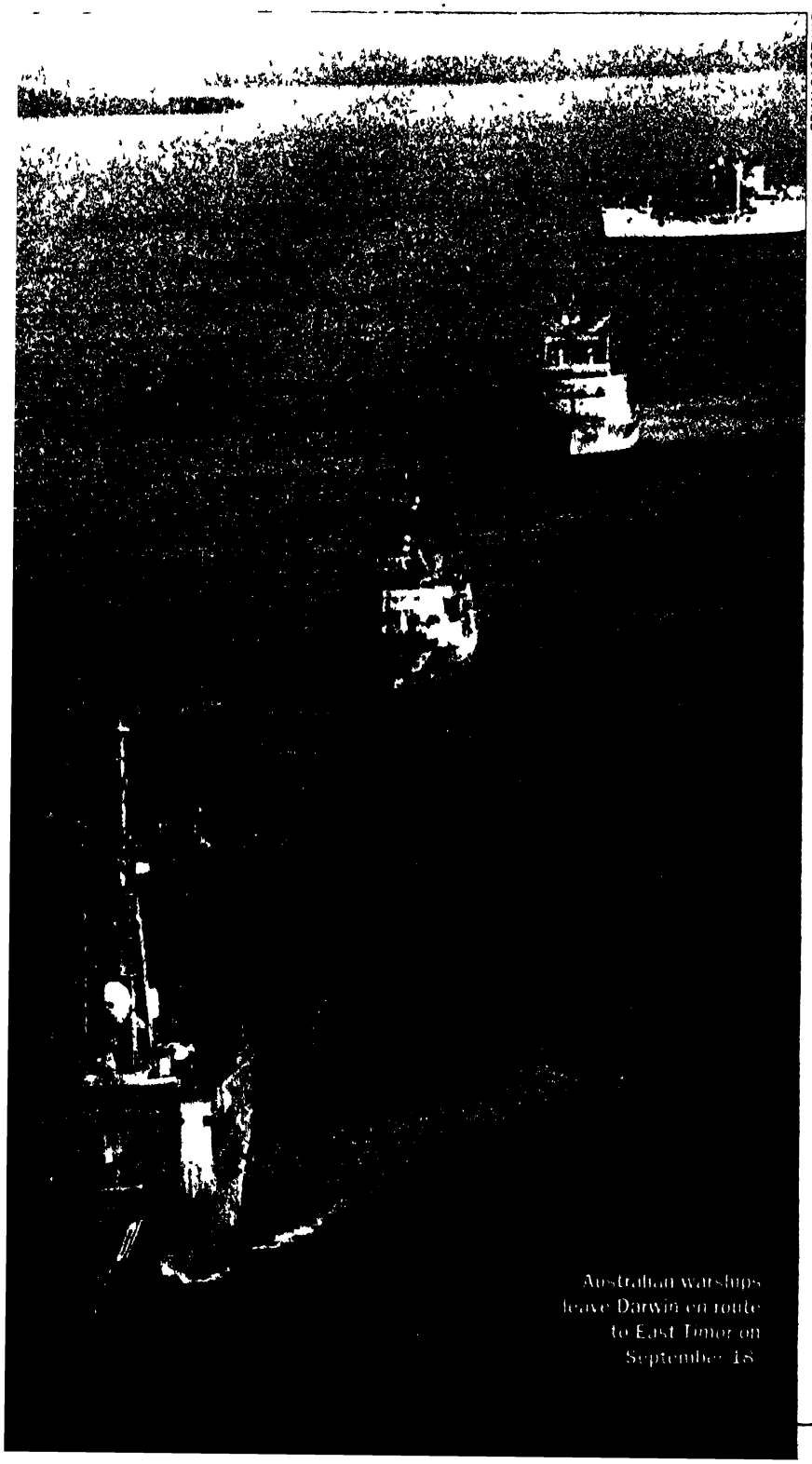
Satyavrat was a Minister in the Arjun Singh Government in the 1980s. His Cabinet Minister was Digvijay Singh. Satyavrat failed to get a berth in the subsequent Digvijay Singh Ministry despite being elected from Chandla in 1993. He resigned his Assembly seat in 1997 in protest against Digvijay Singh's failure to implement his proposals to develop the constituency.

Digvijay Singh reportedly persuaded Satyavrat to contest the Lok Sabha elections, promising to consider his proposals.

In the neighbouring constituency of Damoh, the chances of the BJP candidate, Dr. Ramkrishna Kusmaria, who has been winning the seat since 1989, are rated high compared to the Congress(I)'s new face, Tilak Singh Lodhi. ■

A slow march to freedom

Under the protective wings of a U.N.-approved multinational force, East Timor prepares to savour freedom from Indonesian rule.



BRIAN CASSEY/AP

Australian warships leave Darwin en route to East Timor on September 18

P. S. SURYANARAYANA
in Singapore

IT looked like a snapshot of a voyage of high hopes to enfranchise a people yearning for freedom in a desolate spot of the earth. It was a smooth-sailing flotilla, which bore much of the world's intentions to establish peace as also the material means to achieve that goal through a fight if need be. And, by dawn on September 19, it was heading from Darwin in northern Australia to the shores of East Timor, the world's latest independent state-to-be.

Aboard the missile-guided frigates and vessels carrying landing craft were the members of an 8,000-strong multinational military force. The expeditionary force, led by Australia, had been mandated by the United Nations Security Council to restore peace in East Timor, the tiny Indonesian province which voted overwhelmingly for a transition towards independence in a U.N.-sponsored "popular consultation" on August 30.

Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter provides for a credible use of all necessary military measures to restore peace in a given place and thereby maintain international order. Hence, when the vessels set sail from Darwin on September 18, the mission had a stamp of legitimacy.

On September 19, the Australian commander of the multinational force, Major-General Peter Cosgrove, held a preliminary meeting with the Indonesian military commander in East Timor, Major-General Kiki Syahnakri, in Dili, the capital of East Timor. The subjects discussed were the modalities for inducting the U.N.-authorised force (which is technically not the same as a U.N. brigade of "blue berets") and a parallel or even a rapid pull-out of the Indonesian military units from the territory. Speaking of the meeting, Cosgrove hailed the "cooperative spirit" in which he and his delegation were received by Syahnakri and the "first class cooperation" from the Indonesian side. Syahnakri said that Jakarta would hand over its military command over East Timor to the multilateral force in a phased



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/AP

Australian troops, part of the multinational peacekeeping force, deployed around Dili airport on September 20.

manner from September 20. It was an acknowledgment of some kind that Jakarta would no longer lay claim to East Timor.

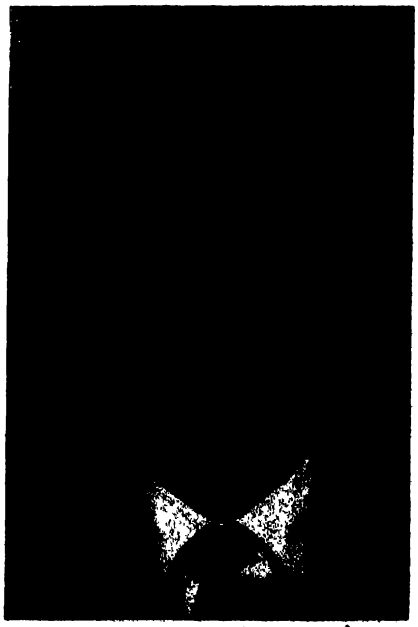
Although Australian Prime Minister John Howard has warned his compatriots about the dangers lurking in the way of the U.N. mission, in view of the threats from pro-Indonesia militiamen in East Timor, the mission is expected to last until the territory can be put on the course of independence.

THE launch of the military expedition was preceded by a "pie-in-the-sky" mercy mission for starving East Timorese refugees who had fled their homes following extensive violence that was unleashed by suspected elements in the Indonesian military and their friends in the pro-Jakarta militias of East Timor after the August 30 vote. Cargo planes, operating under the aegis of the multinational command, air-dropped food and other essential supplies in areas identified as having large concentrations of displaced people. A silver lining was that the first mercy flights were not thwarted either by the suspected "rogue" elements of the Indonesian military or the anti-Independence militias.

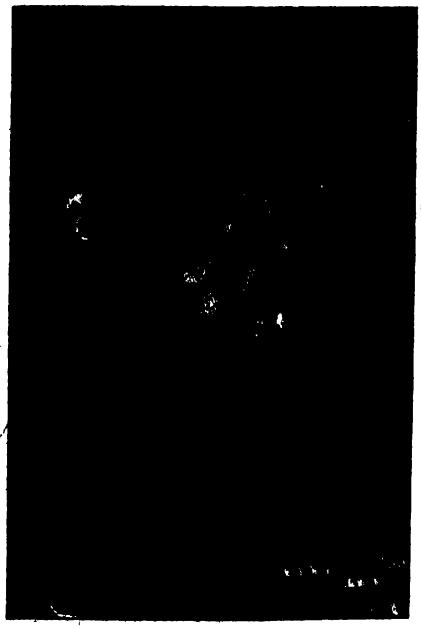
Precise figures of the number of East Timorese killed or displaced or forcibly "re-located" across the border in West Timor will be known only after the multilateral force overcomes resistance from those unwilling to see the territory slip out of Indonesia's grasp. Indications are that a military coalition of at least 23 nations will be deployed in East Timor in a calibrated fashion, beginning September 20.

At least one in every five of the 4.5-lakh eligible voters of East Timor had opted for continued association with Indonesia, albeit with enhanced provincial autonomy, while nearly 80 per cent of them voted for nothing less than total sovereignty.

But East Timor's march to freedom will be a measured one, if the U.N. does not suddenly swerve from the path it had sketched out, ahead of the August 30 referendum, in conjunction with Indonesia and Portugal – the former colonial masters of East Timor which beat a hasty retreat from that half-island in the Indonesian archipelago in the mid-1970s. Encouraged by the Portuguese action and flaunting an anti-Communist flag, which the United States-led West (excluding Portugal) took note of, Indonesia had invaded and later annexed East Timor. It



ED WRAY/AP



EMMANUEL DUNAND AFP/ AP

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie. (Right) Gen. Wiranto, chief of the Indonesian armed forces.

The Kashmir non-context

P.S. SURYANARAYANA

THE consequences of the United Nations' unique experiment in constitutional engineering in East Timor – both the "popular consultation" or the vote for self-determination on August 30, and the latest authorisation by the Security Council for a multinational military force under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter – can pose a challenge to India's diplomatic ingenuity in its quest for a final settlement of the Kashmir issue.

India obviously knows how to fend off any bid by Pakistan to invoke East Timor as a millennium-eve example. Despite the India-Pakistan Shimla Accord of 1972 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999, neither Islamabad's reflex action of seeking to keep Kashmir in U.N. focus nor the resultant challenge to New Delhi is a matter of surprise.

For a start, the Clinton administration's categorical refusal to equate Kashmir with East Timor is a huge plus point for India in facing any innovative campaign that Pakistan may launch on the international stage. In the prismatic worldview of U.S. President Bill Clinton, there obviously is a refractive difference between East Timor and Kashmir, and for good reasons of fact and policy.

Prima facie, the singular difference between East Timor, a former colony of Portugal, and Kashmir is that the former's annexation by Indonesia was never recognised by the U.N., whereas the latter's union with India was part of a British-approved transfer of power formula.

From a Pakistani perspective, a simple but profound question now is whether the latest developments in East Timor will have a resonance in Kashmir, and if so, whether New Delhi can at all be "encouraged" by the international community, which suffers from a certain degree of Kashmir-fatigue, to allow U.N. mediation in the matter. Significant in this context is a comment by Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, in an interview to this correspondent, that there is no similarity between East Timor and Kashmir, given the differing historical backgrounds of the two issues. He, however, added that Indonesia as well as India had come in for international criticism for their alleged human rights violations in their respective disputed territories.

Reacting to a question on East Timor's relevance to Kashmir, Jamsheed Marker, U.N. Special Representative to East Timor and formerly Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the U.N., remarked that Kashmir was not within his mandate. Marker, who was in Dili on the polling day, expressed the hope that the Kashmir issue would be resolved amicably.

It seemed an irony, at a different but related level, that two Indians were associated with the pre-poll phase at the U.N.'s behest, and not as the designated representatives of India. Om Rathore, a top civilian police official, was entrusted with the task of studying the deployment of international civilian police personnel and other unarmed military consultants who were to liaise with the Indonesian security forces for the pre-poll arrangements.

Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee was commissioned by a U.N. agency to study the human rights situation in East Timor ahead of the poll preparations there, and he accomplished that task to the satisfaction of the U.N.

The confusion in certain circles in India in equating the U.N.'s East Timor assignments with the world body's track record of conducting democratic polls in Cambodia, for instance, is misplaced. An election held under U.N. supervision for a political transition in a country like Cambodia, without the result in any way intended to affect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of that state, is entirely different from the present U.N. operation in East Timor.

The Clinton administration's refusal to equate Kashmir with East Timor is a huge plus point for India in facing any innovative campaign that Pakistan may launch on the international stage.

It was not in Jakarta's strategic self-interest to allow a (potentially) free East Timor in the midst of the Indonesian archipelago. It also had in mind the economic rewards of retaining the territory. In the process, Indonesia's military leaders and foot soldiers – power-brokers under a system in which the armed forces had a decisive say in domestic politics – antagonised the vast majority of East Timorese. At the same time they secured a strong pro-Jakarta constituency in the territory.

But the Indonesian Government is in a dilemma, especially because many ordinary Indonesians in this most populous South-East Asian country with a population of over 210 million, aspiring for a quick resurgence of democracy in their country, are not particularly worried about the "defeat" of their Army in East Timor. They instead hope that the military establishment, long used to ruling the roost in Jakarta but now chastened by the East Timor experience, will respect their democratic rights. This is expected of the top Army officials even as they exert energies to restore their wounded pride by seeking to sustain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Indonesia through suitable, perhaps more "humane" measures, in other pockets of separatism.

To say that Jakarta is now up against its nemesis in East Timor is to miss the larger international picture of related power games. For four days from September 9, international political leaders wrestled with the East Timor crisis at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Auckland, New Zealand. The delicate exercise, catalysed by New Zealand, Australia and Canada, was moderated by the United States. The resultant diplomatic denouement – the U.N.'s authorisation of a multinational expeditionary force to restore law and order in East Timor in a transparent open-ended operation – bears the stamp of the world-view of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The history of Jakarta's links with East Timor and the hopes and aspirations of Indonesians for democracy were, in one sense, recognised by Clinton. In taking a measured view of the possible consequences of isolating the world's largest Islamic country (as he described Indonesia, despite its wish to portray itself as a Muslim-majority state with a secular society), Clinton recognised the need to "protect" the "integrity of democracy" everywhere, including the Indonesian heartland. With the Indonesians now facing the psychological moment of truth regarding a revival of democracy in their



FIRDIA LISNAWATI/AP

East Timorese refugees crowd for food rations supplied by the Indonesian Army as they wait to be evacuated at Dili airport on September 19. (Below) In a refugee camp, a woman sleeps with a knife next to her.



PAULA BRONSTEIN GAMMA


OKA BUDHI AP


GAEL CORNIER AP



East Timorese leaders (from left) Xanana Gusmao, Bishop Carlos Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta. The onus of bringing about a peaceful resolution of the crisis now lies with them.

country, in the wake of their powerful Army's sense of loss in East Timor, Clinton did not opt for a Kosovo-like operation in East Timor. Instead he put forward a strategy that aimed at "pressuring" Indonesia to "invite" an international military force into East Timor, albeit under U.N. auspices.

In chalking out this strategy and carrying his allies such as Australia and New Zealand with him, despite their geostrategic stakes in East Timor, Clinton obviously left the option open for other means if Indonesia were to fail to "invite" the U.N. At the same time the U.S. remained in constant touch with the Indonesian military chief, General Wiranto, who eventually consented to such an "invitation" from the beleaguered Habibie administration.

Jenny Shipley, New Zealand Prime Minister and the APEC summit hostess, indicated, in reply to a question from this correspondent, that no ultimatum was issued to the Habibie Government about the possible use of military force outside the U.N. auspices.

Jakarta responded quite positively to the modified Clinton doctrine for the globalisation of democracy. Clinton made it a point to convey on September 12, while in Auckland, that even "as the eyes of the world are on that tiny place (East Timor) today", the international community would have "a strong interest in seeing an Indonesia that is stable, prosperous and democratic". For many agitated Indonesians, though, Clinton's concern for democracy in Indonesia *per se* was not the prime issue. The question was whether a new Constitution for East Timor would be drafted by external forces. They were incensed over the manner in which Australia, which had accorded recognition for Indonesia's annexation of East Timor in 1975, had now taken a U-turn to lead the multinational force. Violent protests on the streets of Jakarta followed the passage of the U.N. Security Council resolution. The demonstrators

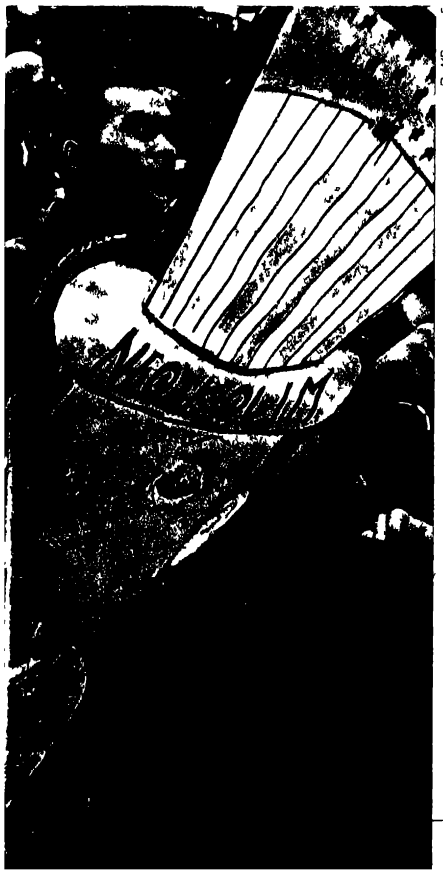
Students protest against foreign intervention in East Timor in front of a U.N. office building in Jakarta on September 4. One of them holds a cut-out of President Clinton with a hat inscribed "neo-colonialism".



were no less angry with the United Kingdom, which had given diplomatic sanctuary to the charismatic leader of the East Timorese independence movement, Xanana Gusmao, as soon as he was released from prison by the Indonesian authorities after the August 30 referendum. Gusmao, who is eager to work for reconciliation among the warring factions within East Timor as also between that territory and Indonesia, later left the British embassy in Jakarta for an undisclosed destination.

Some extremist Islamist elements in Indonesia have even pledged to wage a holy war against the multinational forces. Therefore, the onus of a peaceful denouement in East Timor lies with Gusmao and other East Timorese leaders like Jose Ramos-Horta and Bishop Carlos Belo, besides the U.N. and the multinational force.

The multinational force is led by and consists of troops mainly from Australia (over 4,500 out of the initially planned total of between 7,000 and 8,000). Besides New Zealand, Canada and Britain, the coalition consists of some South-East Asian nations as well. While the U.S. association is confined to non-combat logistics of a sophisticated kind, several other countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Argentina and Brazil, have offered to send troops to augment the original core group. ■



The role of the West

The Western nations, with whose tacit support East Timor was subjugated by Indonesia, have changed their tune.

JOHN CHERIAN

THE long-suffering people of East Timor finally have some reasons to be optimistic. On September 20, the first unit of a multinational peacekeeping force landed in the strife-torn territory with a mandate to crush a campaign of terror unleashed when East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia three weeks earlier. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Government started a gradual pull-out of its troops. The commander of the Indonesian troops in East Timor had said that the pull-out could take less than a week, but there are also reports from Jakarta which indicate that influential sections of the Indonesian establishment not yet reconciled to the dramatic turn of events want a military presence in East Timor for some more time. A quick pull-out would further inflame domestic public opinion, which has generally viewed the recent events as a breach of the country's sovereignty. Even more galling for the Indonesians is the fact that the United Nations-approved peacekeeping force is to be headed by Australia.

The bulk of the force will comprise Australian troops. The few Asian countries that have reluctantly pledged to contribute are sending only a token number. The Indonesian Government had wanted a predominantly Asian peacekeeping force. But the rapid pace of events in early September, coupled with the reluctance of many of Indonesia's Asian neighbours to take the initiative, left Jakarta with very few alternatives. And in the ultimate analysis, the ham-handed and brutal way in which the Indonesian Government handled the Timor issue has left it with few sympathisers in the international community. The U.N. Security Council chided Indonesia in early September for failing "to stem the uncontrolled violence" after East Timor overwhelmingly voted for independence.

But what is highly suspicious is the key role assigned to Australia in the peacekeeping force and the blueprint that the West has for the region. Australia had been painstakingly preparing for such a role in East Timor. By the end of August, 5,000 troops were already in place in the city of Darwin, only an hour and a half flying time to Dili, the East Timorese capital. The Australian effort to get into East Timor at the earliest was evident from the very outset.

Australia, like other leading proponents of speedy military intervention today, has been deeply involved with Indonesia ever since the Suharto regime sent in its Army in 1975 to subdue brutally the Timorese people when they were on the verge of *de jure* independence. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other Western intelligence agencies were fully aware of the Indonesian Army's moves. The top Australian Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) base near Darwin had intercepted Indonesia's military and intelligence communications and passed it on to the CIA and MI6 (the



SUSAN WALSH AP

President Bill Clinton. The U.S. is posing as a champion of human rights and decolonisation in the region.

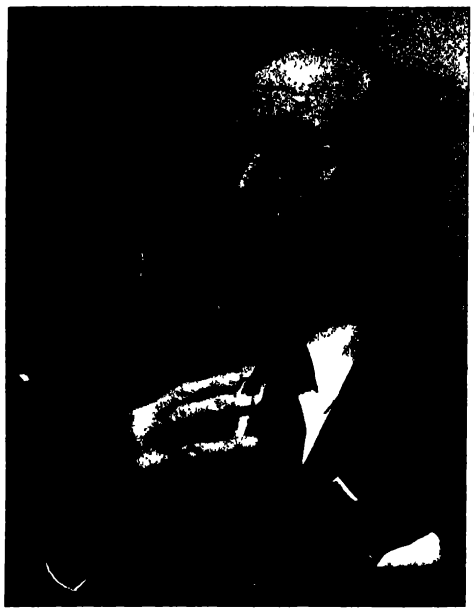
British Intelligence agency) under treaty arrangements. The Australian Government was in fact aware of Suharto's invasion plans four months before the Indonesian troops marched into Dili. Gough Whitlam, the Australian Prime Minister, had told Suharto in 1974 itself when the Portuguese were on the verge of leaving their colony, that East Timor should be part of Indonesia as it did not have the economic resources to be a viable, independent state.

The Australian High Commissioner to Indonesia at that time, Richard Woolcott, had sent a message to his government four months before the invasion arguing the Indonesian point of view and the need for Australian public opinion to be "assisted" and urging that the Government show Indonesia "private" understanding with regard to "their problems". "We do not want to become apologists for Indonesia. I know I am recommending a pragmatic rather than a principled stand but that is what national interest and foreign policy is all about...", he went on to add.

The Timorese were expendable in 1975 when Indonesia was under the brutal and corrupt dictatorship of Gen. Suharto. Australia's major objective then was to ensure that its neighbourhood remained stable so that Australian mining companies could start exploiting the rich gas and oil reserves in the Indonesian archipelago. In 1979, Australia went ahead and gave *de jure* recognition to the Indonesian annexation of East Timor, the first and only country to break international ranks. Indonesia and Australia finalised the Timor Gap Treaty in 1989, splitting the mineral reserves between themselves.

The then British Ambassador to Indonesia was even more forthright. In his cable to his superiors in London in 1975, he stressed that it was in Britain's interests that Indonesia "absorb the territory as soon and unobtrusively as possible". The British Government under Margaret Thatcher signed a series of lucrative arms deals with the Suharto regime. One of the beneficiaries of the deals was Thatcher's son. According to Western journalists who covered East Timor in the 1980s, British-made Hawk fighter jets which were sold to the Suharto regime were used with devastating accuracy against Fretelin guerilla targets by the Indonesian Air Force, causing hundreds of casualties among civilians.

The U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, also signalled to Jakarta that the United States would not object to an Indonesian invasion of Timor. In fact, two days before the invasion, President Gerald Ford and Kissinger were the guests of Suharto, despite having been fully aware of the impending invasion. Kissinger rationalised that an independent East Timorese state with a Communist government in the Indonesian archipelago, was unthinkable. (Deep sea trenches near the Timor coast are used by U.S. nuclear submarines travelling between the Pacific and the Indian oceans and the U.S. was not ready to risk their control falling into the hands of a potentially Communist country.)



RICK RYCROFT/AP

Australian Prime Minister John Howard. His country's agenda on East Timor is suspect.

The leadership of the guerilla organisation Fretilin, which spearheaded the liberation struggle against the Portuguese, had a left orientation, like the People's Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA) in Angola and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in Mozambique, which were also engaged in overthrowing the yoke of Portuguese colonialism. While invading East Timor, the Indonesian generals had also sought to justify their actions by describing the popular Fretelin interim administration as "Communist". When the Indonesian Army went on a killing spree in East Timor, the U.S. Government increased its supply of arms to Indonesia despite the U.N. General Assembly passing a resolution "strongly deploring" Indonesia'a aggression and asking it to withdraw its troops "without delay". The U.N. Security Council had also demanded of "all states to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor". But the U.S. State Department was busy sabotaging the will of the international community. The U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. at that time, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, wrote: "The Department of State desired that the U.N. prove utterly ineffective. This task was given to me and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success".

It was the tacit support of the Western nations that allowed Indonesia to invade East Timor in the first place. Now that there is no fear of East Timor becoming another Cuba, the U.S. and its main surrogate in the region, Australia, are posing as champions of human rights and decolonisation.

The peacekeeping force under Australian command is expected to number 7,000 in the initial stages. President Bill Clinton has announced that the U.S. would send 200 soldiers and heavy equipment. The British are sending 250 Gurkhas to the peace enforcement contingent that is authorised by the U.N. Security Council to "use all necessary means" to restore law and order. A total of 23 countries have so far given their commitment to participate in the force. Some countries such as India have not yet made up their minds. India has always viewed the issue of East Timor as an issue of "decolonisation" but some in the corridors of power feel that the events in East Timor could be viewed as a precedent for intervention in the domestic affairs of a country. The U.S. State Department spokesman went out of his way to allay New Delhi's fears by saying that there cannot be any comparison between Kashmir and East Timor.

THERE is a nationalist surge in Indonesia as illustrated by the popularity of Megawati Sukarnoputri, who is tipped to be the next President. The loss of East Timor has not gone down well with her supporters. She herself has refused to endorse the decision of the Habibie Government to recognise the reality. The people hold the powerful Indonesian Army responsible for the dramatic turn of events. They fear that the restive provinces of Aceh and Irian Jaya may be next in line for secession. More and more provinces are demanding autonomy from Indonesia. The gamble of Suharto and the military in 1975 has now backfired and the present retreat is an admission that the invasion was not a success. The domestic backlash in the coming months is likely to affect the Army's ability to influence the country's internal affairs. ■

Arrest of a terrorist

THE Coimbatore police arrested in Madurai on September 7 Zahir Hussain, one of the 180 persons charge-sheeted in connection with the blasts in Coimbatore between February 14 and February 17, 1998. Coimbatore City Police Commissioner K. Radhakrishnan said that Zahir Hussain (30) was the brain behind the activities of Al-Umma, a banned terrorist organisation, which has been blamed for the blasts that killed 58 persons. Also arrested with Zahir Hussain was Siddiq Ali (23), another accused in the case. While Zahir Hussain alias Abdul Anuz belongs to Kollengode in Kerala, Siddiq Ali alias Sultan belongs to Melappalayam in Tirunelveli. Zahir Hussain carried a reward of Rs.2 lakhs on his head.

Nineteen explosions shook Coimbatore during the run-up to the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The first of them took place February 14, near the venue of an election meeting which was to be addressed by Bharatiya Janata Party leader L.K. Advani. Seven human bombs, all members of Al-Umma, were to target Advani.

Radhakrishnan said that Zahir Hussain was an expert bomb-maker and that it was under his guidance that 40 box-bombs and about 100 pipe-bombs used in the explosions were made. He had personally made many bombs. Top police officials said he had obtained the PEK (Plastic Explosives, Kirkee) from Abdul Naser Mahdani, chairman, People's Democratic Party of Kerala, which were to be used by human bombs that were to target Advani. Zahir Hussain had been associated with Al-Umma from 1990 and enjoyed the confidence of its founder-president S.A. Basha, who has been named the first accused in the blasts case. He had links with fundamentalist organisations in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Police officials said that he was involved in a series of murders and explosions. The incidents included the stabbing to death of Hindu Munnani activist Veera Siva in Coimbatore on August 29, 1989, the murder of P. Rajagopalan, Hindu Munnani State president in Madurai on October 10, 1994, the blast in the Hindu Munnani office at Chennai in 1995, the stabbing to death of a Hindu Munnani activist, Ramji, near Chennai in 1996 and the murder of Dr. V. Sridhar, president of the Tiruchi unit of the BJP on February 2, 1999. Zahir Hussain was also linked to a huge stockpile of bombs and weapons found in a house at Kodungaiyur in Chennai in 1996.

Police officials said that Zahir Hussain planted bombs near police establishments in Tiruchi, Coimbatore and Chennai in the last week of May 1999. These bombs were made by him in Madurai and despatched to the three cities, according to the police.

Siddiq Ali, a confidant of Zahir Hussain, was allegedly involved in the murder of Arumugham at Tirunelveli, the triple murder of Dr. Selvakumar, flower vendor Kannappan and tailor Sankar in August 1997 at Melappalayam and the murder of Dr. Sridhar at Tiruchi. Radhakrishnan said that the arrest of these two persons "has broken the back of Al-Umma". ■

T.S. Subramanian

Beedi fad

WARNING of a worrisome new trend in youth smoking, Massachusetts health officials recently released the United State's first official study on the prevalence among teenagers of smoking skinny, sweet-flavoured and highly potent cigarettes called beedis that are hand-rolled in India and faddishly popular among young Americans.

The study, whose results are rather approximate because they were not based on a rigorously random sample, found that of the 642 teenagers in the Boston inner city surveyed, 40 per cent had tried a beedi, nearly 16 per cent smoked beedis currently and nearly 8 per cent were "heavy users" who had smoked more than 100. "These are very disturbing findings that I believe have national importance," said Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Howard Koh.

The State Department of Public Health also announced that a separate study it undertook on the content of beedis found that, contrary to the seeming natural innocence of their leaf-wrapped looks, beedis could contain five times the tar and three times the nicotine of conventional cigarettes.

The beedi fad particularly concerns health officials and opponents of smoking because they say beedis seem tailor-made to attract young smokers. Beedis are often cheaper than conventional cigarettes, and they are available in more than a dozen flavours, including mint and strawberry.

The trouble is not only the appeal of the flavours, Alyonik Hrushow, director of the Tobacco Free Project of the San Francisco Public Health Department, said, but also the misapprehensions of many young people about the cigarettes themselves. "A lot of youth are not aware that beedis actually contain more nicotine than regular cigarettes," she said. "Because they're wrapped in a leaf and sort of sold as being natural, they think that it's somehow safer, and it's almost like a little underground sort of behaviour." Because beedis resemble marijuana joints, some young smokers enjoy an extra air of rebellion when they puff them in public; beedis also tend to go out frequently because the leaf they are rolled in does not burn well, requiring frequent re-lighting and deep inhaling that add to what some see as an impressive ritual.

A survey of stores, done in 1998 by teenagers at the Tobacco Free Project, found that beedis were significantly easier for under-age smokers to buy than conventional cigarettes and that most packs failed to carry the usual warning label of the dangers of tobacco. The teenagers have complained to the Federal Trade Commission and the U.S. Customs Service, Hrushow said.

Health officials said that the Boston survey was only a beginning, statistically, because it was carried out on a "convenient" sample of youth – teenagers who were willing to speak when approached in inner-city Boston neighbourhoods – rather than a carfully random sample. "These results will have to be supported in follow-up studies," Koh said.

Two young anti-smokinng advocates who helped perform the Boston survey, Jwuannita Core and Jennifer Veerasammy, said that when they asked teenagers why they smoked beedis, the answers often included a fondness for the head-rush the potent cigarettes produced. The replies , Core said, also included "they taste better"; "they were cheaper"; they were safer and easier to buy than cigarettes." And some said, "I like the flavour." ■

New York Times Service

Carnage in eastern Sri Lanka

AS September 18 dawned in eastern Sri Lanka, a total of 50 Sinhalese villagers, men, women and children, lay dead. The innocent villagers, residing in a nebulous zone in a linguistically polarised island-nation, were hacked to death in their sleep, reportedly by members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). An otherwise silent night was shattered by the killing-spree.

Gonagala division of Ampara district, bordering Batticaloa district, bore the brunt of the attack by the LTTE. The hacked remains of 14 persons in Chilaw Bund village were a sad sight. Butchered and chopped, the remains spoke of the intensity of the attack by the cadres of the LTTE.

A dissected palm in front of a pulverised skull was the final act of protection a middle-aged man had desperately sought before he was butchered. In the same room, barely a few feet away lay an overturned cot, under which one could see the body of a boy, perhaps not yet into his teens, 'sleeping' in a pool of blood. Next to him was a severely hacked body of a teenager. Both appeared to have been sleeping on the cot when they were butchered.



GEMUNU AMARASINGHE/AP

A Sinhalese woman grieves the death of her family members on September 18.

Herath Premasiri was the lone survivor of his family. The living room of his house was a veritable morgue. Walking across the blood-splattered floor one came across mutilated and hacked bodies. Twelve hours after the cold-blooded murders the remains awaited the arrival of judicial authorities with body-tags written out in paper and strapped around their wrists.

Of the 50 villagers hacked to death, 46 hailed from Gonagala. Of these, 14 were children. A total of 31 men and 15 women were done to death. No firearms were reportedly used by the killers as they "preferred the silence of the night" to operate. Two villagers each were killed from two other hamlets.

While no information is available on the number of attackers, details provided by some of the villagers indicated the presence of women cadres as well. Defence authorities estimate that the number of attackers could have been about 10, going by the magnitude of the deaths. The attackers had apparently arrived from nearby Batticaloa district, parts of which were under LTTE control. Going by previous incidents and the cold-blooded trail left behind, the hand of the Tigers in the killing does not appear to be in doubt.

The immediate provocation for this attack appeared to be an aerial bombing on September 15 by the Sri Lanka Air Force of Puthukudiyiruppu, a Tamil village, killing 22 Tamil people. While the incident was reported by the LTTE and confirmed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Sri Lankan defence authorities had denied it. They continue to maintain that the Puthukudiyiruppu bombings were "on selected and positively identified LTTE targets" and say that the ICRC was known to have made mistakes in the past.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, expressing "shock at the massacre", said that the act, committed at a time when the "Government is doing all possible efforts to solve the two-decade-long ethnic crisis in the island, was not acceptable to any civilised society." Assuring the Government's "assistance to the families of the victims," she "called upon political and civil authorities to take all measures to restore normalcy and provide protection for the affected areas."

Deputy Defence Minister Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte, who visited the affected areas along with the Army Commander and the Chief of the Air Force, condemned the act as "dastardly" and "carried out by a set of cowards." He said the LTTE was "acting in desperation" and was "taking revenge" for military setbacks in the Vanni area.

Reacting to the massacre, the Parliamentary leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), Joseph Pararajasingham, did not fail to mention the bombing of Puthukudiyiruppu. While "condemning the murder of innocent civilians" in Ampara, Pararajasingham in a letter to the President said, "When your Excellency's air force bombed the Puthukudiyiruppu village in Mullaitivu last Wednesday, killing 22 innocent Tamils, your Excellency neither expressed grief nor conveyed your sorrow." This "contrasting behaviour" he said "has gone to reinforce in the minds of the Tamil people that your Excellency too have decided to follow the same communal path of your predecessors."

While much blood has been shed in the decades-long separatist strife, this month's killings were the extreme manifestations of deeper maladies which come in the way of well-intentioned peace-makers and liberal political leaders. ■

V.S. Sambandan

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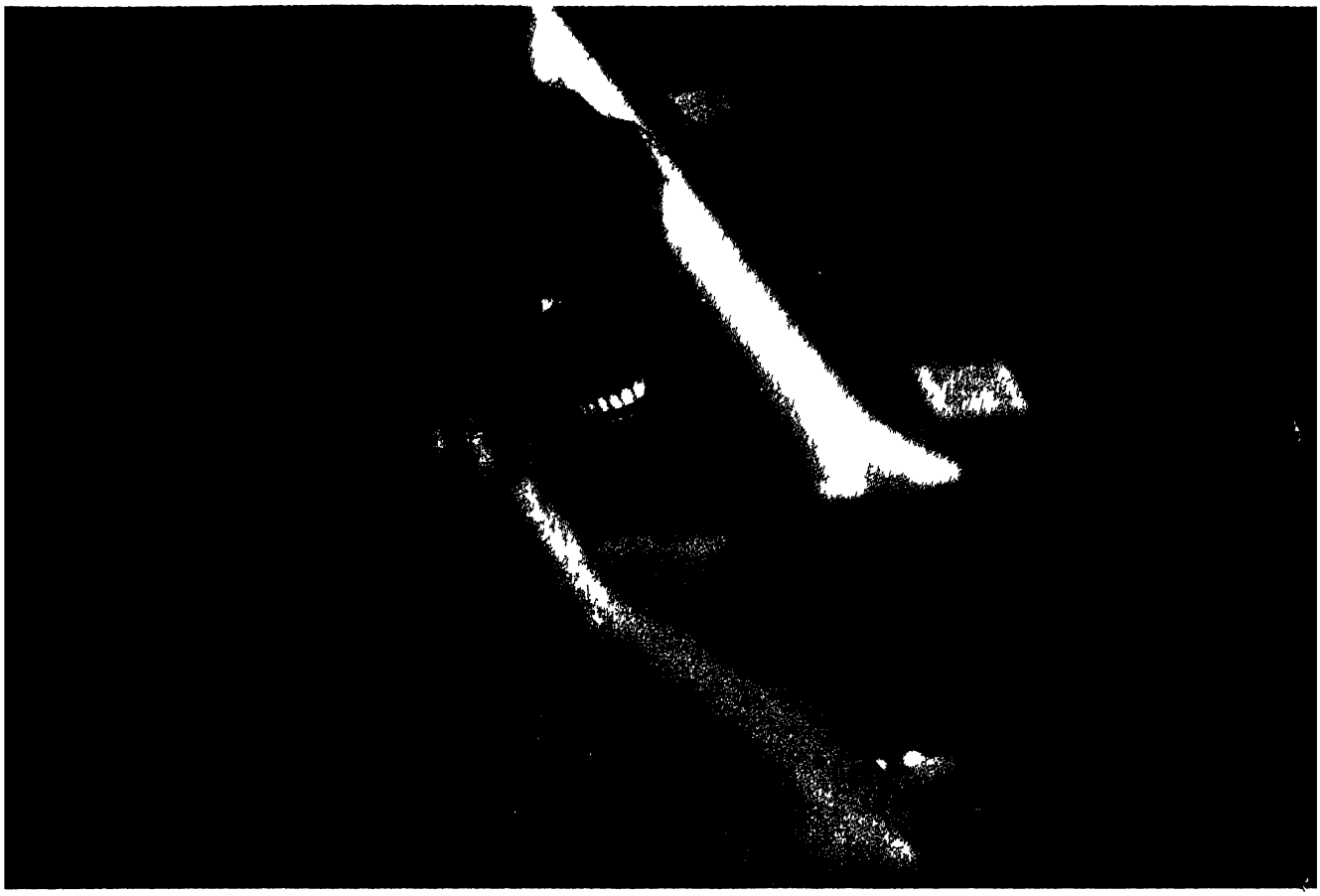


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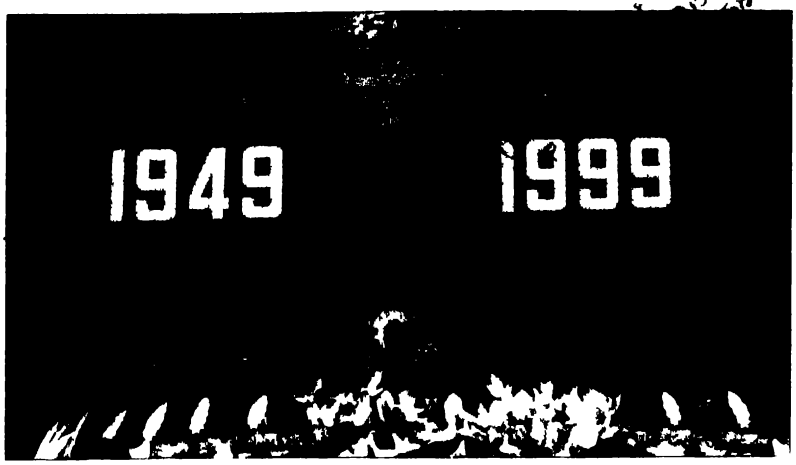
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Frontline



As a celebration of state, the accent of the festivities that mark the half century of the Peoples Republic of China is on the achievements of the past 20 years – of the post Mao Zedong era of reform which made China the fastest growing economy of the world and a player of global consequence 4



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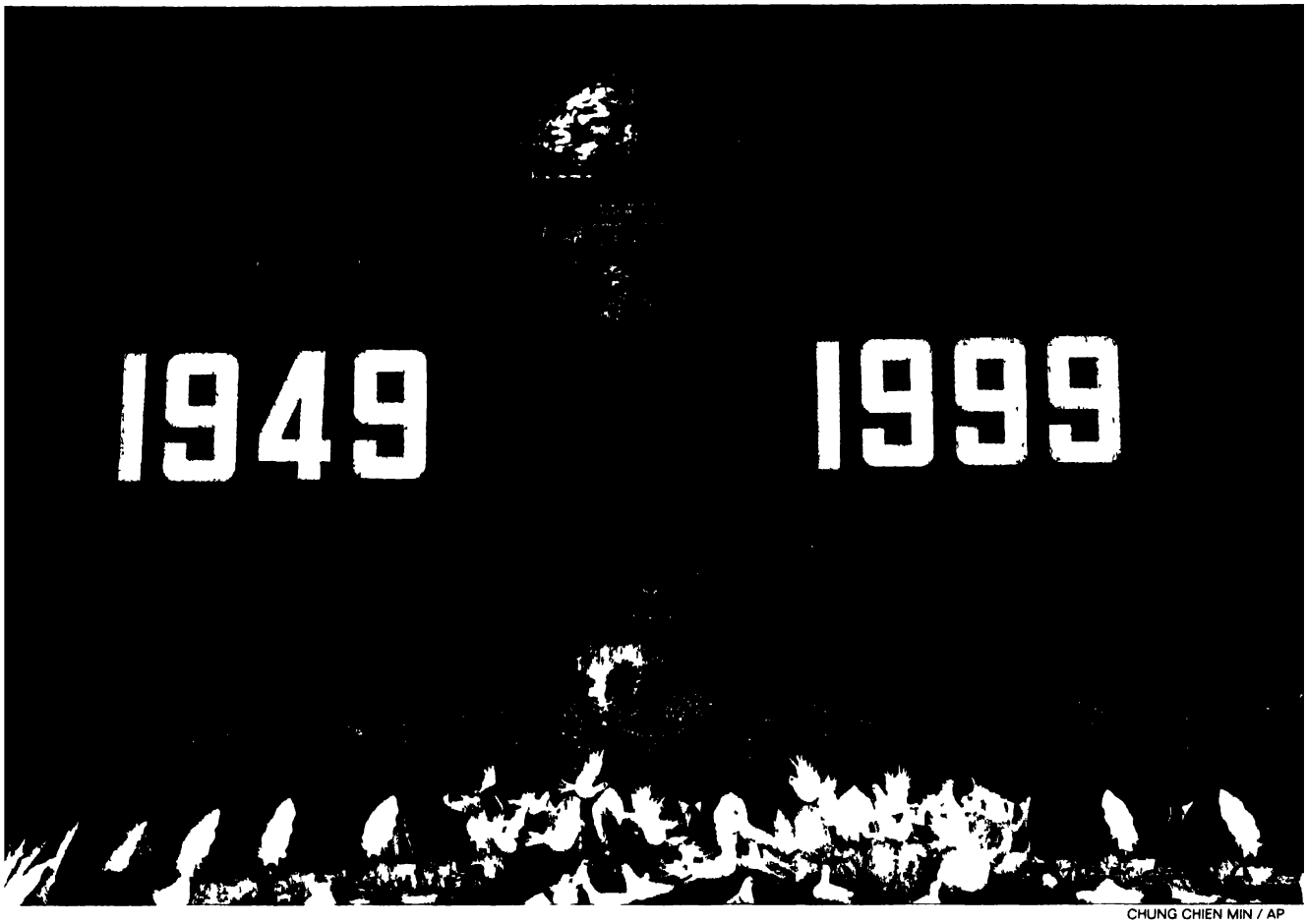
On the cover A flag raising rehearsal at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on September 30 a day before the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Peoples Republic of China began In the background at the crown of the majestic Gate of Heavenly Peace is a 20 foot high portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong which to many Chinese is an important political symbol that reflects the strength and independence that China gained in 1949
Photograph Greg Baker AP

Cover design U Udaya Shankar

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CHUNG CHIEN MIN / AP

■ COVER STORY

PEOPLE'S CHINA AT 50

As a celebration of state, the accent of the festivities that mark the half century of the People's Republic of China is on the achievements of the past 20 years – of the post-Mao Zedong era of reform which made China the fastest-growing economy of the world and a player of global consequence.

MIRA SINHA BHATTACHARJEA

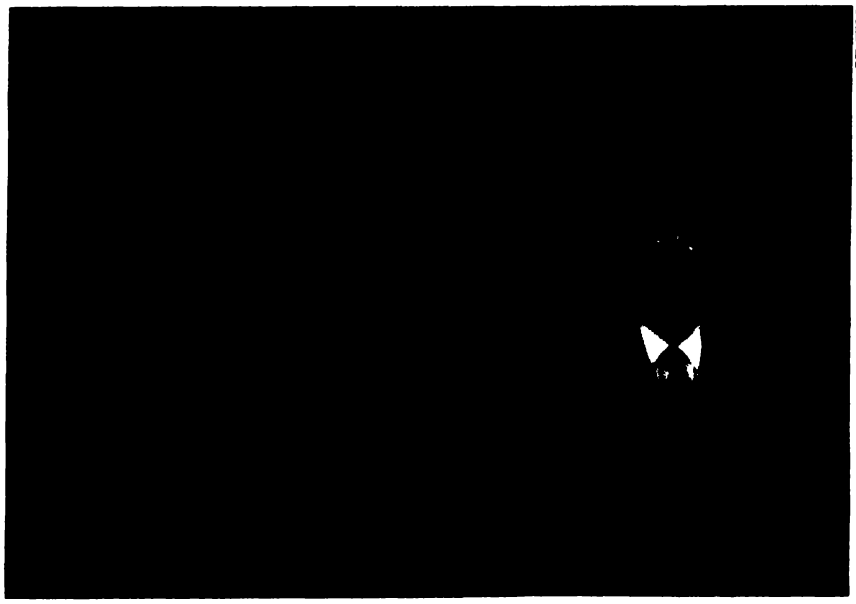
A GRAND parade at Tiananmen Square, and functions all over the country, will mark the celebration of a half century of China's existence as the People's Republic of China (PRC). The festivities, to which no foreign guests have been invited, will undoubtedly convey strong messages to the people of China and to the watching world. Some of these messages will confirm that the Communist Party of China (CPC) still plays the central and leading role in Chinese politics, that the third-generation team led by President Jiang Zemin is in control, and that China has successfully avoided going the Soviet way. Other messages will highlight the achievements of these 50 years not only in the indices of economic and state power but also in terms of living standards. In short, this anniversary will celebrate the fact that China, having 'stood up', as Mao Zedong so proudly announced on the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, now stands upright, sturdy and tall in the world of states.

As a celebration of state, the accent of the festivities will fall heavily on the achievements of the past 20 years, that is, of the post-Mao Zedong era of reform which made China the fastest-growing economy of the world and a player of global consequence. But no survey of the five decades of the PRC can ignore Mao Zedong, for he was both China's revolutionary and China's nationalist, *par excellence*. When victory in the civil war was won, and the new state was founded, Mao as leader of China's millions promised to bring to a close the long century of China's 'humiliation' by imperialist powers, including Japan. He promised to unite the nation and the state and set it on the path to wealth and power and to a standing of equality among the nations. No single imperialism had dispossessed China of its sovereignty; it never was fully a colony as India was. Only Japan thought of making the whole of China its colony. Its invasion



XINHUA / AP

XINHUA / AP



REUTERS

(Facing page) Premier Zhu Rongji speaks at a banquet in Beijing on September 30 to mark the inauguration of ceremonies in connection with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The anniversary will buttress the fact that 50 years after it was founded, the PRC stands upright, sturdy and tall in the world of states. (Above) At Tiananmen Square on October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong announces the founding of the Republic. (Right) President Jiang Zemin addresses a gathering of the 1999 Global Forum in Shanghai on September 27.

and aggression against China in the 1930s provided the conditions for Mao to entwine anti-Japanese nationalism and anti-imperialism into the compelling dynamic of the Chinese National Revolution. China's Revolution, therefore, did not confront the 19th century imperialist powers, especially Britain, which had opened its century of humiliation with the Opium War of 1840. It confronted, instead, the new imperialists of the 20th century – first Japan and, after its defeat in 1945, the other new imperialist, the United States.

To stand up – united, strong and equal with the powers – was a promise that history would have demanded of any government that may have come to power in Beijing. The CPC, on this anniversary, can claim to have fulfilled these promises in the main. Of the three territories that remained outside the jurisdiction of Beijing after 1949, Hong Kong was returned to China in a remarkably smooth transition under the innovative one-country, two-systems formula, and so will be Macao by the end of this year. It was often said that the Chinese leadership had privately decided on 2005 as the outside year for the peaceful reunification of Taiwan – to which that formula was first offered – with the mainland. But developments since the missile crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and, more recently, a few months ago have set up serious roadblocks. If

President Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan continues to describe cross-Strait relations as between two equal states, he risks making the one-plus-two formula, as well as the whole question of reunification, dangerously redundant. The new situation will involve the U.S. more directly and could delay indefinitely a resolution of the Taiwan problem. This is one success that the CPC would have liked to have claimed at this anniversary. Instead, it represents a serious setback for the Chinese Government, and raises new tensions in the Asia-Pacific region.

THE other two promises made to the nation on the founding of the state have been more or less fulfilled. In its search for equality, as for wealth and power, China had set its sights on the richest and the most powerful country, namely the U.S. It was also the U.S. that had denied the PRC's existence as an international entity, treating Taiwan as China, for 23 years. Appropriately, therefore, it was President Clinton who symbolically conferred, as it were, 'equality' on China during his first summit meeting with President Jiang Zemin in 1997 in Washington. The Beijing summit the next year confirmed China's new status and considered establishing a 'strategic' partnership between the two countries. This suggests that China, already a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, may envisage a diplomatic reach beyond its Asian region. However, it still has a long way to go before it can – if it ever will – acquire sinews of power to match those of the U.S.

Nevertheless, China's economic statistics testify to the giant strides it has taken in these five decades towards acquiring wealth and power with an average annual growth rate of 9.8 per cent over these decades. China weathered the recent Asian financial crisis without devaluing its currency, and its economy grew at a respectable 7.8 per cent during the period. In 1997 its gross domestic product (GNP) reached $1,055 billion, making it in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) the third largest economy in the world. Per capita income rose to $860, having doubled over the past decade; adult literacy rose to 87 per cent; and average life expectancy rose to 70 years. In the years from 1985 China attracted upwards of $140 billion in direct foreign investment and accumulated foreign exchange reserves of $120 billion and a trade surplus with the U.S. of about $40 billion. It also became the world's 11th largest trading state.

These are impressive figures. But the goal before China is modest – to reach the income levels of middle-ranking countries such as France and Italy by the middle of the coming century. Actually the goal is far from modest, for it aims to provide all its 1.2 billion people with the comforts and living standards of those countries. China still has a long way to go before it can achieve this goal.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 20th



CUI YUJUN / LIBERATION DAILY / AP





XINHUA / AP

Deng Xiaoping brought order to the nation after the unsettled conditions during the Cultural Revolution. He also represented continuity with the Revolution, with the party organisation and with Mao. (Below, left) President Jiang with Premier Zhu Rongji. (Below, right) Vice-President Hu Jintao, considered the man of the future.



The Chinese flag is raised as the Union Jack is lowered at the ceremony to mark the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China, in July 1997.

century, China is no longer the ripe melon ready to be carved up by the imperialist powers that it was at the end of the 19th century. Instead, the present leaders could borrow from Zhou Enlai a description of China today. China, he said in 1975, was like a piece of tough meat, difficult to chew on or to swallow.

EVEN if the 50th anniversary is, in essence, a celebration of state and not of 'socialism', much of the credit for what the state is today must still go to Mao the nationalist. As a nationalist Mao led the millions of China. As a Marxist, however, he led a party that comprised, at that time, only a mere 5 per cent of the population. With this limited tool he undertook the awesome task of building socialism in the country from a peasant and backward base. Constantly aware of being in the minority, Mao made 'serve the people' (not just the proletariat), the *raison d'etre* of the party and the state and made the test of such service an incremental increase in the basic necessities of life for all the Chinese people. Building a strong state and serving the people were two separate and often conflicting items on the agenda. At best they were linked by the choice of means employed by the party in managing the large society and increasing its productivity.

In the mid-1960s, fearful that the party was beginning to serve itself rather than the people, Mao called for the overthrow of the party leadership and organisation. The famous big character poster that urged 'bombard the headquarters' launched the disastrous Cultural Revolution (C.R.). In the desperate hyperbole of those heady days, the C.R. was presented as an attempt to touch people's souls, to bring about a sudden transformation of outlook and values in society, more in keeping with socialism. But Mao was in the minority even within the party. It was almost a foregone conclusion that Mao would fail, as he did, in this desperate gamble. His failure also heralded the end of the socialist effort in China, despite its present use as a signboard, to proclaim identity – that is, a socialist China building a socialist market economy, and so on.

Mao's portrait still looks out over Tiananmen Square and the 50th anniversary festivities. But his contribution to the building of the state will in all probability not be acknowledged. Yet Mao's contribution was not negligible, and needs to be recalled for it laid the base from which Deng Xiaoping's reforms could take off. To list a few of his contributions: At the end of the Mao era, China was debt-free; oil resources (not revealed by Soviet prospecting) were discovered and exploited; the nuclear programme proceeded apace; land reform had been thorough and recovery had been made in agriculture.

Externally also China had made significant and strategic gains. Its 23-year-long period of isolation in the world ended with its acquiring a seat in the U.N. and its diplomatic recognition by the developed countries – on its own terms. This meant the de-recognition of Taiwan and the promise by other countries that relations with that island would henceforth be conducted only at sub-diplomatic levels. The crowning act in this drama of undoing the past was the 'private' visit of President Richard Nixon to China in 1972. That journey by the most powerful leader of the world to what was an 'enemy' country for 23 years, to be received by the man and a system he had threatened to destroy, and to a country which

The architect of 'new China'

JOHN CHERIAN

MAO ZEDONG is no doubt one of the greatest of leaders who strode the world stage in the 20th century. The architect of the Communist Revolution in China, he presided over the country's destiny for 27 years. Maoist ideology may have been put on the backburner now, but the leaders of today's China acknowledge the role of Mao in building and consolidating the revolution. Many leading economists and Sinologists have forecast that China will become an economic superpower in the next three decades. It was Mao's insistence on self-reliance during the first three decades after liberation that enabled China to withstand Western attempts to rein it in militarily and hamper its economic growth. Small wonder then that the Chinese people give Mao the credit for creating the "new China".

Mao was born in Hunan province on December 26, 1893. He was the eldest of four children – three sons and a daughter. His father, a dispossessed peasant, joined the army to escape poverty. His stint in the army made him relatively rich. From the beginning, Mao had the makings of a radical. He was against his father's profiteering ways.

Mao completed formal education at the age of 25. He passed out of an institution that trained teachers. While he was there, he participated actively in the country's nascent revolutionary movement. One of the early supporters of the Russian Revolution was Li Ta-chao, a librarian at Beijing University. He, along with some progressive-minded people, started a Society for the Study of Marxism in 1920, which was the forerunner of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Li employed Mao, who was one of its members, as an assistant.

Mao was part of a group of young intellectuals in the CPC and began organising revolutionary activities in 1921. It was in the mid-1920s that Mao began to realise that tremendous revolutionary dynamism could be unleashed by mobilising China's vast, impoverished population. Although both Lenin and Stalin had recognised that peasants could play a revolutionary role in underdeveloped areas, Mao was the first to propose that the peasantry was potentially the backbone of the Chinese Revolution.

The Communist Party suffered a series of setbacks between 1921, when the party was founded, and 1927. Chiang Kai-shek's forces violently crushed the urban-based National Democratic Revolution and an attempt by industrial workers, who constituted a very small proportion of the population then, to ignite a revolution between 1925 and 1927. The failure of two revolutions sidelined the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. After 1927 the revolution shifted to the countryside, where Maoist ideology thrived, and it triumphed ultimately.

After conducting some investigations on his own, Mao wrote in 1927 a report, the key elements of which was to constitute his lifelong conviction – that it was the rural areas that would be the key centres of revolution not only in China but all over the world. Mao predicted that the power of peasants would "bury imperialism and militarism". In a celebrated passage in the report, Mao emphasises that only "armed struggle" can bring about genuine change. "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."

Mao's strategy and tactics were effective. Between 1928 and 1933, the Communist Party's membership in China swelled from 40,000 to 300,000. During the same period, the Communist army's strength grew to 100,000. Chu Teh, a former warlord, and his forces joined hands with Mao. Chu Teh became the Commander of the Red Army and was Mao's comrade-in-arms during the 21 years of revolutionary warfare that followed.

Alarmed by the growth and popularity of the Communist Party, the Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek, launched a fierce military offensive aimed at destroying Mao's military base in Kiangsi province, where Mao had proclaimed the creation of the Kiangsi Soviet, a Communist republic. For three years, the Communists administered a territory of 15,000 square miles. The CPC was advised by the Comintern, an organisation of world Communist parties, against conceding any territory to the Kuomintang. This strategy, however, backfired, and in order to avoid a military rout the Communists, under Mao's leadership broke through the Kuomintang encirclement and embarked on the epic Long March. The March, one of the most heroic episodes in history, dramatically changed the course of 20th century history.

The March, which lasted from October 1934 to October 1935, saw Mao



GAMMA
XINHUA

In 1947, Mao leads comrades-in-arms to the northern Shaanxi province, from where they continued to direct the national liberation war.

and his followers trek 6,000 miles (9,600 km) from Kiangsi to the northern Shensi province. A temporary headquarters was set up at Pao An before a permanent base was established at Yenan 14 months later. During the March, the Communist forces were reduced from 90,000 to around 20,000: they had not only to negotiate rivers, rough mountain terrain and arid areas, but also to engage the Nationalist (Kuomintang) army in battles. Among those who died were some of Mao's closest comrades. One of his brothers, Mao Tse-t'an, was killed in one of the battles with the pursuing Kuomintang and warlord armies. Two of Mao's children, who were left behind with sympathetic peasants in Kiangsi, were never traced.

Few would disagree with Edgar Snow's assessment of the Long March as "an Odyssey unequalled in modern times". The heroic deeds which the Communist guerillas under Mao accomplished are now part of revolutionary lore. They have inspired several revolutions, including the Cuban Revolution. The Long March was also instrumental in consolidating Mao's hold over the Chinese revolutionary movement. In January 1935, Mao was elected Chairman of the Politburo of the CPC. The other leaders of the party who held sway for decades since the 1930 were also veterans of the Long March.

The Yenan experience (1937-45) was invaluable for Mao and the CPC. During his sojourn in Yenan, Mao was at the height of his creativity. He addressed himself to the needs of the peasants and carried out land reforms and rent reduction programme. Peasants became fully involved in the political, economic and military organisations in the liberated areas. In order to sensitise the peasantry, Mao created a corps of poor peasants – this was in addition to the farm labour union – and encouraged them to participate actively in the land reform movement. During this period Mao also formulated the "Three-Thirds System", which limited the participation of party cadre in local government to one-third, leaving two-thirds of the posts to progressive citizens and intellectuals. The bulk of his writings, which later appeared as *Thoughts of Mao*, were written in Yenan. (Even while steering China towards progress in later years, Mao never forgot his Long March experiences or his days in Yenan. The periodic shake-ups he carried out in the government and in society in the 1950s and 1960s owed a lot to these experiences.) In Yenan, he criticised comrades who could "repeat quotes from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin from memory but understand very little or nothing of their own history."

The Communists under Mao made spectacular military gains from the mid-1930s to 1945. At the outset of the war with Japan, they gained immense prestige by routing the Japanese in the Shansi province, while the Nationalist troops had fallen into disarray. The Japanese invasion undermined the Kuomintang regime as it was evicted from the major cities. The Communists, on the other hand, gained enhanced access to the countryside as they had generated tremendous goodwill among the peasantry and were good at guerilla warfare. The invading Japanese did not have sufficient manpower to enforce their writ in the countryside.

Much of the guerilla warfare against the Japanese were organised by the Communists. During this period the communist army gradually coalesced into a professional army. After the Japanese surrendered in 1945, it emerged as the strongest force in China. But the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek refused to acknowledge this reality and started another civil war in the country which was just recovering from the ravages of Japanese occupation. (The Kuomintang war machine was financed by the United States of America. Chiang Kai-shek's main adviser was Gen. Ludwig von Falkenhausen, a German.) At the beginning of the civil war in 1945, the Communists only had half a million regular troops, which was one-fourth the size of the Nationalist army. By 1948, however, the Communist army's strength was the same as that of the Kuomintang's.

The U.S. tried to change the course of history by coming quickly to the aid of the Nationalists. When the Japanese were withdrawing from the cities, the U.S. dispatched 50,000 marines to key ports and communications centres, besides airlifting Nationalist troops to Tientsin, Beijing, Shanghai and Nanking. The defeated Japanese Army also collaborated with the U.S. and the Kuomintang. The CPC, however, managed to retain control of most of northern China. The entry of Soviet troops into Manchuria was also a positive development from the CPC's point of view.

Mao's leadership role was crucial to the final outcome. His theory was that an inferior force could defeat a larger enemy only through a gradual process. When the civil war started, the Communists adopted a defensive posture, taking into account the overwhelming numerical superiority of Chiang Kai-shek's forces. In a classic gambit, the Communists withdrew from several areas which were under their control, including their Yenan headquarters. Chiang Kai-shek interpreted the withdrawal of the Communists from their headquarters as a sign of military weakness and ordered his elite troops to pursue them deep into Manchuria. This, however, put an enormous strain on his supply lines. He did this against the advice of the U.S., his staunchest ally.

The second stage of the Communist plan was implemented in 1947. A limited counter-offensive was launched against the provinces of central China and against the railway network used extensively by Chiang Kai-shek to provide supplies to his troops. By the end of 1947, when Chiang Kai-shek's best troops were fighting in Manchuria and his communications capabilities were overstretched, the more mobile Communist army captured key railway junctions in the Hopei province south of Beijing. The Nationalist Government in Nanking found it difficult to send reinforcements and supplies to its beleaguered troops in Manchuria and northern China.

By the middle of 1948, the Nationalists were in total disarray. Mao initiated the final push by launching a series of military campaigns through central and eastern China, which ultimately brought him and his men to the doorstep of the Nationalist capital, Nanking. Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Taiwan. Despite the reservations expressed by some of his own comrades and allies such as Stalin, Mao ordered the capture of Nanking. The rest is history. On October 1, 1949, Mao stood high on the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing to announce the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It was a day that was as significant as the end of the French Revolution in 1789 and the Russian October Revolution of 1917.

While riding into Beijing triumphantly, Mao composed a poem, which reflected his worldview. A line from it is: "The true way that governs the world of men is that of radical change." ■

Washington did not recognise, was an exercise in the most extreme form of realpolitik. It could only be accomplished by denying a friend of as many years, during which time Taiwan, with a population of only 11 million, was for the U.S. the only China. The Nixon visit opened the door to the technologies and markets of the developed world for Mao's successors.

DENG XIAOPING, as Mao's successor, must, however, be given the credit for knowing how to walk through that open door where he wanted to take China. Deng's coming to power was an accident of history – he was not one of Mao's chosen successors. Mao identified him as the second most important target of the C.R. Deng survived that turmoil and witch-hunt, to be recalled to power and position in 1974 as Mao aged and cancer took its toll of Zhou Enlai. As soon as he had consolidated his power, he decided to pronounce a formal assessment of and verdict on the C.R.

No assessment of the C.R., however, was possible without a similar assessment of Mao and the party. Unable to throw out Mao with the C.R., as it were, his erstwhile targets found his merits to be primary and his errors to be secondary. Mao's undeniable contribution lay in waging a successful struggle and in bringing the CPC to power. His mistakes, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, had stemmed, it was found, from an inability to understand what building socialism meant. This had lost China 10 years and more of development. This verdict on the C.R. and Mao was to be the foil for Deng's genius in putting economics, not politics, in command of socialist development.

Physically Deng Xiaoping was a little man, small built and stocky, but he had the makings of a big leader, unlike Zhou Enlai who seemed destined to be the permanent No. 2 in the leadership hierarchy. The story of his return to power after the C.R. is unsavoury, and understandably it is not often recounted in China. But China was fortunate to have him as leader. He brought order to the nation and to governance after the chaos of the C.R. Above all, in his person, he represented continuity – so important for a C.R. ravaged China – with the revolution, with the party organisation, and with Mao, even though he switched the tracks on which the nation was going to travel. These were the sources of his right to power.

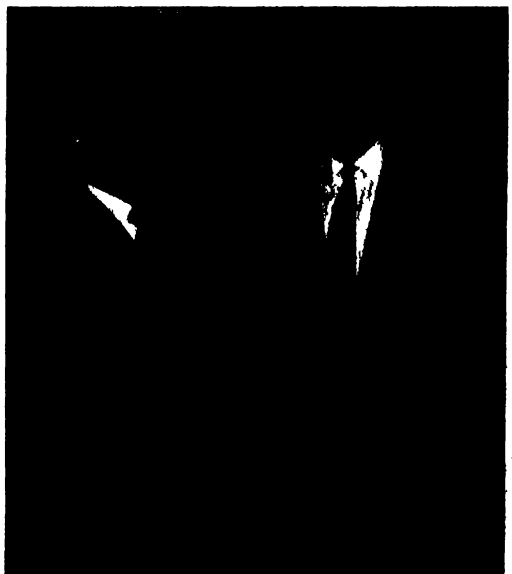
Yet, like Mao before him, he worried about leadership succession, on which would depend the future of China. He was unlucky with his chosen heirs until he brought Jiang Zemin from Shanghai to Beijing after Tiananmen (1989) and then devoted the next six years of his life to grooming Jiang to be the core of the third-generation leaders of party, state and army.

Deng, like Mao, had the ability to think in the round. Having put economics in command, he undertook reform from above in all sectors of society, both to support the modernisation drive and to contain the inevitable fallout on the party and society as vested interests were disturbed. At the same time, he had to manage a complex relationship with the world, and in particular with the U.S. His biggest challenge was to introduce political democracy, taken to mean freedom of expression and association, the rule of law and the separation of powers. Both internally and externally he was unable to fit political democracy into his reforms. Instead, as student demonstrations rocked China, the 'Democracy Wall', which had come up during the C.R., came down. His new Constitution also dispensed with the earlier Maoist inclusion of 'four big freedoms' to the people, including the right to strike work.

With Tiananmen and the collapse of the Soviet Union with its break-up on ethnic lines, and its adoption of a multi-party democratic system, China became the bad boy on the block. Isolated once again, as in 1950, by the developed world, it faced international criticism and sanctions on many fronts – on human rights, on its one-child population policy, on prison labour, on censorship and so on, all of which added up to a condemnation of China's refusal to abandon socialism and change to a multi-party democracy.

There was domestic criticism of his line too from both the Right and the Left, and not until 1992 was he able to assert his free-market, get-rich strategy and tempt the developed world with the prospect of a market of a billion consumers. That strategy, with some modifications and considerable skilful diplomacy, has resulted in the lifting of international sanctions and the muting of criticism by governments wanting to do business with China. Ten years after its international standing touched a low following Tiananmen, and 20 years after the reforms began, China's economic development, supported by domestic stability and considerable military muscle, both conventional and nuclear, has enabled it to recover and improve its international standing, though not its pre-Tiananmen image.

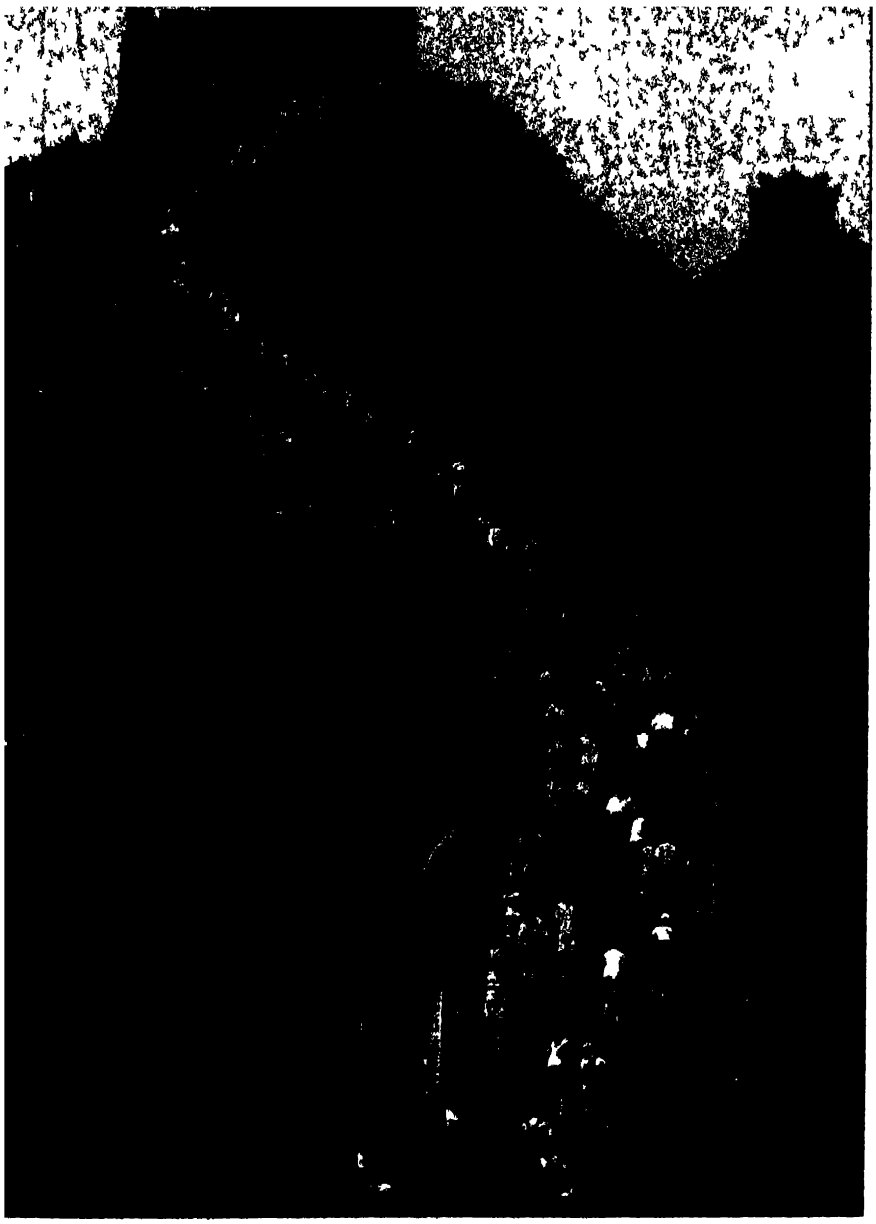
This duality will continue to characterise the way the developed world will look at China in the years to come. On the one hand, the lure of the China market will strengthen those who advocate closer 'engagement' with China, who argue that this will in time bring about a greater democratisation of its system. On the other, in a strange reversal of roles, the ideologues of democracy – if one can call them that – are the new Cold War warriors who argue that China should be 'contained' by putting pressure on it to change its system through strong sanctions and diplomatic and trade isolation. As China becomes stronger, these voices will probably become louder. History has no precedent for the international community's adjustment to a new power without resorting to war.



WIN MCNAMEE/AP

U.S. President Bill Clinton with Jiang. China's objective is to use diplomacy to avert conflict with the U.S. and point out the advantages to both countries of a cooperative relationship.

EVEN as China reaches a critical take-off period in its domestic development, it is faced with a new and more complex external environment. The reform era began, by contrast, in the relatively simple and predictable bipolar world, which China charted with some skill until the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a unipolar world and with it, supposedly, the 'end of history'. Since then new complexi-



VIDYA RAM

Tourists at the Great Wall. China's 'new security concept' calls for a series of bilateral and multilateral arrangements with its near and distant neighbours.

ties have been added – for instance, the nuclearisation of South Asia and the spread of international terrorism.

Since that time China has been concerned not only with the problem of managing this complex world, but with the need for it and India, as ancient civilisations, to influence the shape, structure and norms of the coming world order. In the last half decade, China has indicated the kind of world order it would like to encourage, namely one in which a number of big powers can be identified. At present these comprise China, Russia, Japan, Germany, France and, potentially, India. In this multi-polar system of its preference, no one pole can aspire to equal the U.S., but collectively and in their own interests they would be able to act as curbs on it, both within and outside the United Nations

It has also revived the old India-China case for introducing a new set of behavioural norms – the Panch Sheel – to replace what it calls 'power politics' In short, these would accept the territorial limits and the sovereignty of states; respect the right of governments to manage domestic problems without outside interference; help move disputes from the ground to the negotiating table; and encourage a mutuality of approach to common problems. This is its theoretical framework.

In its practice, China's grand strategy takes the U.S. as the 'other' both in terms of the world order it advocates and perhaps as the biggest obstacle to the emergence of China as a global great power. At the same time, it needs U.S. markets and U.S. technology. Its latent suspicions of the U.S. have become more overt as it aggregates the sum meaning for China of U.S. policies in the Asia-Pacific region of the past few years. Briefly these include what it sees as a qualitative change in Washington's more official relations with Taipei; the revival and strengthening of U.S security relations with Japan and Australia, and America's proposed theatre missile defence system in Asia. Its overall objective is not to risk a military conflict with the U S. but to use diplomacy to deflect from such a possibility and to continue to point out the advantages to both countries of a cooperative relationship.

Partly as a result of the present skewed balance of power, partly because of U.S. policies and presence in the region, and partly because of its own limited military capability, China has begun to concentrate on Asia The clearest expression of this interest is to be found in the speeches made by President Jiang Zemin on his recent state visit to Thailand. China's 'new security concept' calls for a series of bilateral and multilateral arrangements with its near and distant neighbours, which would increase the density of interaction to the degree of making conflict a more and more distant possibility. China presents these as the building blocks of a comprehensive security system for the region, and by extension an alternative such system for the world. These arrangements, as should be obvious, have the added worth of reducing opportunities for the U.S. to take advantage of China's bilateral problems with its neighbours

The 50th anniversary thus also marks the beginning of a period fraught with grave problems for China, both domestic and external which, in addition, intersect at many points. Some external problems have been mentioned above. China's many domestic problems include those that flow from a loosening of party controls, from a lack of higher purpose which has permitted religion to extend its hold and fringe groups like the Falungong to emerge; from the growing inequalities between the hinterland and the coastal areas, the rural and the urban, the rich and the poor, the ethnic minorities and the Han, and so on, and from the consequences of its one-child family on the population profile of the early 21st century. These will test the management skills of the leadership as it takes China forward to achieving its mid-21st century goal for the Chinese state. ■

China in a globalised world

China's post-reform growth was made possible either because of the achievements of the pre-reform economic regime or because of the continuation of certain features of that regime.

PRABHAT PATNAIK

CHINA's economic progress since 1949 is among the most significant phenomena of this century, a source of hope for the wretched of the earth that their lot too can improve dramatically within a short span of time. True, China has not been alone among the underdeveloped countries in experiencing rapid economic progress, but its case is unique because of its size: its development makes a substantial difference to world poverty. A mythology, however, has grown up of late around China's development, which claims that it began with the introduction of "market reforms", that the earlier years were "wasted years" marked by bungling, bureaucratism, excesses, arbitrary experiments, and one terrible famine, all of which were associated with the effort to build socialism. China's pursuit of "pragmatic" neo-liberal economic policies not only has brought it prosperity but also constitutes a lesson for others who may still be suffering from a residual ideological inclination towards socialism.

This perception, which underlies such remarks as "China should be celebrating 25 years of reforms rather than 50 years of Communism", is in my view completely wrong: the contrast between a pre-reform period devoid of progress and a post-reform period marked by great achievements is factually incorrect, and the interpretation of the post-reform economic performance is fundamentally flawed.

China overcame poverty (as defined in Third World countries such as India) before it embarked on "market reforms". China put in place a universal public distribution system, which gave every citizen a certain minimum amount of essential commodities, before it embarked on "market reforms". China's stupendous achievements in terms of social indicators occurred before it embarked on "market reforms". And China, despite having an adverse land-man ratio (far more adverse than India's), managed to record significant increases in food production (both absolute and per capita) through the construction of impressive water management systems under collective ownership, by mobilising locally available surplus labour, before it embarked on "market reforms". All these facts are well-known and have been attested to by a host of distinguished scholars (including Professor Shigeru Ishikawa of Japan). If for tactical reasons the current Chinese leadership underplays earlier economic progress, and if Western authors, either owing to neo-liberal ideological predilections or because of a penchant for bowing before the prevailing orthodoxy, underplay these remarkable achievements, then that is no reason why we too should close our eyes to them. In fact, in some ways, as we shall see later, the post-reform period represents a retrogression compared to the earlier years.

Even more important, however, is the fact that this perception, by attributing post-reform high growth to the so-called "virtues of the market", actually misinterprets this growth experience. China's remarkable post-reform growth (though I personally believe it has been less remarkable than is usually made out) was made possible either because of the achievements of the pre-reform economic regime or because of the continuation of certain features of that regime.

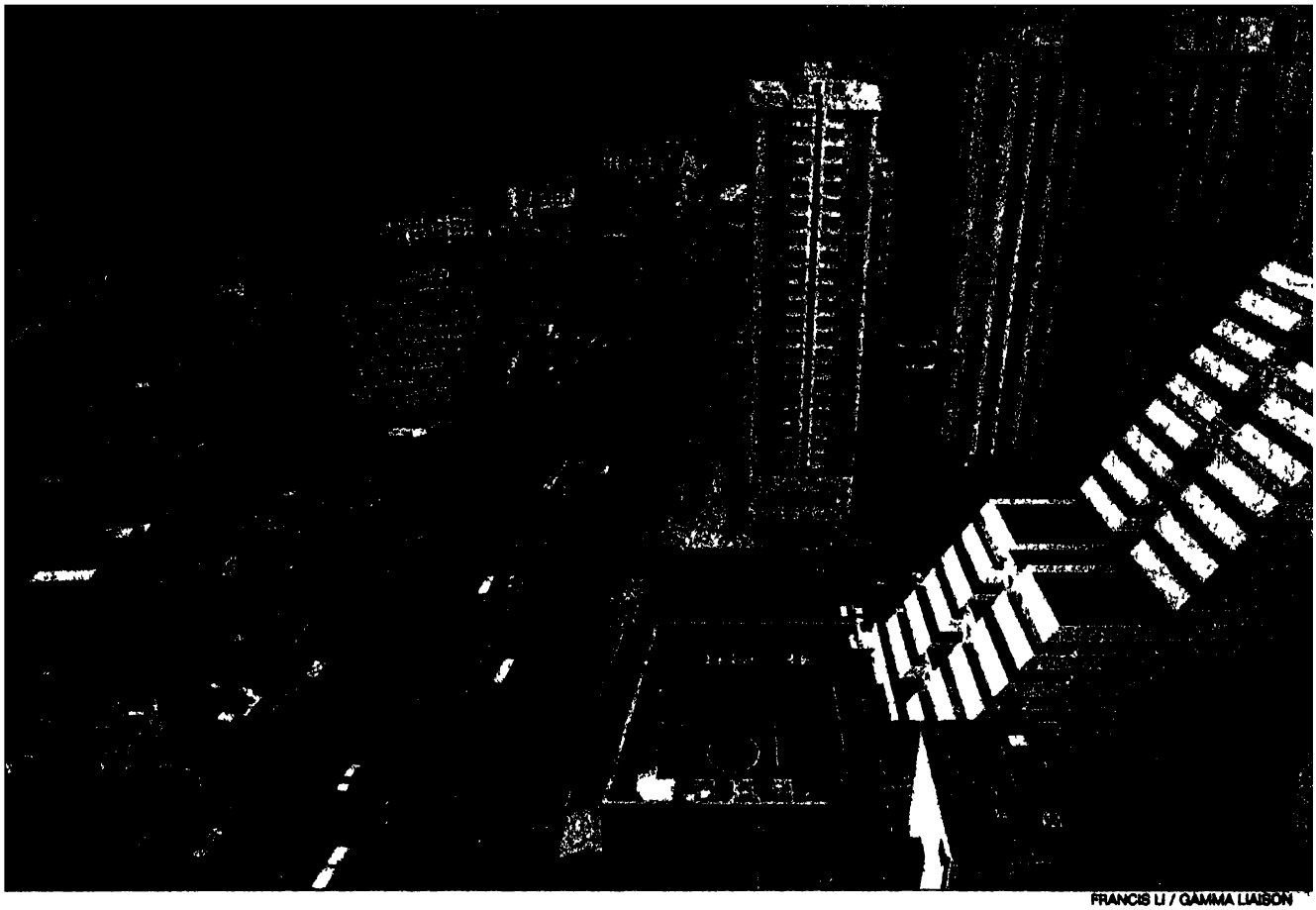


GAMMA

Construction work under way on the Three Gorges Dam across the Yangtze, a 1997 picture.

THERE are at least four ways in which this happened. First, the achievement of near-universal literacy and the improvement in the educational and health status of the work-force, which were some of the legacies of the earlier years, were important factors that contributed to the dynamism that China has experienced in the more recent period.

Secondly, there can be little doubt that inequalities in China, both inter-regional and inter-personal ones, have increased greatly in the reform years, which has been a major problem associated with the reform process. Let us, however, eschew judgment for the present. The point is that if these increases in inequalities were superimposed on an



FRANCIS LI / GAMMA LIAISON

Modern skyscrapers and other symbols of growth in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. China's economic progress since 1949 is among the most significant phenomena of this century.

already highly skewed pattern of income and wealth distribution, then, notwithstanding such high growth rates that China is supposed to have been achieving, social tensions would have become difficult to manage. The surfacing of these tensions in turn would have made these growth rates impossible to sustain. Thus China was able to sustain its post-reform growth, for whatever it is worth, because it started with a relatively egalitarian base, and that was a contribution of the earlier regime.

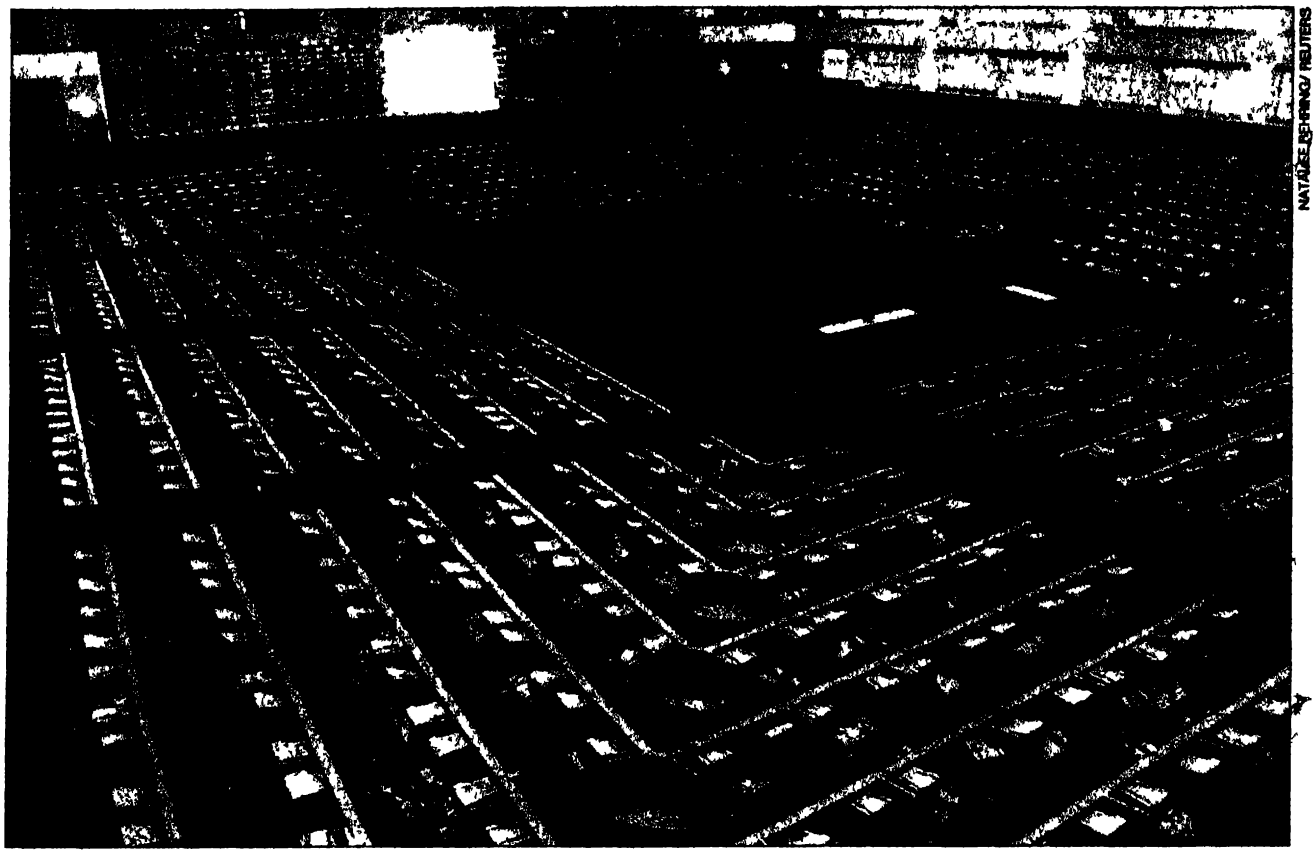
Thirdly, to call China a neo-liberal "model" is a travesty. China's success during the reform years has sprung precisely from the fact that it has managed to combine in an altogether novel way the virtues of centralisation with those of decentralisation, or, putting it differently, the advantages of a command economy alongside the flexibility imparted by the functioning of markets. It has been, if you like, a command economy at one remove. In periods of runaway inflation, for instance, price controls have been clamped down with ease rather than resorting to drastic deflation with high social costs (as would happen under capitalism), because a large part of the economy continues to be state-owned and hence amenable to control by the party. Likewise, foreign exchange management, a potential source of serious problems in any Third World capitalist economy, has been handled with somewhat greater ease because the old system of party directives to enterprises continues to be effective. In short, China has had the advantage of being able to supplement the usual instruments of state intervention available in a capitalist market economy with other instruments which it has retained from its pre-reform years. In this sense, drawing a sharp contrast between the pre- and post-reform periods is altogether misleading.

Finally, the high agricultural growth witnessed in the early reform years, which provided the bedrock for the reform experiment, was made possible because the regime of collective ownership and management of the irrigation systems was not abandoned. Here again China reaped the advantages of the old collective system in terms of the irrigation works it bequeathed, and continued to reap the benefits of collective ownership of such works, even while breaking up the communes and privatising agricultural operations.

The new regime, in other words, was erected on the shoulders of the old one, but not after wholly dismantling or destroying the latter. There was, and still is, a peculiar symbiosis between the new and the old, which characterises the Chinese economy. That is why lauding its neo-liberalism is as out of place as uncritically hailing it as a socialist "model".

THE complex admixture of dirigisme and a market economy that characterises China is reminiscent of what other East Asian economies too had used to register remarkable growth rates. The difference lies in the fact that in China the dirigisme is that of a socialist economy while elsewhere it was dirigisme associated with capitalism. Notwithstanding this basic difference, the element of similarity must not be missed and this consists of the fact that the range of instruments available for intervention in the market is much wider than under usual (metropolitan, especially Anglo-Saxon) capitalism. This admixture, particularly in the context of rapidly expanding world trade, can be a powerful promoter of growth.

Precisely as the experience of East Asia shows, however, this arrangement, this capacity to take advantage of the market and yet not be a market economy in the conventional sense of the term, can only



NATALIE BEHRING/ REUTERS

Inside the Shanghai Stock Exchange. China's success during the reform years has been achieved only because it has managed to combine in a novel way the virtues of a command economy alongside the flexibility imparted by the functioning of markets.

be a transitional one. The very fact of high growth brings about changes in the domestic social structure, in the class configuration of society, which undermines the continuance of this arrangement. Even more important, changes in world capitalism unleash new forces that make such an arrangement untenable and with this the continuation of the remarkable growth rates. East Asia has already reached a point of crisis from where a return to the earlier growth trajectory is almost impossible even if there is some recovery. China too, in my view, would find it difficult to continue with the regime it has been having and hence the growth experience that went with it. To say this is not to predict a slowing down of the Chinese economy but to suggest that China would have to adopt an altogether new course if it has to maintain its economic dynamism.

I mentioned earlier that despite market reforms China continued to have collective ownership of the irrigation works and that this contributed to the agricultural dynamism of the early reform years. Over the years, however, as agriculture has come under the sway of private ownership, the collectively owned irrigation works have tended to atrophy. A particular admixture of centralisation and decentralisation may be very fruitful in terms of growth, but it cannot be frozen for ever. Changes in class configuration arising from this growth itself keep upsetting it, even though such upsetting has the objective consequence of choking off growth or making it more "expensive". The case of agriculture is only an illustration. More generally, as the private (or decentralised) sector of the Chinese economy becomes stronger and stronger, this very fact would restrict the ability to use party directives in special cases. The proposition that the "purity" of the Chinese Communist Party would act as a bulwark against China's proceeding towards full-fledged capitalism scarcely carries conviction. The Communist Party, after all, is not an entity that can for ever remain impervious to social pressures; if capitalists are on the ascendant, they would sooner or later enter and influence the Communist Party itself. In such an eventuality, however, China would lose its current unique advantage and would not be able to maintain its dynamism.

There is a second and even more powerful reason for this and that has to do with the changes occurring in world capitalism. The ascendancy of finance and its globalisation constitute a crucial feature of the contemporary capitalist world. This has two obvious effects. On the one hand it is responsible (among other factors) for the slowing down of the world economy, since Keynesian demand management, which worked so well in the post-War period, becomes difficult to undertake in a world of extreme financial fluidity. On the other hand, globalised finance capital tries to break down the insulation which particular economies enjoy from its movements. It attempts to suck every country into the vortex of its movements.

Now, the success of East Asia earlier and even of China arose from the fact that they managed to insulate themselves from the movements of finance even as they pushed out substantial exports of commodities. In the new situation, however, it becomes difficult to sustain both these features. The slowdown in the world economy adversely affects trade performance, which then creates the condition for globalised finance to insinuate itself into the economy. Once the economy has become open to financial flows, it becomes a plaything in the hands of international speculators, and its growth atrophies. This is what happened in East Asia. The question is: will China go the same way?

China managed to avoid the East Asian contagion because, as President Jiang Zemin himself pointed out, it did not have a convertible currency and had not undertaken any significant financial liberalisation. China had, in other words, managed to keep its economy insulated from international speculative financial flows. Nonetheless it had to pay a price. While the stability of its currency was maintained, the economy had to be deflated for this purpose. No doubt the economy can experience a resumption of growth (though not perhaps of the same order as before), provided there are enough controls in place to keep it insulated from the activities of domestic and international speculators. But this would require above all a countering of the political pressure that these groups would bring to bear in various ways, including via the Bretton Woods institutions. The only way that such pressures can be countered is by mobilising the people. But if the working masses are depoliticised, then such countering becomes difficult. And if, in addition, the government wishes to win their favour by initiating growth through inflows of short-term finance, which makes the economy vulnerable to capital flight, then that would be a recipe not only for economic atrophy but for imperialist hegemony over China. This is not just a political necessity. It is essential for China's continued economic advance.

We are, in short, entering a new phase of world capitalism. In this phase the possibility of the diffusion of activities from the metropolitan centres to certain sites in the Third World, which was responsible for the East Asian "miracle" and which also underlay the Chinese growth performance, is restricted. On the other hand there is enormous pressure for opening Third World economies for international financial flows, which would bring in their train economic atrophy, loss of economic sovereignty and loss of control over domestic natural resources and productive assets (especially of the public sector) to metropolitan capital (or what Karl Marx would have called "centralisation of capital" on a global scale).

The days of a socialist economy achieving high growth by using the capitalist world market are over. Adopting socialist ways (which must not be taken to mean getting back to the regime that prevailed earlier) may well be the means of achieving high growth itself in the new situation. ■

■ COVER STORY

Experimenting with market socialism

At this stage, China perhaps needs to think afresh about the direction in which the anti-egalitarian market reforms have been taking its hard-won Revolution.

UTSA PATNAIK

THE 20th century will surely be counted by China as one of the most momentous in the history of its ancient civilisation; and indeed China's rise from the status of a poor, humiliated semi-colonial nation to an independent, vibrant and confident nation poised to emerge as the second largest economy in the world is of great moment for the course of world history. As China celebrates the 50th anniversary of the formation of the People's Republic after the victorious Revolution, one wonders anew at the enormous transformations that the great civilisation has undergone in the last century alone.

Successive images and events flash through the mind: the humiliation of the Triple Intervention by the Western imperialist powers, Beijing students in the May 19 Movement, the 21 demands made by the Japanese, the seizure of Manchuria, the peasant movement in Hunan, the Canton uprising, Chiang Kai-shek's annihilation campaigns against the Communists, the incredible Long March by a band of ill-clad and ill-equipped revolutionary soldiers with only handfuls of millet to sustain them physically but fired by the resolve to survive and wrest victory from retreat; the long guerilla war, land reforms in the liberated areas, and final victory over the Japanese and the Kuomintang, enabling the initiation of the historic second experiment in the world of an autonomous strategy of building socialism. The consternation in the advanced capitalist world at that time when China "went Communist" and the joy of the majority of the populations in the Third World at the victory can now only be imagined.

That China is poised to emerge as the second largest economy in the world is of great moment for the course of world history.

The Chinese have written their own history in bold strokes in this century; after the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), they have also demonstrated to the world that under socialism it is possible for a very poor nation to reach basic health care not only to the urban but also to the rural population, to provide education to all, to ensure not only food security but an improving standard of life to those who were the poorest in the old society. At this point some will talk of the "famine" of 1959-61; we will discuss this at length in a moment. All analysts of Chinese development history in the last half century, even those hostile to socialism, are forced, however reluctantly, to accept that in terms of human development indicators – food security, advances in health and education, lowering of income poverty, in short, in promoting the welfare of the people – the record is outstanding, in fact better than that of developing capitalist countries with 10 times the per capita income of China. All socialist economies, including Cuba of course, have a very good track record in this respect; but the case of China acquires importance owing to the sheer enormity of the problems that were tackled and the huge size of the population that has benefited.

There is a widespread misconception, however, that the gains are mainly to be traced to the period of market reforms from 1980 onwards and that there was little improvement in the period of Maoist egalitari-

an policies followed in the preceding three decades – from 1949 to 1979. Nothing could be farther from the truth, in the earlier period, not only was the share of investment in income raised greatly (from about 15 per cent to 35 per cent of national income) and a diversified industrial base established, but there was a sharp lowering of both the death rate for the general population and of infant mortality rate, accompanied by large gains in literacy, above all owing to the improvements in villages where the majority of the population lived and which tend to be the most neglected areas in other developing countries.

The basis for this improvement was precisely the socialisation of property (through cooperative and later commune organisation), which enabled a collective welfare fund to be set up, as also egalitarian distribution policies, especially as regards foodgrains and other necessities. Because the subsequent policies of Deng Xiaoping, which were implemented from 1980, were fundamentally different in content, calling for "combating egalitarianism" and "breaking the iron rice bowl" while doing away with collective operation of land, all the achievements of the earlier period have been deliberately sought to be downgraded since that time. In this effort, most Western academics with their hostility to socialism have participated eagerly; some who were all praise for earlier policies switched their views with remarkable alacrity to correspond with the changed government and political line in China. While China has performed much better than India, it is widely believed that China had a more severe famine than India ever had, during the "Great Leap" period in which millions are said to have died; the figure of 27 to 30 million famine deaths is frequently quoted. The main source of this figure in India is Amartya Sen's writings and speeches, which are more widely known and reported than are the basic sources, the work of Western scholars, which he uses. The argument made by him is that the absence of press freedom in China explains the fact that the world did not have any inkling at the time that such a massive famine had taken place.

Similarly, Peter Nolan and others have argued that a massive famine took place during the collectivisation drive in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. In general, the thrust of the argument is that collectivisation produces famine and that the absence of a "free" press as in capitalist countries, prevents anyone outside these countries from knowing about it until much later – when liberal Western scholars painstakingly uncover the facts through their research. Since collective ownership and production form the very essence of socialist production relations, this appears to constitute a damning indictment of socialism. The picture is complicated by the fact that in China itself, some of those earlier termed "capitalist roaders", who were always opposed to egalitarian principles of distribution and who wanted to dismantle the rural communes (which were indeed dismantled from 1980 onwards), seized upon the alleged massive "famine" as one argument for an *ex post* justification for doing so, regardless of the fact that they themselves, despite their active involvement in political life, were apparently quite ignorant at that time that such a massive famine which led to 27 million to 30 million deaths, had taken place in their own country.

It would be instructive to look at how exactly this estimate of "famine deaths" has been arrived at. In China in the period of 1959-61 there was indeed a large shortfall in agricultural output, as much as 15 per cent from the normal level in 1959 and 25 per cent from the normal in the next two years, and this decline did in fact coincide with the "Great Leap" when the transition from advanced cooperatives to the people's communes took place. At that time a number of reasons, including drought in parts of the country, floods in others and attacks by pests, were put forward for the fall in output. No one, including members of the foreign diplomatic corps stationed there, or the ideological critics of collectivisation within the party, at that time suggested that there was massive famine. In India too the 1960s were difficult years and output shortfall owing to drought in 1965-67 was severe, although less so than in China, and it was combined with rapid inflation which eroded real wages and raised poverty levels to 60 per cent of the population, according to available World Bank estimates.

When we look at the estimates made by U.S. scholars of death rate and birth rate for China during the years 1959-61, we find that the death rate rose sharply in a single year, 1960, by as much as 10.8 per thousand compared to 1959. But because China in the single preceding decade of building socialism had reduced its death rate at a much faster rate (from 29 to 12 comparing 1949 and 1958) than India had, this sharp rise to 25.4 in 1960 in China still meant that this "famine" death



rate was virtually the same as the prevalent "normal" death rate in India which was 24.6 per thousand in 1960, only 0.8 lower. (All vital rates quoted here are from Carl Riskin's *China's Political Economy: The Search for Development Since 1949*). Further, in both the preceding and the succeeding year India's crude death rate was 8 to 10 per thousand higher than in China. Of course, each economy has to be judged in relation to its own internal performance; and no doubt the rise in the death rate during the worst years of output shortfall is a bad blot for China on its otherwise very impressive record of rapid decline and good food security.

Indeed the death rate would not have risen as much as it did despite the output shortfall, as Riskin argues, if the government had not bungled and continued to procure foodgrains from farmers. After 1961 the death rate again fell very steeply and reached 9.5 by 1966, a low level not achieved by India until three decades later in the mid-1990s. But is it correct to say that "famine deaths" in China totalled as much as 27 million to 30 million; and that absence of press freedom meant that China's then leaders, despite being aware of such massive deaths, were so cynical and depraved that they could mislead the world successfully? In a recent article pub-



Farmers in Jilin province storing grain, a 1986 picture. In terms of providing food security, making advances in health and education and lowering income poverty, China's record in the last half century is remarkable.

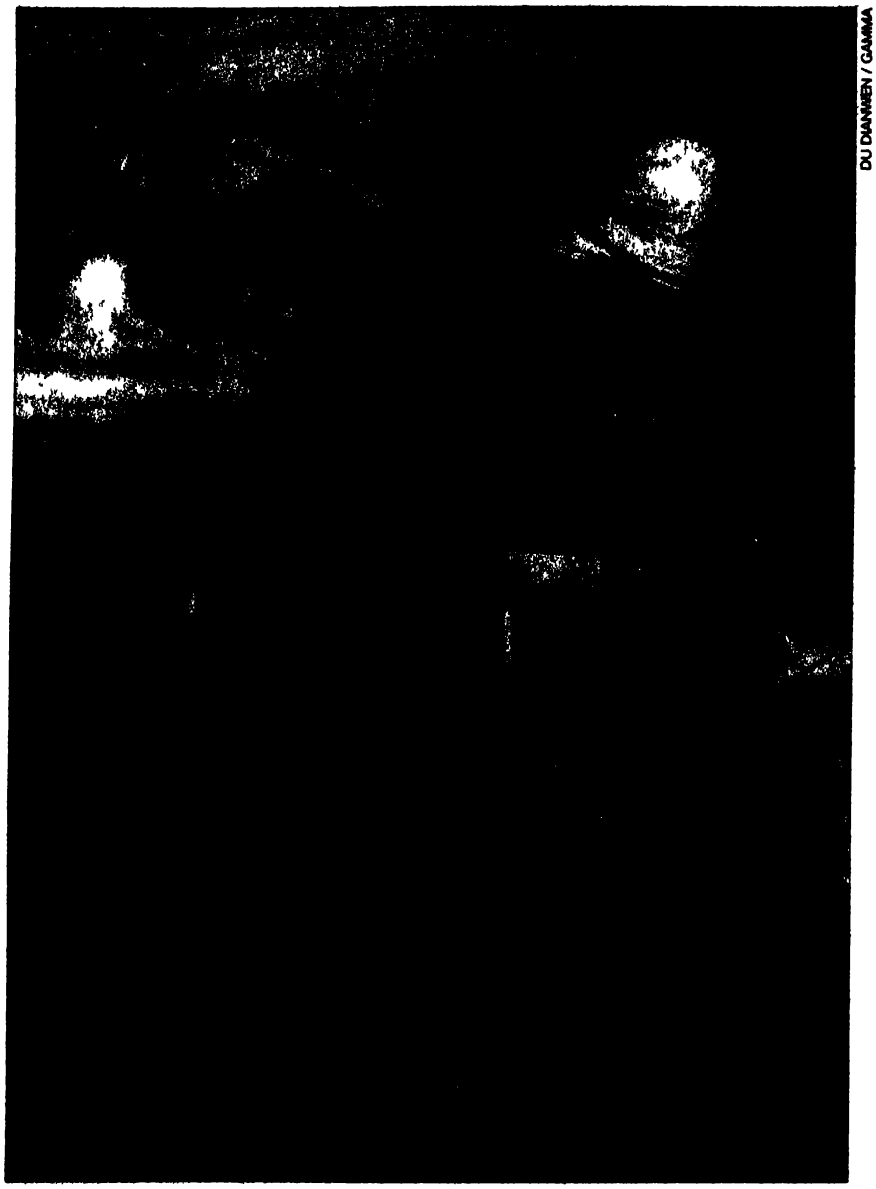
lished in the Bengali-language journal *Anushtup*, Badruddin Umar has provided a powerful and explicit critique of the widely accepted argument put forward by Western scholars and popularised by A. Sen on large famine deaths (and hence also a critique of others like P. Nolan). Umar argues that there is a contradiction in saying that the very state in China which had demonstrated its commitment to people's welfare through measures to reach basic health services and ensure food security to the poor, and which had achieved a much faster reduction in infant mortality and the death rate in the very first decade of independence than had India, could conceivably have wilfully suppressed information it had of such a large number of "famine deaths". We think there can be a more realistic estimate of mortality, and we also think of why no one, including the Westerners in China, even noticed that mortality was higher during these years.

Most people will accept that in order to qualify to "die" in a famine, and become a famine-death victim, it is necessary to be born in the first place. But over 16 million of the estimated 27 million "dead" in China's famine were not born at all! Most of those non-experts, journalists and others who accept and propagate the "massive famine deaths" in China argument do not themselves realise that people who were never born at all are being included to arrive at a grossly inflated estimate of "famine deaths" in China.

The measurement techniques seem designed to mislead, to talk about the "death" of people who were never born. How is this absurd situation possible? It has come about because not only the rise in the death rate but also the accompanying sharp fall in the birth rate is being taken into account when estimating "famine deaths". The birth rate in China declined and fell to a low of 18 per thousand in 1961 compared to 29.2 in 1958. (After 1961 it rose at a faster rate than it had fallen, to reach a peak of over 43 by 1963). The rise in the death rate during 1959-61 compared to the bench-mark year 1958 implies that there was indeed a total excess mortality of about 10.5 million persons over the three-year period 1959-61 in China. This is the correct estimate of excess deaths, but this order of "famine deaths" is not quite spectacular enough for liberal scholars. (Had India lowered the death rate after 1962 at the same pace as China, over 6 million deaths per year could have been avoided here over a period of three decades.) Therefore, the decline in the birth rate which was very steep during these three years, is taken into account and the babies which would have been born if the decline in birth rate had not taken place are added on by them to arrive at a nearly three times higher estimate, which is then called the "missing millions" and identified with "famine deaths".

The fact that at least 16.5 million of the alleged famine victims were never born seems to be a minor point for those who want to talk about massive "famine deaths" totalling at least 27 million in China and thereby discredit collectivisation. To the lay mind with its robust common sense this cannot be anything but tendentious academic sophistry. That periods of food shortage do lead to decline in fertility is a fairly well-established proposition. Periods of mass mobilisation of males, for military service, for example, also get reflected in a decline in the birth rate. There was no military conscription at this date in peacetime China, but there was massive mobilisation of both male and female workers for a stupendous construction effort during this period of early commune formation. The established peasant family living and work patterns were radically reorganised with the formation of the communes; large bands of men and women set out in teams and brigades for constructing water management systems, cleaning up the environment and eradicating disease-carrying organisms, afforesting hills, terracing and bunding and so on. They spent weeks at the work-sites, and there were communal kitchens and creches to look after children in these years. It is not surprising if this disruption of normal family life in the interests of construction may have also contributed greatly to the observed decline in the birth rate as birth decisions were postponed. With the stabilisation of the new system, dismantling of communal kitchens and reversion to family life the birth rate again surged to unprecedented levels, peaking at 43.4 in 1963, as though the people were scrambling to make up for the earlier decline.

As regards the genuine excess mortality during China's difficult years, while shortages were very real and visible, famine was not easily visible, including to



DU DANWEN / GAMMA

An agricultural worker in Yunnan province in southwest China.

the Westerners resident at that time in China, because China by then was an egalitarian society, not a class society. The undoubtedly severe rural food shortage was not concentrated in a sharp drop in consumption by the members of a particular deprived class like poor peasants who then died in the sight of all, while others had more than enough to eat, as typically happens with famine in class societies. Food shortage, while it was severe, was spread out over the rural consuming population much more evenly, and therefore, we can hypothesise, may have led to higher rates, but not immediately or obviously visible higher rates of mortality in those sections which remain vulnerable even in otherwise largely income-equalised – such as parturient mothers, infants and the aged. Paradoxically, the very success of egalitarianism in distributing the burden may have contributed to the invisibility. It is a mistake to think that all real trends are visible to the individuals living through the events at the time.

Thus even though we ourselves in this country have lived through the period when the infant mortality rate has fallen greatly, it is a matter we are convinced of not from our direct experience of it but after the numbers have been counted and presented to us. China's leaders were not guilty of wilful suppression of knowledge of the higher mortality; the knowledge itself was built up much later than the events, and the correct estimate as we have seen is about one-third of the highly sensationalised estimates which are still being circulated.

On a visit to China in the early 1980s, during the time the inflated "famine deaths" were being talked about in the West, this author mentioned these estimates and asked some very senior Chinese economists about their own experience of this period. They were extremely surprised and said that while there were cases of more deficiency diseases than usual, they were not aware of widespread famine deaths. It should be noted that those who designed the above-mentioned unique measure of "famine deaths" by including unborn babies, seem to be very reluctant to apply it to non-socialist countries. Their method, if impartially and honestly applied, would produce more than one episode in this century of large "famine deaths" – by their own definition – in the West European countries, which saw not only a rise in civilian mortality but also a decline in the birth rate during the time of wartime shortages. Even the accurate definition in terms of rise in the death rate is never applied by them to talk about famine in countries which are no longer socialist. Thus, in Russia, comparing 1994 with 1990 with the data given in World Bank publications, we find that the death rate rose from 48.8 to 84.1 per thousand able-bodied persons (that is, excluding children and the aged), the infant mortality rate rose, the birth rate also fell to a level below the death rate so that the population has been declining. Male life expectancy fell drastically as that country plunged into "shock therapy" to usher in a capitalist paradise and succeeded only in halving its national income. No one can say that the press is under censorship in Russia today or that the estimated vital rates are not known. But not one of those eminent economists, experts and others who have deafened us with their estimates of "famine deaths" during the Soviet or Chinese collectivisation, have bothered to apply the same method to the current Russian data.

With the transition to market socialism in China too some of the welfare gains of the three decades of egalitarianism have slowly been reversed, as reflected in the rise in the infant mortality rate. There is a new emergence of large-scale unemployment and the proliferation of urban slums of migrants from the villages. As China celebrates the achievements of its half century of independence and building of socialism, its people perhaps need to reflect afresh on the direction in which the last two decades of anti-egalitarian market reforms have been taking their hard-won Revolution. Much has been achieved; but the vision of an alternative society still remains to be realised. ■

A defensive strategy

Perceptions about China in India are not always rooted in the reality; this situation calls for change.

GIRI DESHINGKAR

IT has been an article of faith in India for almost 40 years out of the 50 years of existence of the People's Republic of China that it is an aggressive and expansionist country. In the immediate aftermath of the 1962 border war, such a perception was perhaps understandable. But it has persisted although the India-China border has essentially remained tranquil since that short war. This is because India's leaders projected an image of China, which was almost racist. "Whenever China has been powerful in history it has been expansionist," declared Jawaharlal Nehru, without consulting any history book. Much play was made about the literal translation of Zhongguo, the Chinese name for China, as the "Middle Country" as proof that China considered itself to be the centre of the world. Radio programmes such as "India and the Dragon" were aimed at creating a feeling of disgust about Chinese culture, food habits and so on.

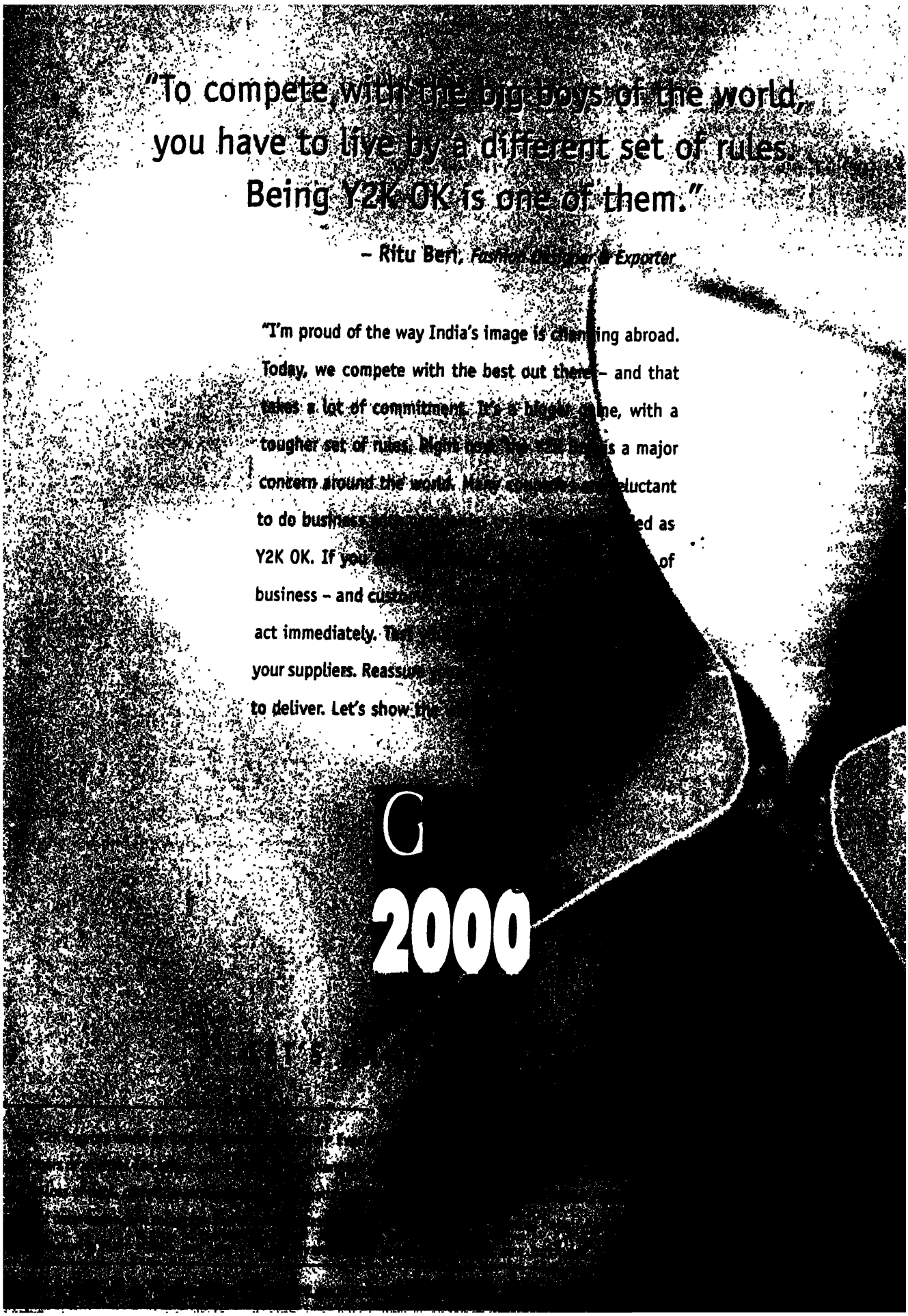
Belief accumulates "evidence" to reinforce itself and rejects all contrary facts. So when China exploded its first nuclear device in 1964, there was panic in India; the perception was that those atom bombs were surely aimed at India. China's "no first use" declaration was laughed at by the very people in India who today want other countries to trust India's "no first use" doctrine. India's think tanks treated the Sino-Soviet dispute as proof that China could not live in peace even with its ideological brothers. Reports in India spoke of nuclear-tipped Chinese missiles deployed in Tibet, targeted at Indian cities; Defence Minister George Fernandes asserted this a year ago without checking out the facts with military intelligence. He also spoke of Chinese naval bases on the Cocos islands off Myanmar, again without the benefit of an opinion from naval intelligence.

Why did China withdraw to essentially India's claim line in the eastern sector after advancing to its own claim line in 1962? Why has China never conveyed even the hint of a nuclear threat against any country? Why has the India-China border remained largely peaceful for so many years? Why did Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988 suddenly improve India-China relations? India and China have signed two agreements over the Line of Actual Control. The first operative sentence of the agreement of 1996 says: "Neither side shall use its military capability against the other." Why did China bind its hands with such agreements? Such questions must be asked and answered in order to get beyond the preva-

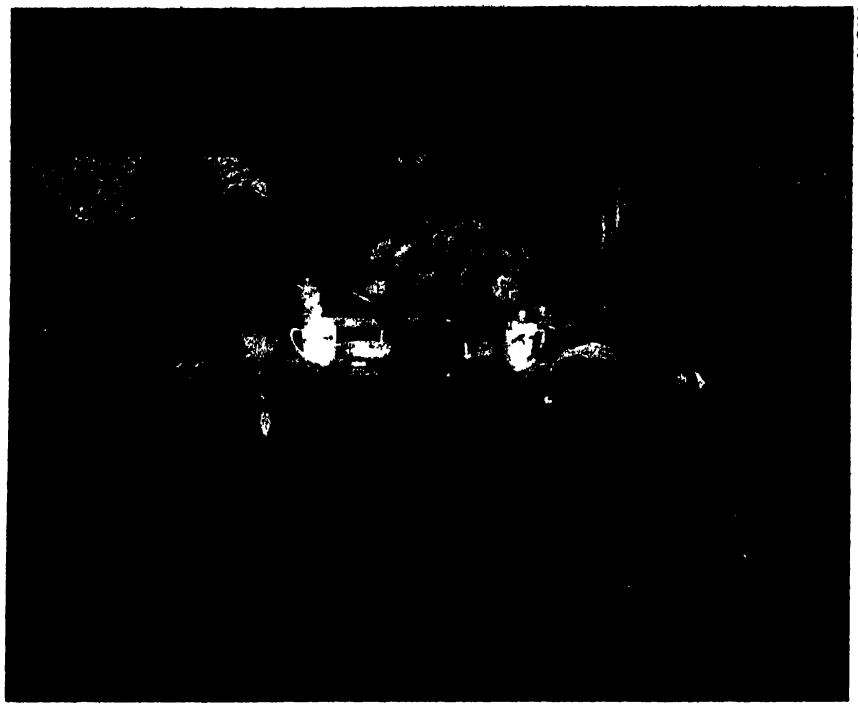


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On a visit to India in June 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, President Rajendra Prasad and Vice-President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.


"To compete with the big boys of the world,
you have to live by a different set of rules.
Being Y2K OK is one of them."
– Ritu Beri, Fashion Designer & Exporter
"I'm proud of the way India's image is changing abroad.
Today, we compete with the best out there – and that
takes a lot of commitment. It's a bigger game, with a
tougher set of rules. Right now, the year 2000 is a major
concern around the world. Many customers are reluctant
to do business
Y2K OK. If you
business – and
act immediately.
your suppliers. Reassu
to deliver. Let's show
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Deng Xiaoping with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in December 1988.

lent one-line conclusions with which public opinion has been "educated" about China in India. Only then can India come up with an intelligent, sober China policy for the 21st century.

With this in mind, let us look at China's security and defence policies as they have evolved over the last 50 years. These have gone through two phases: the first, ideologically dominated one lasted approximately until the end of the 1970s. During this phase, ideology defined who China's friends and enemies were, regardless of what the actual situation on the ground was. China's actual conduct of foreign relations was, however, laced with pragmatism. But the pragmatism came to an end with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Foreign policy until the early years of the 1970s was no longer determined by professionals in the diplomatic service but by the highly ideologically indoctrinated Red Guards.

Ideology told the Chinese that another world war, a nuclear war, was inevitable, and that it would come sooner rather than later. China would therefore remain in a permanent state of mobilisation. Everyone in China became a soldier. Deep and extensive tunnels were dug under all the big cities to withstand anticipated nuclear attacks by imperialist enemies such as the United States and "social imperialists" such as the Soviet Union. China's general defence posture in those days was one of giving the tit-for-tat response. This led to quite a few armed clashes on the Sino-Soviet border. Later China was to launch a "punitive" strike against Vietnam as well.

This astonishingly tough posture was based on a People's Liberation Army (PLA) which was high on manpower (at one point it had 6,000,000 soldiers) but very low on technology when it came to weapons and equipment. The basic military doctrine asked for a combination of millet and rifles, or a simple lifestyle and whatever weapons were available. The weapons were of old Soviet design. China's attempts to design new weapons were unsuccessful. What it lacked in weaponry was supposed to be made up with troop morale, that is, revolutionary fervour. Notwithstanding its deficiencies, the Chinese Army projected a formidable image of power, reinforced undoubtedly by a growing nuclear arsenal and a missile force. During this phase China's defence expenditure also remained high.

High-alert military preparedness, however, went with a totally defensive strategic doctrine. The motto was: "We will not attack unless we are attacked but we will certainly counter-attack if attacked" was the motto. This kept peace between China and other countries for the most part but the posture was also susceptible to over-reaction; retired Chinese officials admit today that China overreacted to India's provocative "forward policy" in 1962. Their Indian counterparts agree that the policy was unnecessarily adventurous.

Chinese leaders at last digested the evidence which cast serious doubts on what Marxist-Leninist ideology had been telling them and came to a new conclusion. By 1985 they were ready to declare that a nuclear world war was unlikely in the foreseeable future. So China should divert towards economic development its resources that were earlier earmarked for national defence. Since the new strategic doctrine did not envisage any large-scale invasion of China, the PLA's manpower could be gradually reduced: as of now it has been reduced to 2,500,000 and may see further reductions as the PLA's mobility improves. China's military industry has virtually stopped producing weapons of obsolete designs, among them long-range bombers, the MiG series of combat aircraft, main battle tanks, army vehicles of different types, and some classes of submarines. Both troop reduction and a virtual end to arms procurement have enabled China to reduce the defence budget to a level that is lower than India's. (Journalistic opinion of course dismisses the official budget figures as false but China-specialists say that the official figures are correct.) China's attempts to produce new designs for its weapons systems have not been successful so far. So, departing from past principles and practice, China has begun to import advanced combat aircraft, submarines and anti-aircraft missiles from Russia and some military technology from Israel.

Since the change of strategic doctrine, China has made special efforts to improve relations with its neighbours and these efforts have yielded results. The earlier antagonism between China and Vietnam has now given way to a cordial relationship; the border problem between them is close to being resolved. Russia, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have already resolved their border problems with China. As a result, China has drastically reduced its troops strength on its northern border. The dispute between China and some of the islands in the South China Sea is alive on paper, but things are under control despite an occasional skirmish between the Philippines Navy and Chinese fishermen. China has become an active member of several multilateral forums in the Asia-Pacific region.

CHINA'S relations with the U.S. had their ups and downs; at the moment they are at a new low. But there is no mil-

itary tension between the two except insofar as the U.S. is prepared to involve itself in the event of China using force to integrate Taiwan with itself. The same problem plagues China-Japan relations, in addition, of course, to the historical distrust China has for Japan. Two earlier adversaries, Outer Mongolia and South Korea, are now on friendly terms with China.

The end of the Cold War has given China a feeling of security and facilitated several of these relationships, but China's foreign and defence policies had changed well before the end of the Cold War. Mikhail Gorbachev's Vladivostok initiative of July 28 1986 (the Soviet leader had unveiled an ambitious project for a dramatic recasting of Moscow's diplomacy towards the Asia-Pacific region, which included demilitarisation and an end to nuclear weapons development) may have induced Rajiv Gandhi to visit China and agree to a mutually acceptable solution to the border dispute (India had earlier refused to grant any legitimacy to the Chinese position) but by that time China's new policy of befriending earlier adversaries was already under way. Once relations started improving the pace picked up remarkably; the fact that China "readjusted" its policy towards Pakistan also helped the process along.

The perception in India that China is inherently an aggressive country and it will "show its teeth" when it becomes a super power is still deep-rooted, particularly in the armed forces and the bureaucracy. Without an enemy the military loses its mission and importance. The bureaucracy is institutionally unable to admit that the policies it made were wrong. The politicians have no such inhibitions but their views are dictated by the needs of domestic politics; they are often the victims of public opinion, which they had created in the first place.

Both independent India and China are 50 years old. China has learned the hard way quite a few lessons during this period. India has been slow in understanding China. Today, the fact is that there is no basic conflict of interest between the two countries; there are only specific bilateral problems, as they exist between any two countries. It is important for India to watch China's security policies in order to see how a country can formulate a security doctrine, which is not imported or outmoded like the "draft" Indian nuclear doctrine, but is a product of its own genius. ■

Foreign policy directions

China is in the process of reorienting its foreign policy with the focus on promoting stability and prosperity in the Asian region and bringing about multipolarity in international relations.

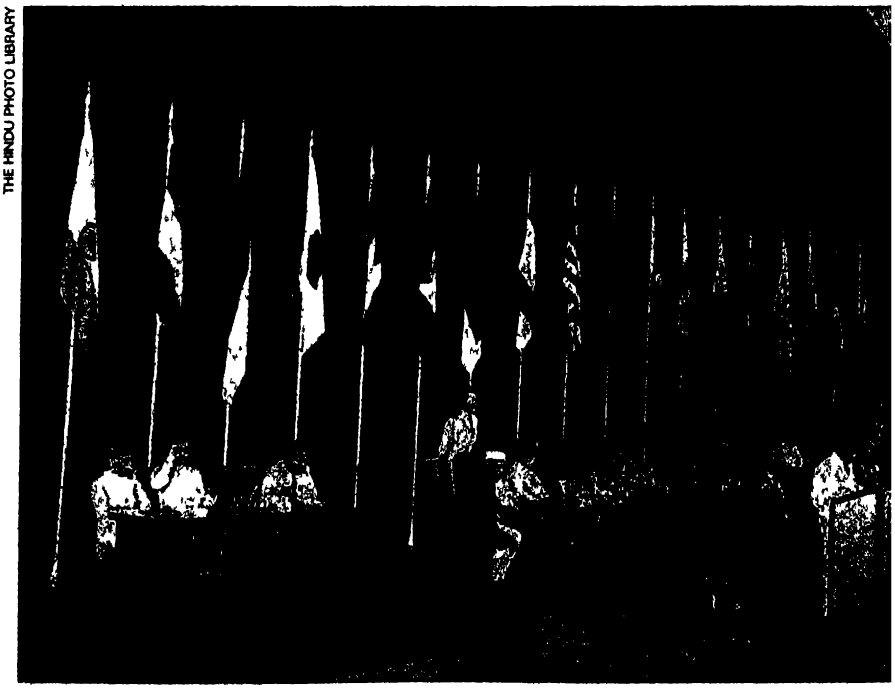
JOHN CHERIAN

CHINA'S foreign policy has evolved considerably over the past 50 years. In 1949, Mao Zedong unequivocally announced the "lean to one side" policy: "The Chinese people must lean either to the side of imperialism or to the side of socialism. There can be no sitting on the fence; there is no third path."

The China-Soviet Union axis lasted until the late 1950s. There were many concrete manifestations of the friendship. One of these was the Soviet assistance to China in the nuclear field, which began in 1957. A year later the Soviet Union sent a heavy water type reactor to Beijing. This relationship was the cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy during the first decade after the Revolution.

In the early 1960s, the simmering ideological differences between Beijing and Moscow boiled over, and until the 1980s the two countries remained implacable ideological foes. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar world once again made Beijing reorient its policies. Now Moscow and Beijing have re-established a "special" relationship but it is unlikely that the close ties of the 1950s will be replicated.

In the last two decades China's foreign policy has to a large extent been dictated by its security environment. China has about two dozen neighbours. Five of them – Russia, Japan, India, Pakistan and Indonesia – have a population of over 100 million each. China's foreign policy with regard to its non-Communist neighbours has been more or less consistent. Bilateral relations with these countries are guided by the five principles of peaceful co-existence: mutual respect for each other's territory and sovereignty; mutual



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April 1955: President Sukarno of Indonesia addresses the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, at which China played a key role and emerged into a leadership position among countries of the developing world with the theme of peaceful coexistence with its Asian neighbours.

non-aggression; non-interference in each other's domestic affairs; equality of relationship; and mutual benefit.

China played a crucial role in the Korean war in 1950 when it unhesitatingly sent a million "volunteers" to fight the American invasion. Chinese help to the Vietnamese in the 1940s and 1950s in their fight against the French and later in the 1960s and the 1970s against the Americans was also of great importance.



U.S. President Richard Nixon with Chairman Mao during a path-breaking visit to China in February 1972.

CHINA'S key role in the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung (Indonesia), where its theme of peaceful co-existence won it a leadership position among the countries of the Third World, was an important foreign policy milestone. The Chinese Government did its bit in the struggle to decolonise the Third World by providing liberation movements both moral and material support. In the 1960s and the 1970s, Beijing undertook ambitious infrastructure projects on a turn-key basis in the developing world. The railway line connecting Lusaka to Dar-es-Salam, which was completed in the 1970s, has contributed to the development of the region. Many underdeveloped countries benefited from such projects.

But after Deng Xiaoping consolidated his hold on power and ushered in the Four Modernisations – agriculture, industry, science and technology and national defence – Chinese foreign policy became more pragmatic. The focus was now on turning China into a leading modern state by the year 2000. Since the 1980s Chinese officials have repeatedly emphasised the importance of economic development while underlining the danger posed by looming U.S. hegemony. The Chinese view is that in the 21st century, national power will derive primarily from economic, scientific and technological prowess.

The fast pace of events instigated in the latter half of the 1980S by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's "new thinking" alarmed Beijing. China made no secret of its view that Gorbachev's reforms oriented towards *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) would lead to the weakening of the Soviet Union and the socialist world. Secondly, the critical position Washington adopted after the Chinese authorities tackled the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, led to a serious rethink in Beijing. It became apparent to China that Washington was using the issue of "human rights" to interfere in its domestic affairs. Another alarming development related to indications of Japan's overt inclination to assume again the role of a military power.

The situation in the Korean peninsula was seen in Beijing as yet another matter of concern. The United States had made it clear by the mid-1990s that it intended to keep a forward force of 10,000 troops deployed in Japan and Korea for the next 20 years. Naturally China feels that these forces are aimed at it. Washington retains the right to position nuclear weapons in Okinawa in Japan, in case a military crisis erupts in the region. In May 1999, the Japanese Diet (parliament) passed legislation to enable the implementation of the U.S.' plans for joint U.S.-Japan operations in case another war breaks out in East Asia. The guidelines replace the joint strategy drawn up more than 20 years ago to fight the Soviet Union.

Beijing feels that it is being shortchanged by the U.S. and Japan on the Taiwan issue. President Bill Clinton, after visiting China in 1998, reiterated his support for China's position on the Taiwan question. But in July this year President Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan declared that Taiwan no longer considered itself part of China. China was infuriated and has announced its intention to "uphold national sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity". The U.S., on the other hand, has pledged to defend Taiwan if it faces an external attack. From China's point of view, the U.S. position is aimed at preventing China from emerging as a great power.

The distrust between China and Japan runs deep and is fuelled by historical animosities. Beijing is suspicious of the intentions of Japan as also of some other states in its immediate neighbourhood that are cosying up to the U.S. and tacitly supporting Pentagon's long-term plans to encircle China militarily. The Americans are doing their best to prevent China from emerging as the dominant power in the region and to hold on to their



VIKTOR KORDTAYEV / AP

President Jiang with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, an August 1999 picture. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar world, Moscow and Beijing have re-established a "special" relationship but it seems unlikely that the close ties of the 1950s will ever be replicated.

claim to be the sole arbiter in the Asia-Pacific region. China may be trying to follow the Japanese strategy of economic development, but it has carefully avoided the Japanese pattern of subservience to the U.S.

The recent crisis in Kosovo, during which the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed by U.S.-led forces, has further alienated Beijing from Washington. The continuing expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the plans to set up a theatre missile defence (TMD) system are also viewed as manifestations of Washington's desire to dominate the world. The TMD umbrella is ostensibly meant to shield Japan, South Korea and Taiwan from a perceived missile attack. The system would for all practical purposes make Taiwan a U.S. protectorate. China is justified in concluding that a new Cold War is in the making, with itself replacing the Soviet Union as the "enemy".

However, the Chinese leadership is optimistic about multipolarity in international relations becoming a reality in the not-so-distant future. Chinese security and strategic experts are of the opinion that Russia will recover and will soon pursue vigorously its national interests. They do not expect Japan to remain subservient to the U.S. for long and they feel that China will emerge as a world power.

China is also aware of the U.S. backing to separatist ethnic and religious tendencies. Beijing has accused Washington of supporting a pan-Mongolian movement. Inner Mongolia is part of China. Statements have been issued from Mongolia urging "the peoples of Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang to fight for freedom and independence". In Xinjiang, the movement by Islamic fundamentalists to create an independent "Republic of East Turkistan" has the tacit support of the U.S. The U.S. encouragement to the separatists in Tibet is well-documented.

The Shanghai Group of Five, consisting of China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, is coordinating action to combat the separatist and fundamentalist forces. Beijing attaches great importance to this regional grouping, citing it as an illustration of multipolarity. China, like India and Russia, takes the threat from Islamic fundamentalists seriously. Followers of Islam in China are concentrated mainly in the Xinjiang area (Muslims in the country number more than 17 million). China depends a great deal on Pakistan to use its influence on the Taliban leaders to prevent the supply of arms to Islamic rebels in Xinjiang.

WASHINGTON has accused Beijing of being one of the biggest arms exporters. Chinese officials, however, maintain that they are careful about entering into defence deals. The Chinese Government has denied that it has supplied missiles and advanced missile technology to countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Beijing has accused Washington of being a greater proliferator of nuclear weapons, pointing out that the U.S. is the world's largest weapons exporter, with 44 per cent of the global sales. The Chinese Government is especially angry about the sale of high-tech U.S. weapons to Taiwan. The warm relations Beijing has with Moscow today has made China the second largest defence partner of Russia. India is the biggest buyer of Russian weapons.

Former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov was a strong proponent of a Moscow-New Delhi-Beijing strategic axis to counter U.S. hegemony. But both New Delhi and Beijing, for their own reasons, were lukewarm to this proposal. But they do share some common perspectives. For instance, both India and China are alarmed at the growing trend in international politics of using "human rights" as a pretext to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. The Clinton administration has used this rationale to intervene in Kosovo.

Further, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for "more active intervention" by the U.N. when civilian populations are at risk has set alarm bells ringing. Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan has said that respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of another country "are the basic

principles governing international relations" and that any deviation from these would lead to a new form of gunboat diplomacy that would "wreak havoc" with global peace.

China continues to have close ties with developing countries. It is involved in a number of joint ventures which, according to Chinese officials, are for "mutual benefit". The government allows "special enterprises" to take part in these ventures. China recently completed a major project in Sudan, which involved the developing of an oilfield and the laying of an oil pipeline. This project has made Sudan an oil-exporting country. Cash-strapped Sudan will repay China with crude oil. Sudan is one of several countries facing a U.S. economic embargo.

China has excellent relations with Cuba. It is one of the biggest trade partners of Cuba outside Latin America. Moreover, Beijing has been vociferous in its criticism of the inhuman U.S.economic blockade against Cuba. Both Cuban President Fidel Castro and President Jiang Zemin have exchanged visits.

BEIJING'S focus is on promoting stability and prosperity in the region. Defence Minister General Chi Haotian said recently that the confidence-building measures (CBMs) signed by China since 1994 with Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and India have increased mutual trust and provided safeguards for border security. This in turn has promoted stability and prosperity.

China is on the verge of settling most of its border disputes. The long-standing disputes with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States have been more or less resolved. China and Vietnam have set the year 2000 as the deadline for resolving their border problems. The dispute with India is the only one that remains to be resolved. Chinese officials feel that a solution to this could take some time as the Line of Actual Control was never fully demarcated.

Jiang Zemin, in a recent speech in Bangkok, said that "the world is far from being tranquil. Hegemonism and power politics still exist and have even been developed in the international political, economic and security fields." He added that the "gunboat policy" and the economic neo-colonialism pursued by some powers had undermined the independence and development interests of many small and medium-sized countries and threatened world peace and international stability. ■

Line and leadership

Mao Zedong's socialist vision would remain a reference point for assessing the Deng Xiaoping line of reforms.

MANORANJAN MOHANTY

AS China celebrates the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, the people of China recall the Yi He Tuan movement, also known as the Boxer Uprising, whose centenary falls this year. It was an anti-imperialist armed struggle which started in Shandong province in 1899 and spread to Tianjin in early 1900 and to Beijing in May that year. The Qing dynasty dowager Ci Xi, after showing sympathy for the rebels, capitulated when the combined armed forces of Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United States and Japan landed to suppress the uprising in August. After this, yet another unequal treaty was imposed on China in 1901 giving more rights to the imperialist powers, including the right to set up their legation quarters in Beijing.

This uprising fuelled the sentiments of nationalism, leading to the 1911 Revolution that overthrew the Manchu monarchy and set up a republic. But only after the Bolshevik Revolution did the Chinese nationalist movement acquire a democratic content. The students' protest in Beijing against the Treaty of Versailles giving German possessions to Japan spilled over into other cities. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 brought the masses into the political struggle against colonialism and social oppression. This struggle was led by the Communist Party of China (CPC), which was founded in 1921. After a tortuous process of political experiments, the CPC evolved its strategy of People's Democratic Revolution under the leadership of Mao Zedong and achieved victory on October 1, 1949.

The running theme of the 20th century history of China is gaining prestige for the nation and achieving welfare for the people and making them masters of their own destiny. Dr. Sun Yatsen, the leader of the 1911 Revolution, enshrined it in his Three People's Principles – Nationalism, Democracy and People's Livelihood. Mao Zedong's theory of New Democratic Revolution built upon it and



China's top leaders (front row, from left) Li Lanqing, Hu Jintao, Zhu Rongji, Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Li Ruihuan and Wei Jianxing with nuclear and space scientists who were honoured at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on September 18.

propounded the concept of a four-class united front of workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie – constituting the people who formed 90 per cent of the population. This united front sought to carry out an anti-colonial and anti-feudal revolution. Deng Xiaoping reverted to this theme of nationalism with economic well-being in 1978 through his programme of reforms and an open-door policy. Mao's political line of the People's Democratic Revolution led to the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Deng's political line of building a socialist market economy has brought about significant economic successes in China and a steadily rising status for the country in the world. Deng followed the united front framework to mobilise social forces to the maximum extent in order to carry out economic modernisation.

Mao Zedong's line for building socialism was different from what Deng adopted. Mao advocated the application of the class struggle perspective while striving for economic development. He stressed that without the right political-ideological orientation economic growth may bring about capitalist development. The Cultural Revolution propounded this perspective, but in the course of the ideological campaigns during 1966-76, factional political battles became widespread, causing conditions of anarchy and large-scale persecution. Deng carried the party at the Third Plenum of December 1978 to repudiate the Cultural Revolution *in toto* and affirm the centrality of 'economic construction' in place of class struggle and emphasised the need for socio-political stability as against the political campaigns of the Cultural Revolution.

Deng's and his successors' economic successes have put Mao's line on socialism in the museum of rejects. But two things cannot be denied. First, much of the economic successes of the reform period would not have been possible without the structure of collective economy built during Mao's leadership. Secondly, as capitalist forces grow in China and the capitalist culture takes root and social inequality and regional disparity, corruption and crime acquire serious proportions, Mao's socialist vision remains a reference point to assess the Deng line of reforms. But without doubt, the living standards of every Chinese family have substantially improved during the past two decades.

The line has been put in place by a political leadership to carry it out firmly. This year is the tenth year of Jiang Zemin's leadership, which was installed by Deng Xiaoping in June 1989 after the crushing of the youth demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. Interestingly enough, both Mao and Deng tried out three sets of their colleagues to carry out their respective lines. Mao had Liu Shaoqi as his deputy in what was a collective leadership until 1965. During the Cultural Revolution, Liu was disgraced and Lin Biao, the Defence Minister, became the second-in-command. After Lin Biao's failed coup and death in an air crash in 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai took command and he brought back Deng Xiaoping. Deng was challenged by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, who led the 'Gang of Four' and was arrested in October 1976 (Mao died in September that year). Mao's designated successor, the centrist Hua Guofeng, could not withstand the new wave initiated by Deng, who proclaimed the new line at the end of 1978.

A common commitment to the Deng Theory has created layers of leaders in China.

Deng Xiaoping decided not to occupy top party or state posts except a crucial position as the Chairperson of the Military Affairs Commission, which he held until after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. His first nominee was Hu Yaobang, who was the CPC General Secretary from 1982 to 1987 until he was replaced by Premier Zhao Ziyang. Zhao Ziyang was dismissed in June 1989 for his mishandling – read sympathising with – the Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

Jiang Zemin, then the Secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee, slowly consolidated his position as the leader since 1989. Deng reaffirmed the reform line in early 1992 during his tours of the Special Economic Zones and invoked people to carry out the reforms vigorously without fear of capitalist restoration; he pointed out that the Communist Party leadership was there to direct it. Jiang moved fast and christened the new ideas in the 14th Party Congress as the theory of "socialist market economy" and Deng Xiaoping's theory of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics". After the death of Deng (in February 1997), the 15th Congress, held in September 1997, proclaimed Deng's theory as the new "ideological banner" of the CPC. In the meantime, Jiang assumed the office of the Chairperson of the Military Affairs Commission after Deng's retirement and became President of the People's Republic.

Jiang at 73 has sidelined his critics and challengers such as Qiao Shi who was retired in 1997 on consideration of age. He has pulled along reasonably well with former Premier Li Peng, 71, now Chairperson of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC). Jiang's trusted colleague from Shanghai is Premier Zhu Rongji, also 71, who has directed the economy through periods of crisis and periods of smooth growth. Another technocrat in his team in the Standing Committee of the Politburo is Li Ruihuan, 65, who was the leader in Tianjin earlier. Now he is the Chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the United Front organ. Li Lanquing, 67, a Vice-Premier, is in charge of international economic relations, and Wei Jianxing, 68, the Secretary of the Party Discipline Commission spearheading the ruthless drive against corruption, is in charge of Security Affairs. But the man of the future is Hu Jintao, the youngest member of the team at 57, the Vice-President of the PRC who has been elevated to the post of a Vice-Chairperson of the Military Affairs Commission in the just-concluded Plenum of the CPC Central Committee. A former Secretary of Guizhou and, more important, of the Tibet Party Committee and earlier the Youth League leader, Hu has been the President of the Party School for many years. Jiang Zemin may be grooming him to become his successor at the 16th Party Congress to he held in 2002.

The leadership question does not seem to pose much of a problem as a common commitment to the Deng Theory has created layers of leaders in China. The Deng Theory has an intrinsic flexibility to address the burning socio-political problems that China faces at the turn of the century. But the legacies of the people's revolution of the century have created enough strength to pursue their agenda of national prestige and mass well-being and contribute to similar processes going on in other parts of the world. ■

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Firmly on the socialist path

China is making major strides of economic development while at the same time being conscious of the problems of growth of any tendencies alien to socialism. Some observations and impressions from a visit.

SITARAM YECHURY

A FIVE-MEMBER Central Committee delegation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led by Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury visited China from March 31 to April 10, 1999, at the invitation of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The other members of the delegation were Nirupam Sen, P.K. Gurudasan, N. Varadarajan and Ashok Dhawle.

The delegation, which was received warmly, held fruitful discussions with the CPC leadership reflecting the mutual desire to strengthen relations between the two countries, peoples and the parties. At the Great Hall of the People in Beijing the delegation was received by Wei Jianxing, one of seven members of the Standing Committee of the CPC Political Bureau who is in charge of party discipline. The delegation held discussions with Dai Bingguo, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, Ma Wenpu, Vice-Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee, and many others. Three days of intensive discussions with the leadership of the CPC in Beijing covered a wide range of bilateral and international issues.

Thereafter, the delegation visited the provinces of Xian, the ancient capital of China, and Yunnan. In Yunnan, the delegation visited remote hilly areas and deep down south the tri-junction with Laos and Myanmar inhabited by China's minority nationalities. The week-long tour to interior China aimed to study the living conditions of the people and find out how the problems arising out of the speedy developmental process are being tackled at the grassroots level. The itinerary was worked out at our suggestion that we visit interior China rather than the more developed, fashionable and prosperous east coast which has huge cities such as Shanghai and Guanzhou (Canton), which are easily comparable with Hong Kong.

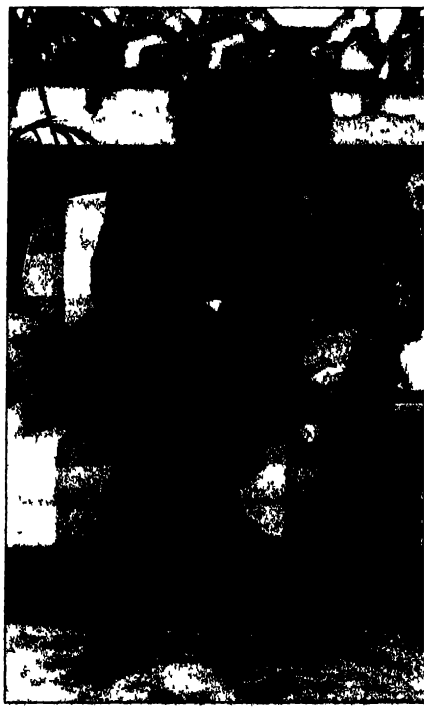
What we saw and experienced in China's interior reflected a country and a people seized with a singular passion to bring about all-round development based on speedy economic growth. This singularity of purpose and determination was evident at all levels. Given that this is happening in a country with 1.3 billion people which has been experiencing a phenomenal annual economic growth during the last two decades, such a massive human and material effort is bound to produce results that will have global implications.

One highlight of the visit was the discussions the delegation had with Wei Jianxing. While detailing various aspects of the current situation in China, he highlighted China's desire to improve good-neighbourly relations with India. This, he said, was in China's interest as its main priority was to develop its own economy and thus strengthen socialism, which required peace and absence of tension with any country. Despite the recent setback to the decade-long process of improvement of relations that had begun with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988, Wei Jianxing emphasised China's desire to overcome these problems and continue the process of improving relations. In response, we conveyed to the Chinese leadership that the Indian people, given their centuries-long association and interaction with the Chinese, are equally, if not more, desirous of improving these relations. In fact, mutual concern for good-neighbourly relations was a constant feature of all the discussions we had during the visit.

Considering that ours was the first political delegation visiting China after the BJP-led government assumed office in India and in the background of irresponsible acrimony unleashed by the BJP and its allies against China as a justification for Pokhran-II, the fact that there was such a universal desire among the Chinese leadership and the people to improve relations with India was heartening.

The Chinese leaders emphasised that while one arm of the present developmental process in China is that of economic reform and opening up to the outside world, the other arm is the firm adherence to the four cardinal principles (adherence to the socialist road; Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought; people's democratic dictatorship; and the leadership of the Communist Party) and the strengthening of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

A series of public campaigns are being conducted by the CPC on these issues and a vast network of party schools continuously train and re-train party members on ideological matters. Our delegation visited the party school in Yunnan province. One important activity at this school is to carry on study and research in Marxism-Leninism and Deng Xiaoping theory. Apart from research scholars, party cadres



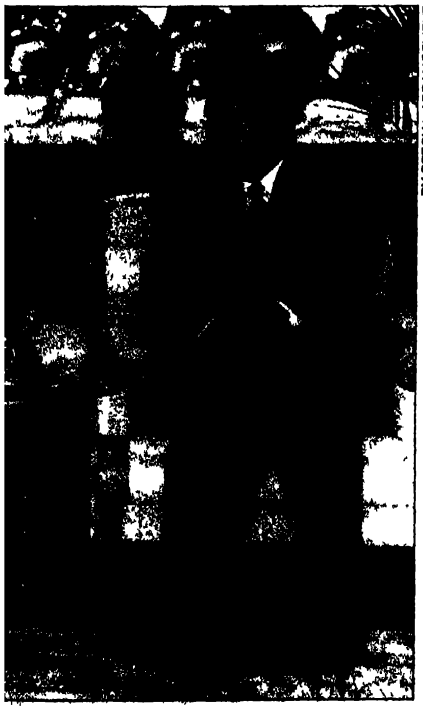
CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Sitaram Yechury (left), who was part of a five-member Central Committee delegation from India that visited China earlier this year, with Wei Jianxing, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China.

sent by the lower-level committees come here for training. Over the last 20 years, the school has trained more than one lakh students. It conducts various courses in revolutionary theory and philosophy and also on party-building and party history. The faculty follows the method of criticism and self-criticism and studying theory by integrating the subjective with the objective.

Explaining their assessment of the international situation, the CPC leaders told our delegation that peace and development will remain the main themes of the 21st century. They were optimistic that the 21st century will offer more opportunities than challenges for the struggle towards socialism. In their perception, the circumstances also will be more favourable than they are unfavourable, and hence the opportunities should be seized to counter the challenges.

CERTAIN important features of the present international situation figured in the discussions. The first is the global tendency that propels the world towards multi-polarity. While on the one hand, such a development, after the bipolar Cold War period has ended, is a positive one, on the other, there are forces with a vision of a "new world order" which seek to convert this natural tendency towards multipolarity into one of unipolarity. Such an effort will have to be resisted in the interests of a democratic world order.

The second feature concerns the true nature of economic globalisation. Its potential to wreak havoc is becoming clearer with the severe economic damage it caused in South East Asia, virtually overnight. Globalisation poses serious threats to the sovereignty and economic security of Third World countries. On the other hand, globalisation also offers possibilities for expanding economic activity and, hence, achieving development. China is preparing to face this dual nature of globalisation.



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

During the discussions with various leaders it became clear that over the past couple of years China has overcome enormous difficulties and achieved new advances while maintaining political and social stability alongwith a relatively high economic growth. China has achieved significant diplomatic victories as well and is bracing itself to re-unite Macau during the 50th anniversary year of its socialist revolution.

Domestically, China had to overcome two very serious problems: the impact of the South East Asian financial crisis and severe floods, unprecedented in this century.

The impact of the financial crisis, we were informed, is still felt. Over the past few years China's foreign trade was growing at an annual rate of 16 per cent. Last year this figure fell to 0.4 per cent. Anticipating such problems, China had targeted a modest 8 per cent growth. Of this, 2 per cent was to come from foreign trade. The sharp drop in the foreign trade was therefore a severe setback. The unprecedented floods caused damage of more than 200 billion yuan (the Chinese currency, approximately eight to a dollar). Despite this, China achieved a growth rate of 7.8 per cent during the year. And real per capita income grew by 4.3 per cent in the rural areas and 5.8 per cent in the urban areas. How was this achieved?

China faced these two formidable challenges mainly by effecting a massive increase in state spending that stimulated internal domestic demand. This year, more than yuan 100 billion was spent by the exchequer on building infrastructural facilities. It was this timely and effective state intervention that helped China avoid going the way of the South East Asian countries, which would have caused tremendous chaos in a country of China's size.

While China's decision not to make its currency freely convertible helped it insulate itself from the financial crisis elsewhere, it has refused to devalue its currency despite this being the obvious choice to bolster exports and, thereby, improve the growth of foreign trade. The country, instead, took a series of measures to encourage exports through a variety of subsidies. One of the main reasons for not opting for the devaluation of the currency was that it would have affected Hong Kong which was already suffering the consequences of the financial crisis. Further, any devaluation would adversely affect the overall confidence in the economy and its international standing. More important, it would increase China's foreign debt burden.

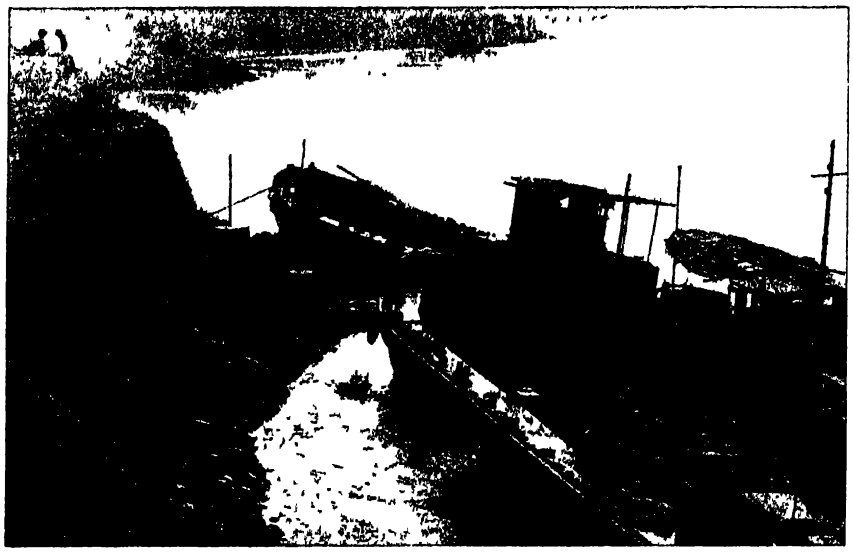
Incidentally, the few hours we spent in Hong Kong during our return journey confirmed the fact that mainland China had greatly helped Hong Kong to avoid buckling under the regional financial crisis. Apart from not devaluing the yuan, mainland China had stepped up investments in Hong Kong, boosting demand and employment. This has silenced even the worst critics of Hong Kong's unification with China. The bulk of Hong Kong's population appears more grateful to the mainland than even before.

It would be interesting to note that when we, in India, argue that in order to overcome the current industrial recession and at the same time generate employment it is necessary for the government to undertake large public expenditures, we are told by the Indian "liberalisers" that this will push up the fiscal deficit and, hence, would be counter-productive. Then why is this not true for China? Because, it is not true for India either.

On the contrary, despite such huge public expenditure, both retail and consumer prices grew at a lower rate in China than in the previous year. The Chinese explained that the problem is not in building up domestic debt. The question is how such borrowed funds are utilised? If it is employed productively and not wastefully, then it need not give rise to inflation. They claimed that the ratio of deficit plus the total value of outstanding national bonds (domestic borrowing) to GDP is still below the internationally accepted alarm level and, hence, sustainable. This has been so because, unlike India, over the years China has pursued a prudent fiscal policy.

As regards foreign debt, a question with which we are often confronted in India, China has explained that in no single year has its outstanding foreign debt been more than its foreign exchange reserves. This, it was stated, is the key to ensuring that the country does not get indebted excessively.

WE were most impressed to learn how China tackled the unprecedented



XINHUA

Building a bund in the lower reaches of the Yellow River in order to check flood damage. The experience of the Chinese people in mobilising mass efforts to fight floods has been impressive.

floods. Apart from a direct economic loss of over yuan 200 billion, many mines and industrial enterprises had to be closed down. But, following a massive mobilisation programme under the leadership of the CPC and the People's Liberation Army, China succeeded in battling the floods and minimising losses. Despite such a major calamity, the harvest that followed was generally good. Amazingly, the grain output did not fall; it was estimated to have grown by around 4 per cent. In fact, very high priority has been accorded to agricultural development with an emphasis on urgent modernisation.

With regard to industry, a major problem China is facing is that of its public enterprises. Public enterprises continue to be the overwhelmingly predominant part of Chinese industry. And we were assured that this situation will be maintained. However, in the process of restructuring these enterprises, the problem faced is that of workers being laid off. Around five to six million workers are laid off every year. But at the same time, six to seven million new jobs are created every year. But due to population growth and additions to the labour force every year, around five million workers remain to be re-employed. This situation is expected to be resolved in the next couple of years.

The laid-off worker is protected by the state; he or she receives a minimum amount of money required to sustain norm[illegible]life. Further, in China, whenever a pers[illegible]n is employed, the employer is oblig[illegible]d by law to take out an insurance poli[illegible]against the employees' future risk of unemployment. The employer pays the premium. If the employee loses the job, then he or she receives the insurance amount as compensation.

Another problem being faced by China is the regional economic imbalance between the prosperous east coast and the rest of the country. We were told that conscious efforts were being made to overcome this situation through greater financial allocations for major projects in these areas and to create a better climate for the introduction of private capital. The developed areas are to assist the backward areas through economic linkages, that is, by encouraging the establishment of auxiliary units in the backward areas. Through this process, people deprived of developmental benefits should receive them at the earliest. What was in evidence, therefore, was an active policy of state planning to ensure balanced economic development, far from relying exclusively on "market forces".

Another problem that China is facing relates to the growing disparities in the income levels of its people. The Chinese dictum that in the process of getting rich some people will get rich faster is there for all to see. But through conscious state intervention, China is seeking to provide benefits to those at the lower end.

Apart from such disparities, a major problem that continues to surface is the growth of illegal activities such as corruption. The CPC has adopted a vigorous policy of encouraging people to grow rich through honest means and simultaneously cracking down on illegal activities. A widespread campaign is on in this regard and some deterrent action has also been taken. The action taken against the former Mayor of Beijing, who was found to be corrupt, is one example.

In March 1999, the National People's Congress, the highest state authority, met to review the activities of the past year. The Chinese emphasise that Deng Xiaoping's theory means working from practical conditions. In the past, they had committed, according to them, the mistake of not acting on the basis of this theory. China is not yet a developed country; it is still backward. Hence their decision to develop productive forces through the socialist market economy and to demonstrate the superiority of socialism through the growth of economic productivity. In the process of such a review, they realised the need to amend the Constitution in order to allow the development of other forms of property ownership such as private, collective or cooperative ownership while retaining public ownership as the dominant one.

This, they said, was necessary to stimulate the initiative of private or other forms of ownership and to allow them to co-exist with public ownership. Responding to the obvious question whether this would permit the growth of a capitalist class, they answered that under the leadership of the CPC with its commitment to maintaining and strengthening socialism in China, they are confident that they can preserve China's socialist character and not allow such forms of property ownership to become dominant.

With differences in incomes and standards of living growing, the danger of such differentiation laying the basis for a possible process of class differentiation is a cause for worry. The Chinese leadership, however, is confident that while tackling the ill-effects of the reform process, they will also preserve and strengthen the socialist character of the People's Republic of China.

In sum, our delegation's visit to China was an experience which helped us gather more information regarding how China is making stupendous strides of economic development while at the same time being conscious of the problems of growth of any tendencies alien to socialism. The CPC leadership repeatedly emphasised the fact that they are combating such trends and would preserve and strengthen the socialist character of China. The visit resulted in a better understanding of current developments in China and the discussions reinforced the mutual desire to strengthen further the bonds of friendship between the two giant Asian neighbours. ■

Now for the verdict

As the marathon polling exercise ends, attention turns to the shape of governments to come.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

THE Bharatiya Janata Party had obviously preserved the choicest specimens in its vocabulary of political invective for the home stretch of the marathon election season Lal Krishna Advani rode into West Bengal deriding the dominant Left Front as mere "palanquin bearers" for the Congress(I) The veteran Marxist Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, responded suitably by denouncing Advani as a "criminal" guilty of the demolition of a place of worship in Ayodhya Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in high dudgeon, demanded a personal apology for the insult inflicted on the Union Home Minister Chief Minister Basu, at the time of writing, was in no mood to oblige

Advani chose to portray renewed talk of the relevance of a "Third Front" as evidence of political confusion on the Left The reality perhaps is that there is now an increasing likelihood that the BJP's leadership role within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will be eroded by the numerical outcome of the Lok Sabha elections. This could unfetter some of the partners of the BJP-led front and allow them greater latitude to strike up political bargains in the future. The NDA being essentially an effort at numerical vote consolidation rather than an ideological fraternity, the BJP could well have to contend with fresh political headaches once the final arithmetic of the 13th Lok Sabha becomes clear.

EARLY projections of a triumphal romp for the BJP and its allies, it later transpired, were premised upon an assumption that the sense of national bonding and euphoria that the Kargil military operations engendered would be sustained through the election campaign, overriding contingent problems on the ground This was not a very sound proposition for several reasons The course of the election campaign – in particular the manifest sense of panic within the BJP's ranks over political events and trends in Uttar Pradesh – has proven that the "wave effect" that was so pronounced until 1984 is now decisively a thing of the past

All of the social sections that were united in uneasy alliance under the BJP banner in U P have strong political stakes in maximising their parliamentary representation They were disinclined to cede their perceived right to political prominence to a Prime Minister basking in the glow of a military triumph In the case of U P , Vajpayee himself was seen not so much as a detached observer but an active element in the BJP's factional turmoil In assuming that the Prime Minister's newly won moral authority would drown out the compulsion of appeasing every faction, the BJP strategists seem to have grievously erred The response of U P Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, which just stops short of open rebellion, is a deeply embarrassing development, which threatens to erode considerably the Vajpayee halo

The bad news for the BJP is that the States where it is the dominant electoral presence in its own right are unlikely to give it the harvest of seats it garnered in 1998 Problems are at their most acute in U P , although Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan also seem to be posing their own difficulties Bitter infighting within the U P unit, and a relatively cohesive challenge from the



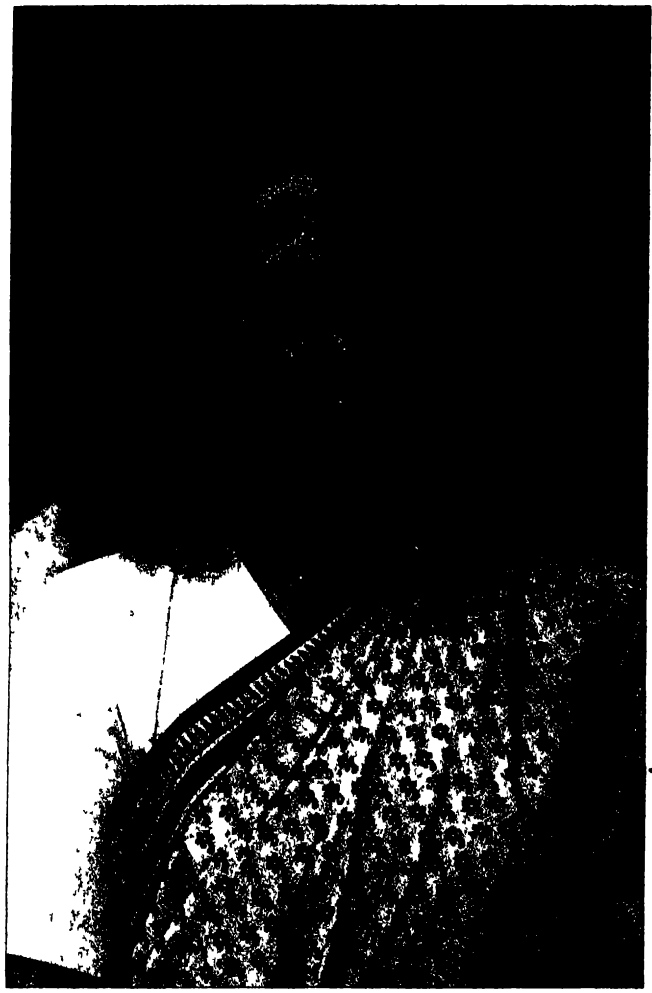
AJITH KUMAR/AP

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee waves to supporters at Bagpat in Uttar Pradesh.

Congress(I) in M.P. and Rajasthan, have ensured that the core area of the BJP's strength will be relatively less rewarding this time around.

The erosion of the party's strength in these States could conceivably be remedied through fresh gains in Bihar and Maharashtra. But in both these States, the BJP is one among equals, and in the case of Bihar, its partner is only loosely affiliated to it in terms of ideological commitments. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka could also bring it certain gains, of a relatively less decisive character in the latter State. In A.P., though, the BJP is quite clearly the junior partner in the NDA, having yielded most of the seats to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

The strategic alliances which have been a large part of the success of the BJP could, in the post-election scenario, engender a fresh set of difficulties. Except for Maharashtra, where its partner shares a strong element of ideological commitment with it, the other States present a uniform picture of contingent alliances, oriented towards the limited objective of maximising electoral gains. What this means for the core ideological programme of the BJP in the post-electoral scenario, when conceivably the NDA will be given the first call to form a government, remains to be seen. There is a strong possibility that even if the alliance that it leads exceeds its total tally of seats in the last Lok Sabha, the BJP's own influence within will be rather diminished.



V SUDERSHAN

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi.

THE ally that is most likely to increase its clout within the NDA is the newly "united" Janata Dal bloc led by Ramakrishna Hegde and George Fernandes. Also performing strongly in the campaign is the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, which has gained ground on account of a virtual abandonment of the Congress(I) by the Janaki Ballabh Patnaik faction. Among the new partners, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the TDP would be pressing for positions of influence.

Considering that the Janata Dal(United) in Bihar alone is likely to have a minimum of five contenders for senior Cabinet positions, the post-electoral scenario for the NDA is likely to be rocky. It is perhaps on account of an uneasy awareness of the likely consequences for the party's ideological commitments that there is already talk of an imminent change in the leadership of the BJP. The colourless tenure of Khushabhau Thakre as party president is unlikely to be prolonged very much further. Even if he is allowed to serve out his full tenure, he is likely to be put on notice immediately after the election results are in, of an imminent change of regime. The custodians of ideological purity in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have already indicated that they would like somebody capable of a more purposive leadership style, such as Advani, at the helm of the party.

The NDA being essentially an effort at numerical vote consolidation rather than an ideological fraternity, the BJP could well have to contend with fresh political headaches once the final arithmetic of the 13th Lok Sabha becomes clear.

ONCE the results are in, there is also likely to be renewed attention to the role that election forecasts have played in this campaign. There was a virtual glut in the market for projections after the Election Commission's rather weak and legally infirm effort to restrain them failed. Many of these failed even to make a pretence of subtlety, plainly putting on view their partisan loyalties. To an extent, the multitude of conflicting or varying projections that have been made by rival agencies provide the best negative advertisement of the accuracy of opinion and exit polls. But the matter is not one that can be wished away quite so easily, especially in a context of a reassertion of government control over the official electronic media.

To work out the various political possibilities that could emerge from the 13th Lok Sabha elections may at this stage be a pointless exercise. When the BJP assumed office in 1998, sections sympathetic to the party were known to predict confidently that it was only one election removed from absolute power. A rather dubious record of governance in the first year of the Vajpayee government seemed to puncture this boast. Some semblance of credibility was restored to this expectation by the manifest inability of the Opposition parties to work out a coherent strategy to neutralise the BJP. Kargil then gave it a renewed momentum. The campaign leading into General Elections 1999 will perhaps be remembered as the story of how this momentum was rapidly dissipated. ■

End of a marathon exercise

Moderate voter turnout and stray incidents of violence mark the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

V. VENKATESAN

FOR the Election Commission (E.C.), each phase of polling is a challenge. The E.C. is deemed to have conducted an election efficiently if incidents of violence or rigging on the day of polling are limited and moderate-to-heavy voter turnout is recorded. And the E.C. would be seen to have passed the "neutrality" test if both the ruling and opposition political formations simultaneously accuse it of bias.

Therefore, it was easy to understand what Chief Election Commissioner Dr. M.S. Gill meant when he remarked, after the close of the penultimate phase of polling on September 25, that "it has been a very satisfactory day for the Commission". In the fourth phase, 74 Lok Sabha constituencies in nine States went to the polls. There were reports of six deaths and injuries to eight persons, reflecting a better situation relative to the previous round. Most of these incidents took place in the sensitive, high-profile constituencies of Barh and Nalanda in Bihar; the police opened fire to disperse mobs that tried to disrupt polling. Former Railway Minister Nitish Kumar and Defence Minister George Fernandes are seeking re-election from these two constituencies.

About 51.16 per cent of the 8.3 crore voters in the 74 constituencies exercised their franchise. The turnout in Bihar and Orissa was 55 per cent each, while in Manipur it was 53 per cent, in Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya 52 per cent each, in Uttar Pradesh 50 per cent, in Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram 40 per cent each and in Nagaland 30 per cent. The turnout more or less reflected the trend in the earlier phases of the election in these States.

On September 27, the E.C. ordered repolling in 559 polling stations – 481 in Bihar, 36 in Uttar Pradesh, 13 in Madhya Pradesh and 29 in Nagaland – of the 1.05 lakh polling stations where voting took place. This followed reports by the respective Returning Officers that there were disturbances or electoral malpractices.

Forty-three of the 74 constituencies were in U.P. and Bihar. Most of these were categorised as either "sensitive" or "hyper-sensitive" and violence was expected. Gill claimed that special measures adopted by the Home Ministry in consultation with the Commission to prevent violence in Bihar had paid off and that the election process was more or less peaceful.

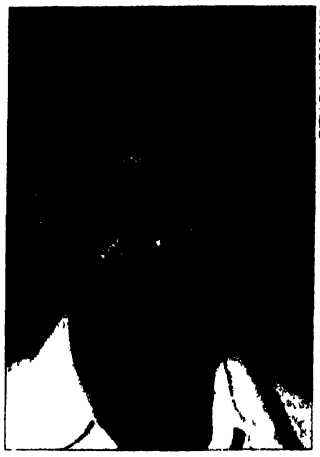
IN Bihar, where elections were conducted in 19 constituencies (see separate story), clashes between political parties in Nalanda, Barh and Siwan left six persons dead. In all, 750 people, including two Ministers, were arrested. While Cooperatives Minister Shyam Bihari Prasad was arrested on a charge of disturbing voting at a booth in the Govindganj Assembly segment in the Motihari constituency, Agriculture Minister Shiv Shankar Yadav was arrested after the police recovered four rifles from his vehicle in Siwan while polling was on. C.P. Thakur, who is seeking to re-enter the Lok Sabha from the Patna constituency on the BJP ticket, was detained and later released by a magistrate. He allegedly attempted to snatch ballot papers from a polling station.

Bihar Governor Justice B.M. Lal could not cast his vote as his name did not figure in the voters' lists in the Raj Bhawan polling booth in Patna. This is the second



RAJEEV BHATT

instance of a public figure finding his name missing from the voters' list. On September 5, Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishnamurthy was dismayed to find his name missing from the list in the New Delhi constituency. (Election officials later located Krishnamurthy's name in a booth covering his previous residential address.)



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Dr. Pannalal Oswal, BJP candidate for the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat, who was killed by ULFA militants.

In Uttar Pradesh (see separate story), polling could not take place in 60 booths in Balia, Begusarai, Munger and Ara owing to heavy rain and floods. A sub-inspector of police in Muzzafarnagar was suspended for his alleged involvement in disturbances in some booths. Polling in nine booths at Sujro village in Muzaffarnagar district was suspended when people clashed with policemen, leaving a magistrate and five others injured. No other instance of poll-related violence was reported from the 24 constituencies in U.P.

In the 10 constituencies in Orissa, a State that had witnessed incidents of violence against Christians in the recent past, polling was by and large peaceful. However, people boycotted the elections in a number of booths protesting against the lack of developmental works in their areas. These included nine booths covering 19 villages in the four Assembly segments of the Keonjhar (reserved) constituency, five booths in three Assembly segments in the Kalahandi constituency, four booths in the Bolangir constituency and three in the Sundargarh (reserved) constituency.

ALTHOUGH stray incidents of violence were reported from the north-eastern States, which are affected by insurgency, polling there was by and large peaceful. In Himachal Pradesh, voters of the Goro Kanwari polling station in the Shoghi area of Shimla boycotted the elections in protest against the non-implementation of their demands.

Incidents of naxalite violence were reported from six polling stations in the Bastar constituency in Madhya Pradesh. Naxalites hindered the polling process in three stations in Pushmaar village of the Bijapur Assembly segment. They torched a bunch of ballot papers in the Patarpara polling station. A gang of naxalites looted at gunpoint ballot boxes and ballot papers from the Konta Assembly segment. The election material was, however, replaced and polling resumed.

The BJP candidate for the Dhubri Lok Sabha constituency in Assam was abducted and killed by suspected United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) activists on September 20.

The Samata Party took serious exception to the E.C. asking Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala to stay away from the Bhiwani constituency, where his son Ajay Chautala was pitted against former Chief Minister Bansi Lal's son Surender Singh, in the first phase of polling on September 5. Chautala complied with the E.C's directive. However, his ally, the Samata Party, has now complained that the E.C. deprived Chautala of his fundamental right to vote. Gill, however, refused to explain the E.C.'s stand. "I will explain it later, if necessary," was all he said.

Jammu and Kashmir also saw polling in four constituencies on September 25 (see separate story).

THE allegation by Defence Minister George Fernandes (he quoted the Director of the Intelligence Bureau) that 65,000 duplicate ballot papers meant for Barh and Nalanda had been printed at the Saraswathi Press in Calcutta was denied by the E.C. The E.C. observed that Fernandes had "by his own admission sought to use the Director of the I.B. to disturb the constitutional electoral process". The E.C. chastised Fernandes for misusing the government machinery to spread "loose allegations" of conspiracy in order to influence the elections in Bihar. It said that as a candidate his actions amounted to "corrupt practice". Gill sought the help of the "highest authorities in government" to clear the contradiction between the Defence Minister's letter to the E.C. and the I.B. Director's denial. A team of senior officers despatched by the E.C. to Calcutta did not find any evidence of having printed ballot papers in excess. As a precautionary measure, the ballot papers for Bihar are printed outside the State.

The Congress(I) and the Left parties demanded Fernandes' resignation in view of the E.C.'s observations with regard to his conduct. The Congress(I) challenged the Prime Minister to explain Fernandes' conduct, or dismiss him. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) urged the Prime Minister to clarify the alleged involvement of the I.B. in the matter, for the Home Ministry had denied Fernandes' claim that the I.B. chief had sent a report about the printing of excess ballot papers. "Any delay by the Prime Minister is tantamount to his involvement in the conspiracy to spread false information in order to influence the voters," the CPI(M) Polit Bureau said. Communist Party of India secretary D. Raja made a similar demand.

The BJP-Samata Party combine, however, lashed out at the Commission. "The language the E.C. had used is that of a political rival, not that of a constitutional body," Samata Party general secretary Jaya Jaitly said. Accusing the E.C. of overreaction, she wondered whether it would at all be possible for anyone to raise legitimate fears on such matters if the E.C. attacked a political party that complained about a malpractice. Fernandes expressed his readiness to face prosecution if he was found guilty of electoral malpractice.

The Patna High Court dismissed a public interest petition seeking an inquiry into the alleged printing of excess ballot papers, in the light of the affidavits filed by the E.C. and the I.B. Director. While the E.C. denied that any such printing of excess ballot papers had taken place, the I.B. denied having given any report to Fernandes on the matter. The High Court, however, asked the E.C. to speak to the complainants in order to ensure free and fair elections and depute additional observers in sensitive constituencies.

THE fourth phase of the Lok Sabha election was the last one to be conducted by the present three-member Commission. Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishnamurthy retired on September 30 after a six-year term. Krishnamurthy said that his tenure was not without its ups and downs. He described the role played by him and Gill during the two-year tenure of Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan as "non-batting batsmen"; at the same time he paid tributes to Seshan's contribution to the E.C. Krishnamurthy said that the Commission under Gill took unanimous decisions, implying that their functioning was cohesive. ■

Of political intrigue and defiance

The BJP in U.P. hobbles through the final phase of elections with dissent and defiance at a new high.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in Lucknow

ON September 24, a day before the second round of polling in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Kalyan Singh complained of giddiness and fatigue. Doctors who examined him said that he had spondylitis and advised him to stop active campaigning for the next seven days. This meant that the Chief Minister would not be able to drum up support for the Bharatiya Janata Party in the run-up to the last round of elections on October 3.

Even as the Chief Minister's supporters expressed dismay at this turn of events, his detractors in the BJP were quick to detect signs of political intrigue. A leader who is close to State BJP president Rajnath Singh, Kalyan Singh's rival in the party, told *Frontline:* "This is no physical ailment. It is the disease of political reorientation." According to this leader, the "illness" will in all probability develop into a "political game" after the elections. "And when this develops," he said, "Kalyan Singh is bound to turn friends into enemies and *vice versa.*" He was referring to the alleged secret understanding between the Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party (S.P.) leader Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Many leaders in the State, including those belonging to the BJP, share this view. Some of them even believe that the BJP is heading for a split in Uttar Pradesh on caste lines (backwards vs forward castes) and that this will lead to a realignment of forces along the same lines. "What one will witness then is a reassertion of Mandal politics, which is supposedly on the wane now," said a BJP leader, who belongs to a forward caste.

Whether these projections come true or not, Kalyan Singh's reluctance to campaign for his party's candidates has been one of the most conspicuous features of the campaign scene in Uttar Pradesh. While he refused to canvass in a few constituencies including his home town of Aligarh, he consented to address public meetings in certain others but failed to turn up at the appointed hour, citing reasons such as inclement weather or technical snags in the aircraft he was to travel in. The constituencies he refused to campaign in fell in the Mathura-Farrukhabad belt. The obvious reason for this was the denial of the ticket to Sakshi Maharaj, one of his close associates and a former Member of Parliament who belongs to the same caste (Lodh Rajput) as his, and his son Rajveer Singh. Kalyan Singh had planned to field Sakshi Maharaj from Farrukhabad and Rajveer Singh from Aligarh. Kalyan Singh made it clear to the central leadership that he would not canvass in the Farrukhabad region since his supporters were upset that he could not get the ticket for Sakshi Maharaj. Constituencies like Allahabad, from where Union Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi is contesting, belong to the second category.

It is not only Kalyan Singh's refusal to canvass that has struck a discordant note; the way he responded to Sakshi Maharaj's extensive campaigning for the S.P. under the banner of the Lodh Swabhiman Sabha in the Lodh Rajput belt between Mathura and Farrukhabad also attracted attention. Not once did the Chief Minister criticise his former associate's decision to campaign for a rival party. Whenever his response was sought on Sakshi Maharaj's campaign, Kalyan Singh said that he did not want to comment on the actions of people who had left the party of their own accord. Large sections of the party saw this as a wrong tactic in dealing with a defector. And since the reaction, or the lack of it, came from Kalyan Singh, who is known for his strong and powerful verbal assaults and pointed repartees, it was deemed as being significantly soft.

Incidentally, in many of the constituencies in which Kalyan Singh campaigned extensively, such as Amethi and Rae Bareli, it was the Congress(I) and not the S.P., that was the main opponent of the BJP. Again, in his interactions with the media, Kalyan Singh was quick to disagree with the view that the State would see a "Congress(I) revival" and assert that the S.P. would retain its number two position in the State behind the BJP.



MANISHA SINGH

Chief Minister Kalyan Singh with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and State BJP president Rajnath Singh at an election rally in Agra.

The backward caste dimension of these events manifested itself in several forms. Sakshi Maharaj's campaign for the S.P. focusses exclusively on this aspect. According to him, the upper-caste leaderships of the BJP and the Congress(I) planned to sideline backward class leaders such as Kalyan Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav from the politics of the State and the country. Sakshi Maharaj, who spoke to *Frontline* in Lucknow, said that he campaigned for S.P. in order to "overturn this vile stratagem". He added: "Backward castes all over the country have realised this and

JOHN MCCONNICO/AP



At a polling booth in Meerut on September 25.

want to be united under one flag. I am carrying out this historical task."

According to Sakshi Maharaj, his campaign, which he claimed had united the backward castes, would help Mulayam Singh Yadav win not less than 40 seats in Uttar Pradesh. Sakshi Maharaj said that he planned to initiate a dialogue between all backward caste leaders of the country in order to unite them. The leaders he identified included Laloo Prasad Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Ram Vilas Paswan and Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal (United), Subhash Yadav of the Congress(I) and Uma Bharati of the BJP. Sakshi Maharaj claimed that this combine would change the face of Parliament and of the country. He said that the backward castes were the natural allies of the minorities and that they would add greater strength to this grouping. On whether his Hindutva background and active participation in the Ram temple agitation would not drive Muslims away from such a combine, he said that if Muslims could forgive Vajpayee, they could forgive him too. In any case, he added, the insincerity shown by the BJP in the matter of building the temple had been laid bare before the people.

MULAYAM SINGH YADAV'S campaign more or less followed the path elucidated by Sakshi Maharaj. In the meetings he addressed in places like Deoria, Gorakhpur and Fatehpur, he did a virtual head count of backward caste members and Muslims among the audience and, according to party workers, was pleased with the results. Evidently, the S.P's augmentation of strength among the backward castes helped it retain its hold over Muslims to a large extent, even though large sections of the minority community are unhappy with Mulayam Singh Yadav for having upset the prospects of an alternative government after the collapse of the Vajpayee-led government. Even in places like Shajahanpur, from where former Congress(I) vice-president Jitendra Prasada is contesting, it was evident on September 24, a day before the second phase of polling, that Muslims, who had gravitated towards the Congress(I), were returning to the S.P. in the belief that only the S.P. would be able to defeat the BJP. In scores of villages and small towns, this correspondent could see evidence of this. The same trend was visible in constituencies such as Moradabad and Amroha.

There are many people in the S.P. and in the Kalyan Singh group in the BJP who believe that the new combination – when it takes a concrete form – will leave no other option to Bahujan Samaj Party chief Kanshi Ram but to join it. If that happens, the concept discussed by Mulayam Singh Yadav and Kanshi Ram in June would be revived, and the fortunes of both the leaders would be on the upswing. The emergence of a formidable force comprising Dalits, Yadavs, Lodh Rajputs, a section of Muslims, a section of Thakurs and Other Backward Castes is bound to change the politics of the country. Such a combination would easily garner over 50 per cent of the votes in Uttar Pradesh and win a majority of the State's 85 Lok Sabha seats.

Such an alliance would naturally check the shifting of the BSP's Dalit vote base and the S.P.'s Muslim vote base towards the Congress(I). This would, in turn, stem the movement of the Brahmin community from the BJP towards the Congress(I). With this, the process of revival of the Congress(I) would be stalled and the party would be forced to depend more and more on the new grouping.

Some middle-level BSP leaders were of the opinion that Kanshi Ram may respond to Sakshi Maharaj's venture by entering into an alliance with the Congress(I). They, however, believe that such a move would be suicidal. "In no way can it prevent the movement of Dalit votes to the Congress(I)," a former BSP MP told *Frontline*.

Even as such calculations were being made, it was clear that the BJP leadership was jittery about the developments. In fact, soon after the first phase of polling the party's central leadership summoned its four main leaders in the State – Kalyan Singh, Rajnath Singh, Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon – to Delhi. At this meeting Kalyan Singh was apparently given an assurance that there would be no threat to his chief ministership after the elections but that he would have to work hard for the party, keeping this in mind. After the meeting, Kalyan Singh addressed a couple of meetings in places like Amethi and Rae Bareli, only to fall sick again on September 24.

According to BJP insiders, the Chief Minister's actions have unnerved the BJP. A senior functionary of the party's State unit told *Frontline:* "It is more or less certain that Vajpayee's parliamentary majority will come down. We are doing our best to boost it. But party workers are no longer confident of repeating the performance in U.P. in the last elections."

Clearly, a sense of apprehension prevails among BJP workers in U.P. They expect the Lok Sabha elections to throw up a few unpleasant surprises for the party in the State. ■

RAJEEV BHATT



Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Voting and violence

Naxalite violence during the first round of voting in Bihar gives rise to speculation that two Left extremists groups that are ideologically opposed to each other have decided to join forces.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI
in Patna

THE political temperature in Bihar has risen sharply after Acting Governor Justice B.M. Lal sent a detailed report to the Union Home Ministry blaming the Election Commission (E.C.) and the State's Chief Secretary for the poll-related violence on September 18. Thirty-eight persons, mostly State police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, were killed in landmine blasts engineered by the outlawed Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity, now known as the People's War Group (PWG), to enforce their call to boycott the elections.

Faced with the criticism of its handling of the elections, the State government blamed the violence on the inadequate deployment of Central paramilitary forces. It had requested 600 companies of the paramilitary forces to cover polling booths in 19 parliamentary constituencies where elections were held on September 18. The Centre sent only 132 companies.

Top State government officials, including Chief Secretary S.N. Biswas and Director-General of Police K.A. Jacob, admitted that Central intelligence agencies had warned the State government that extremists might use landmines in Palamau, Chatra, Hazaribagh and Rohtas districts in south Bihar. Biswas said that apprehesions had been expressed at a meeting convened by the Union Home Ministry in August. The request for more security forces followed this.

Biswas said that during the brief period of President's Rule in the State in February, the Centre had promised to send 50 companies of the paramilitary forces for anti-extremist operations. However, only 39 companies of the CRPF were sent. Biswas claimed that as the anti-extremist operations had begun to show results in May the Centre withdrew 18 companies. He said that this affected the combing operations and that repeated requests to redeploy the companies had no effect.

AFTER unleashing violence in several areas in south and north Bihar on September 18, naxalites lay low during the next phase of polling in 19 constituencies on September 25. Although polling was held amidst tight security, six persons were killed and several people injured in bomb explosions and shooting incidents. Of those killed, four died in police firing (two in Nalanda and one each in Barh and Siwan) and the two others in clashes between political groups. Two Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) Ministers of the State, Shyam Behari Prasad and Shiv Shankar Prasad, were arrested for alleged electoral malpractices. While the former was accused of interfering with the poll process, the latter was taken into custody after four rifles were found in his vehicle.

Shoot-at-sight orders were issued following the landmine blasts of September 18. Mine-detectors were pressed into service in volatile constituencies, including Patna, Arrah, Buxar, Nalanda and Barh. Helicopters were requisitioned to monitor polling in districts where naxalites are active. On September 25, 147 companies of paramilitary forces were deployed.

Clashes and incidents of snatching of ballot papers were reported from Patna, Barh, Nalanda, Arrah, Munger, Gopalgunj, Maharajgunj, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur and Motihari. Polling was affected in more than 100 booths. In Nalanda and Barh, the constituencies of Janata Dal (United) leaders George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar respectively, RJD and JD(U) activists clashed. They were also involved in shootouts and the snatching of ballot papers and police rifles. One person was killed in the crossfire between supporters of Nitish Kumar and his RJD rivals. In Siwan, the pocket-borough of RJD candidate Mohammed Sahabuddin, CPI(M-L) Liberation and RJD activists exchanged fire. A naxalite

RAJEEV BHATT



Members of a private army at work in Barh constituency during the second round of polling in Bihar on September 25.

Targeting missionaries

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

FOLLOWING in the footsteps of others who have in the recent past targeted Christian religious workers in Orissa, fanatics appear to have started a calculated campaign against Christian missionaries working in Bihar.

According to a 19-year-old nun, Sister Ruby of the St. Joseph's convent at Jalalpur, 8 km from Chhapra in Saran district in north-west Bihar, she was kidnapped, disrobed and forced by the kidnappers to drink their urine. The incident came to light 48 hours before the second round of voting in the Lok Sabha elections on September 25. According to the nun, she delayed lodging a complaint at the Chhapra town police station as she had to obtain permission from the church authorities before doing so.

Sister Ruby belongs to the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, also known as the Pondicherry Blue Sisters. The Sisters are involved in the "ministry of healing the poorest of the poor". Sister Ruby hails from Tamil Nadu and is actively associated with the St. Joseph's Health Centre. She has been doing social work in Nawadi, Jalalpur and Maharajgunj areas for about 15 months.

Director-General of Police K.A. Jacob said that religious fanatics were behind the attack. Shortly after the First Information Report was filed, the DGP visited the St. Joseph's Church in Chhapra to speak to the nun about the incident.

According to Sister Ruby's statement, three persons who accused her of converting people to Christianity abducted and threatened to kill her. She was kidnapped at 9.a.m. when she was going to Gandhi Chowk from the convent, the statement says. The miscreants, who were in an autorickshaw, offered her a lift. The nun grew suspicious when the vehicle took a route other than the usual one and she asked the driver to stop. She was threatened and taken to a mangrove where she was dragged out of the vehicle and taken to a deserted house. Her hands were tied and her clothes ripped off. The kidnappers urinated in a bottle and threatened to rape her if she did not drink the urine, according to the statement.

The nun's statement says that she stood naked for almost an hour and was released only when she agreed to drink the urine. Before she was given back her clothes, the men, brandishing a knife, demanded to know how many people she had converted. They rained abuses on and made lewd gestures to her. "We will teach the Christians a lesson after the elections are over," they said, according to the statement. She was also asked not to approach anyone for help; one of them followed her to ensure that she complied with the order. She, however, made her way to the convent and narrated the incident to others, the statement says.

The DGP said that 18 persons had been rounded up in connection with the case. An identification parade was conducted, but the nun said her kidnappers were not among the people.

According to the nun's statement, she was asked about the activities of Christian missionaries. The abductors wanted to know whether the convent functioned only from Jalalpur, how many nuns were attached to it, how many persons she had converted and how many languages she knew. She was also asked why the missionaries had not learnt a lesson from the several incidents of kidnapping, rapes and killings that had already been carried out, according to the statement. They warned her that they would demolish the convent at Jalalpur, she said.

The Archbishop of Delhi and president of the United Christian Forum for Human Rights, Archbishop Alan de Lastic wrote to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee registering the anguish of the Christain community over the continued attacks on Christian missionaries. The Archbishop complained of anti-Christain violence in Orissa, Bihar and some other States. Also, in view of statements issued by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) expressing their intention to take out a 'rath yatra' to coincide with the arrival of Pope John Paul II in Delhi in November, the Archbishop urged the Prime Minister to take steps to ensure that the Pope is not insulted.

Quoting from a report on the Bihar incident sent by Bishop Victor Henry Thakur of Bettiah, the Archbishop said that the convent of the Pondicherry Sisters had been repeatedly threatened in the last two years and it was only at the intervention of the local priest and the civil authorities that major incidents were averted.

Following complaints from a delegation of Christian missionaries to Chief Minister Rabri Devi, the State government has constituted a three-member committee under a woman officer of the Indian Police Service who knows Tamil, to speed up the investigation. The Union Home Ministry has sought a detailed report from the State government. ■

was killed in the incident. At Gopalgunj, the home town of RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav, polling was disrupted when polling agents and officials staged a walk-out after ballot papers were snatched from them.

The threat against those who vote from naxalites, an organised force in south and central Bihar, cast a shadow on the final phase of polling on October 3. The clinical precision with which the [illegible] nine blasts were carried out on S[illegible]mber 18 led to speculation that the MCC and the PWG have sunk their differences and are working in unison. "Every action was worked out meticulously," said R.K. Singh, Superintendent of Police, Palamau. He added: "This would not have been possible if the two groups were not working in tandem."

The MCC and the PWG have been known to target each other's cadres. Observers, however, think that deep-rooted ideological differences would prevent the warring organisations from coming together. They may have just closed ranks to target a common enemy during the elections, they say. The police said that if the two groups had decided to work together, they posed a serious threat to the districts in south Bihar. Naxalites are believed to have used plastic explosive devices for the first time in the State on September 18. In Palamau, where 10 CRPF jawans were killed, a tractor-trailer in which poll officials were travelling was blown up at least 100 feet above the ground. A five-foot-deep crater was formed at the site. ■

The highs and lows

Was the National Conference trying to engineer victories by ensuring that the turnout of voters remained low?

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Srinagar

THE winding road from Larnoo, below the mountain passes that lead from Anantnag into Doda, was jammed by traffic, perhaps for the first time ever. Convoys escorting three politicians had converged at a checkpoint to travel into the hills, but stood blocked since the search for any landmines ahead was yet to be completed. Terrorist violence has been a key motif in the Lok Sabha election campaign in Anantnag, as it was in Baramulla and Srinagar. But it is not the only one. Post-Kargil reportage of the elections has represented Kashmir's political theatre as one made up only of armed actors, censoring out its processes and content.

Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) candidate from Anantnag, turned back from the checkpoint to address an impromptu village meeting. Dozens of Larnoo residents gathered as his jeep, flying the red flag with the hammer and sickle symbol unfamiliar to most voters in Kashmir, drew up off the main village street. The audience listened patiently to Tarigami, who began his speech by outlining his commitment to seeking autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir. Former Union Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and his newly-formed People's Democratic Party (PDP) is fighting to retain his Anantnag seat on the same platform. But, Tarigami argued, Sayeed had done nothing to secure autonomy when he was a Union Minister, presiding instead over a brutal campaign of state repression.

People responded with laughter to Tarigami's wry account of Sayeed's shifting political allegiances, and sought to utilise the occasion to push their own local agenda. An X-Ray machine and medicines, they said, had been looted from the local government-run health centre by the official-in-charge. The health centre had burned down in 1993 after its power transformer caught fire, but the equipment had survived the blaze. Now, the equipment had been moved to a private institution in Anantnag owned by the same officer, it was alleged. "You should vote to punish the government for this," Tarigami said. "If you don't vote, you will suffer, not the National Conference."

Sofi Shalla village lies hours away from Larnoo, in the beautiful Shalla valley. The bridge connecting the village to the rest of the district was washed away years ago, so the already infrequent bus service to Sofi Shalla grinds to a halt when it rains. Here, hundreds of people had gathered for Tarigami's scheduled campaign meeting, despite a venomous campaign in conservative south Kashmir against the CPI(M) leaders' atheistic position. Again, Sayeed's credentials to argue for state autonomy were at the centre of Tarigami's address to the villagers. Corruption and poor governance also figured. "There is no money to build roads, or schools or hospitals", Tarigami said, "but there is plenty of money to build golf courses. You have always voted for the National Conference, but have they repaid their debt?"

Tarigami's campaign is significant because it illustrates the support for democracy that continues to exist through the Kashmir Valley, a support that the low voter turnout in Baramulla and Srinagar has been used to obscure. The only red flag most voters in Anantnag have ever seen is that of the N.C., but the fact that hundreds of people in the district's most remote villages come out at the CPI(M)'s political meetings despite terrorist threats illustrate their endorsement of democratic politics. Unlike his rival, Peerzada Sayeed of the N.C., and the PDP's Sayeed, Tarigami has neither the backing of the state apparatus nor significant financial resources, but the CPI(M) campaign had become the principal threat to both the leading contenders.

Why then were voter turnout levels so low in Baramulla and Srinagar? State government orthodoxy has it that fear of terrorists, represented politically by the All-Party Hurriyat Conference's call for a poll boycott, kept voters away on election day. Posters warning that those who voted would be shot were indeed put up in several areas. Another favoured explanation is that there was a genuine disgust with the democratic process set in place by the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, which fuelled support for the Hurriyat campaign and other anti-India political forces. Supporters of this proposition point to a proliferation of media reports that security personnel pushed voters into polling booths, a state-sponsored enterprise of coercion without which levels of turnout would have been even lower.

But none of these explanations is satisfactory. Contrary to some media assessments, there have been overall



PRAVEEN SWAMI

CPI(M) candidate from Anantnag Yusuf Tarigami addresses a meeting in Sofi Shalla village.

improvements in the security situation in July and August despite the thinning of the counter-terrorist grid after Kargil. In these two months, 166 terrorists were killed in the Kashmir Valley alone, 108 of them persons of foreign origin. By contrast, 172 terrorists were shot dead through the whole of Jammu and Kashmir in May and June. Around 95 civilian lives were lost through July and August, actually marking a decline in the figure from the previous two months. And, as important, the ratio of security personnel killed to terrorists killed, which had dropped to 1:1.92 in June, rose to almost 1:7, for just 24 security force personnel were killed in Kashmir in July and August.

If the much-discussed poll-eve deterioration in the security situation was more fact than fiction, neither fear nor anti-India feeling seems to have been at work in an even manner. Consider the case of Baramulla, which registered an overall turnout of 24 per cent. But the breakdown of voting by Assembly segment throws up enormous disparities. Sopore town, a traditional pro-Pakistan stronghold, saw only 5 per cent of voters coming out, and nearby Sangrama just 2.5 per cent. But Kupwara, indisputably the segment in the Kashmir Valley worst hit by the recent terrorist violence, saw an above average turnout of 25.3 per cent. The border segments of Uri and Gurez, pocketboroughs of the powerful N.C. hill-area leader Mohammad Shafi Uri, have again seen severe terrorist violence and cross-LoC (Line of Control) Pakistan shelling. But 50 per cent of voters came out in Gurez, and 46 per cent in Uri.

Voting patterns in Srinagar showed a similar curious behaviour. Urban Srinagar, the Hurriyat Conference's core constituency, registered uniformly poor turnout as it did in both 1996 and 1998. Just 5.5 per cent of voters came out in Hazratbal, 3 per cent in Zadibal, 2 per cent in Idgah, 5.2 per cent in Khanyar. But Amirakadal, home turf for the N.C. youth leader Shafi Bhat, saw 10 per cent of voters exercise their franchise. In Budgam, 22.5 per cent of voters came out, a sign of the local influence of Congress(I) candidate Aga Syed Mehdi, son of the powerful Aga Shia-community religious leaders. In Chrar-e-Sharif, a traditional N C. bastion, 55 per cent of those eligible to vote did so, but in the Chief Minister's Assembly segment, Ganderbal, just 10 per cent came out either to support or oppose him.

How then does one account for these wide variations in voter behaviour? If voters in Sangrama were too scared to vote, why did their counterparts in Kupwara, who had more reason to be afraid, choose to defy threats? Alternately, if Chrar-e-Sharif residents were pushed out of their homes and made to vote *en masse*, why did similar tactics fail in Ganderbal? When the N.C. was able to push turnout figures up to 10 per cent through foul means in Amirakadal, why did it fail to rig the elections in segments a couple of kilometres up the road? The obvious explanations for voter behaviour in this Lok Sabha election do not seem to have an answer to these questions, questions which media reportage in general has chosen to ignore.

ONE factor behind turnout level may indeed have been security-related, though not in an obvious sense. Last year, 354 additional companies of Central forces had been deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. This time, just eight were brought in, but Farooq Abdullah did not protest. The shortfall was sought to be made up by fixed-period deployments of Army units relieved of their regular border duties, but such deployment appears at best to have been thin. Voters in relatively better secured areas may have chosen to come out, even if they guarded their interests by telling journalists they were forced to do so. Residents of poorly protected towns and villages wisely decided to stay indoors on polling day.

A second, more apparent factor was the local influence of community and political leaders. Caste, class and regional affiliation are factors that are often ignored in discussions on Jammu and Kashmir, but they appear to have played a significant role in some segments of Baramulla and Anantnag. Shafi Uri's success in bringing out voters in Uri and Gurez led Hurriyat leader Maulvi Umar Farooq to refer to the N.C. as the "Gujjar Conference", a derogatory remark which reflected nothing so much as his own Srinagar-elite biases. Mehdi's success in Budgam illustrates the same phenomenon. The N.C. candidate from Baramulla, Abdul Rashid Shaheen, a former aide of Sayeed, similarly secured reasonable levels of turnout in his home segment of Pattan, and pro-India militia leader Yusuf Parrey in Sonawari.

One interesting explanation is that the N.C. itself may have sought to engineer low turnout levels in several areas by spreading rumours of widespread violence, and putting its own formidable election machinery in deep freeze. Ganderbal is a case in point. N.C. candidate and sitting Srinagar MP Omar Abdullah's rallies in the segment evoked a poor response, illustrating the erosion of support for his father. The low turnout in the segment suggests that only committed N.C. cadre were encouraged to vote, unlike in Chrar-e-Sharif, where support for the N.C. still runs high. The principal rival of the N.C. in Srinagar, the PDP's Mehbooba Mufti, lacked the party apparatus to mobilise voters: a resource invaluable in a situation where threats against votes were pervasive.

In Baramulla too, the lack of state support and a party apparatus could have cost the PDP's Muzaffar Baig and former Union Minister Saifuddin Soz a realistic opportunity to take the seat. Days before polling, Farooq Abdullah announced that he would ensure voters "are dragged out of their houses to the polling booths". Few observers understood the real impact of the announcement, which the Chief Minister in characteristic style promptly denied having ever made. In effect, any persuasive activity by security personnel became impossible. "There is an important difference between persuasion activity," points out Tarigami, "and coercion to vote. In a situation where someone is using guns to secure a boycott, it is imperative that the state intervene to reassure voters. Abdullah created a controversy to ensure it could not do so."

Anantnag, too, is only too likely to see an effort to engineer the destructive manipulation-by-inaction witnessed in Baramulla and Srinagar. The terms of combat are already unequal. While even N.C. campaign vans are escorted by bullet-proof police vehicles, no similar cover has been provided to other parties.

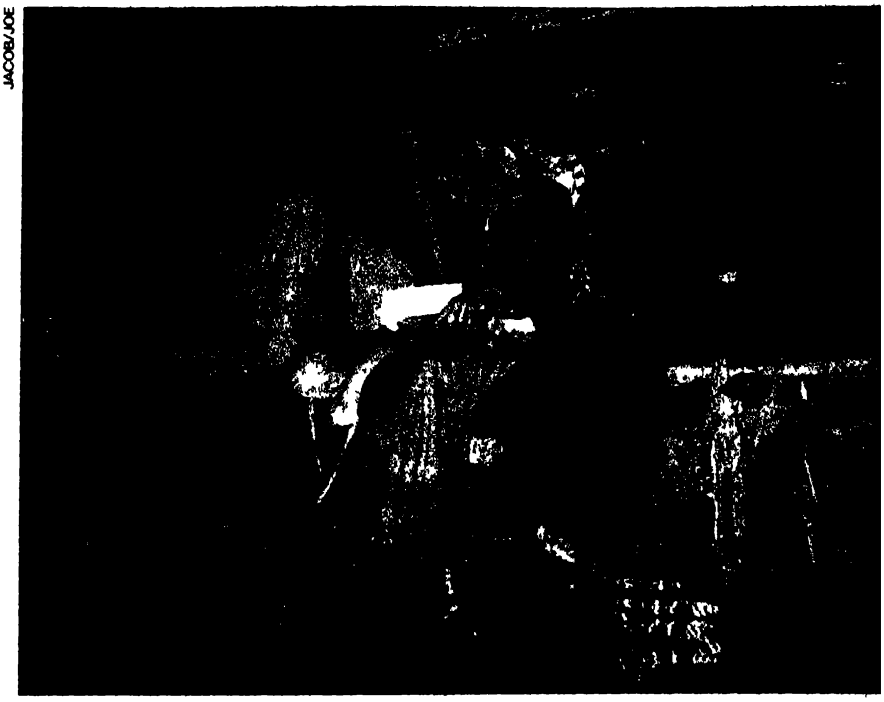
If Anantnag goes the N.C. way, it could well be because of tactics far more important to poll turnout than the string of attacks on candidates by terrorists seen over the past weeks. N.C. politicians should have little reason for delight in their ability to engineer victories through low turnout levels. Interestingly, no effort was made to terminate the Hurriyat's anti-poll campaign in Srinagar and Baramulla this year, since the organisation's efforts would have hit the PDP the hardest. The long-term consequence of such strategies will be to strengthen anti-India formations and discredit the democratic foundations on which the State government's own legitimacy rests. The N.C. has mounted a tiger, which could well end up devouring the party. ■

A protest action in full flow

The three-month-long satyagraha undertaken by the Narmada Bachao Andolan was a major event in the organisation's history of protest against big dam projects on the Narmada.

LYLA BAVADAM

JACOB/JOE



Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar and Samarpit Dal workers on a satyagraha in a hut in Domkhedi village even as the water level rises.

WITH the main southwest monsoon over, the three-month-long satyagraha undertaken by Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar and thousands of people displaced by the Narmada valley projects came to a close in end-September. The satyagraha in Domkhedi (in Maharashtra) and Jalsindhi (in Madhya Pradesh), which began on June 20, was in protest against the February 1999 order of the Supreme Court lifting a stay order issued four years ago which had restrained the Gujarat Government from raising the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat.

The satyagraha was a major event in the Narmada Bachao Andolan's 13-year history of protest against big dam projects on the Narmada. The event drew tremendous popular response from many parts of India and abroad and generated an informed debate on the impact of development projects that fail to factor in the human and ecological costs. Booker Prize-winning author Arundhati Roy made a notable contribution, to the debate and to the satyagraha: following up on her essay "The Greater Common Good" (*Frontline*, June 4), she was at the forefront of a high-profile "Rally for the Valley" campaign which drew people from various walks of life to the Narmada valley to express solidarity with the displaced people and the NBA (*Frontline*, August 27, 1999). She returned to the satyagraha sites on August 12, a day after the satyagrahis were arrested for the first time; they were arrested on three more occasions.

Patkar and others of the Samarpit Dal (Dedicated Squad), who had taken a vow of *jal samarpan*, were arrested thrice when the water level in the satyagraha villages alongside the Narmada rose to dangerous levels. A fourth round of arrests was made when the satyagrahis sat in peaceful dharna outside the administrative office in Dhadgaon tehsil.

On August 11, flood waters entered the hut in Domkhedi village where Patkar and a band of NBA activists and displaced people were offering satyagraha. Even after the water level rose chest-high, the satyagrahis were determined to stay on, but after a day's vigil, the police arrested Patkar and 60 others. NBA activists alleged that the government had caused the floods deliberately by opening the sluice gates of the Bargi dam upstream; this, the activists alleged, was done in order to create an emergency situation and disrupt the satyagraha.

The satyagraha drew tremendous popular response and generated an informed debate on the impact of development projects that fail to factor in the human and ecological costs.

On September 17, water levels again rose alarmingly in the riverside villages, and the NBA said that the flood was man-made. This time, Patkar and others of the Samarpit Dal were in undisclosed locations; however, on September 19 police teams tracked down Patkar at Pipalchop village and arrested her and 135 others. NBA activists said that the arrests were motivated not by concern for the lives of the satyagrahis but by the state's keenness to avert public embarrassment in case Patkar succeeded in her resolve.

A representative of the NBA had at that time told *Frontline:* "Many other satyagrahis have been standing in water for more than 48 hours, and the police are well aware of this. Since the police claim they arrested Patkar only to 'rescue' her, why don't they also 'rescue' these others?"

The third round of arrests was carried out on September 21. According to NBA reports, about 300 satya-

grahis, who were standing neck-deep in water for more than 28 hours in Domkhedi village, were arrested and taken to Dhadgaon village.

Patkar was being held in "protective custody" at Dhule Jail in Maharashtra. On September 24, she was handed over a letter from Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in which he appealed to her "not to resort to any course of action" that would put her life at risk. In the letter, which was delivered by an official in the Prime Minister's Office, Vajpayee said that the "issue of the Narmada project is highly complex and is not amenable to any facile solution". Resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) of those who had been displaced by the project, he said, is "primarily the responsibility of the concerned States". Even so, a number of mechanisms had been put in place to monitor the implementation of R&R measures, keeping in view the "enormous human problems associated with large-scale displacement". Conceding that "there is a need for great sensitivity in conceptualising and implementing appropriate R&R schemes", Vajpayee added: "We are trying to ensure the best possible rehabilitation... I assure you that we will continue the process."

It is believed that the letter from Vajpayee came at the urging of President K.R. Narayanan, to whom several organisations and individuals had presented petitions and memorandums seeking his intervention. An NBA member told *Frontline:* "It took four rounds of arrests in three months, the vow of *jal samadhi,* the determination of the Samarpit Dal, countless letters to the President from concerned citizens, the Rally for the Valley and a Narmada Sahayog Yatra (from Kanyakumari to New Delhi) for the plight of the people in the valley to be noticed."

The state machinery's response to the satyagraha in Domkhedi has been insensitive. The Maharashtra Govern-ment's stand has hardened and it has refused even to consider holding a dialogue. The State Government's handling of the rehabilitation of the people displaced by the project is equally insensitive. The Maharashtra Government submitted affidavits to the Supreme Court holding out assurances that it was prepared to resettle the oustees. The NBA disputed this claim and asked to see the resettlement sites, at which point it was made known that there was no land available for rehabilitation.

The State administration's responses throughout the period of the satyagraha, particularly the methods employed by the police during the third and fourth rounds of arrests, has given cause for concern.

On September 19, reports of satyagrahis standing in chest-deep water came in. According to NBA sources, the water level at the Sardar Sarovar dam site at that time was over 97 metres. The Bargi dam upstream was releasing 5,00,000 cusecs of water; the Tawa and Barna dams, also upstream, were releasing 10,000 cusecs. Even so, say NBA sources, no police personnel were posted at Domkhedi. Inquiries made by *Frontline* with the Nandurbar district police control room revealed that there was no police boat patrolling the river. However, an informed source in Mantralaya, the seat of State administration, claimed: "Police camps have been present there throughout the monsoon ever since Medha Patkar said she would take *jal samadhi.* They have had to be posted there because the area is completely inaccessible and we know that we can't get policemen there in an emergency." Two Deputy Superintendents of Police and 30 other police personnel were deputed to rescue the Samarpit Dal volunteers.

Soon after the satyagrahis were arrested on September 21, villagers from the surrounding areas gathered at Dhadgaon, where Patkar had been taken, and sat in peaceful protest outside the district administration offices demanding to speak to officials. Their numbers soon grew to more than 500. The district administration invoked Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code, which forbids assembly of groups of people, in Akrani tehsil; those who were sitting in dharna were arrested on September 23. According to NBA reports, 484 people were arrested by the police. Some of them, the NBA alleged, "were beaten and dragged by their hair". Offered the option of being released on furnishing a personal bond, the villagers declined; they demanded unconditional release, for they had committed no crime.

In a statement, Patkar said, "When people have been raising basic issues and have been challenging injustice, the response of the State Government has been to trivialise it with the police actions. This is not at all a law-and-order problem; the situation has arisen due to the wrong policies and actions regarding the dam and displacement on the part of Maharashtra rulers. It is a question of tribal rights."

ONE interesting outcome of the satyagraha has been the response of a variety of individuals to the entire gamut of issues thrown up by the struggle of the displaced people in the Narmada valley, and the administration's apathy towards the displaced people. The administration's attempt to impose an information black-out prior to the arrests was countered by individual volunteers of a group called the Association for India's Development (AID-India). The group is made up of Indians living or studying abroad who maintain a keen interest in development-related issues in India.

When the water level rose in the satyagraha villages and there was no news on the fate of the Samarpit Dal volunteers,

Hell and high water

LYLA BAVADAM

ALL through this monsoon season, water levels rose considerably in villages along the Narmada that are marked out for submergence. Rain-swollen rivers no longer flow freely because of the 85-metre-high Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat. To compound the problem, the sluice gates of big dams upstream in Madhya Pradesh are opened from time to time to release excess water.

As a result, villages located in the area between the Sardar Sarovar dam and the upstream dams, which are mostly inhabited by tribal people, have become particularly vulnerable to sudden floods. Fields on the river's edge are submerged one day and left dry barely a few days later. Low-lying houses are similarly affected, and residents can often be seen splashing about in one or two feet of water.

More than 193 villages in Madhya Pradesh face submergence; about 33,000 families will eventually be displaced. The Narmada Bachao Andolan claims that the State Government has not given land to even a single one of these families, let alone rehabilitated those who were displaced years ago for the construction of the Bargi, Tawa, Sukta and Barna dams on the Narmada and its tributaries.

Ironically, the Bargi dam has submerged more land than it is to irrigate today. This is because the State Government does not have the funds to build enough canals. ■

Ravi Kuchimanchi, a Mumbai-based AID-India activist, alerted other members of the group in the United States and set off a telephonic campaign to demand information about the volunteers. Despite the early hour (it was 5 a.m. in the U.S.), ten volunteers from the U.S. started making calls to Mumbai and attempted to speak to the Governor, the Chief Minister or the Police Commissioner. Finally, one volunteer named Kiran got through to the Deputy Inspector-General (Law and Order), Maharashtra, at 6-45 a.m.

Numerous other organisations and individuals were involved in campaigns to express solidarity with the displaced people and to raise awareness about the human and ecological costs of big dams The Narmada Sahayog Yatra, in which AID-India participated, was another citizen-initiated action that was intended to raise awareness about the "destructive nature" of big dams on the Narmada. The yatra, which started from Kanyakumari on September 12, ended in Delhi on September 20. In Delhi, a 15-member delegation met President Narayanan and presented a memorandum drawing attention to the plight of those displaced by the Sardar Sarovar dam, the government's failure to rehabilitate them, and the absence of a viable rehabilitation policy. The delegation requested the President to visit the valley. It also sought the establishment of a new Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal to review the construction of the dams, holding of public hearings on issues related to the project and the President's personal intervention in order to protect the land rights of the tribal people who were displaced. The President said he had received many letters from displaced people as well as citizens regarding the Narmada issue and the plight of the adivasis.

Meanwhile, other support groups are continuing their programmes of agitation in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh in support of the NBA's demands. Activists of the Samajwadi Janparishad, the National Alliance of People's Movements and other groups blocked main roads in Thane city. At Mandleshwar in Madhya Pradesh, people affected by the construction of the Maheshwar dam met the District Magistrate and registered their protest. At Badwani, people from the plains of Nimad, which face submergence, took out a rally and raised slogans that reaffirmed their resolve: "*'Doobenge par hatenge nahi*" (We will drown but we will not move from our homes). ■

Labour at the helm

A workers' cooperative of the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti takes over the Raghuvanshi Mills in Mumbai, which was shut down in June, and takes on the challenge of making it financially viable.

LYLA BAVADAM
in Mumbai

THE 86 spinning machines in the Raghuvanshi Mills in Mumbai, which have been silent since June, should start humming again on October 1, following a bold initiative taken by workers of the mill who have taken over its working.

On September 16, workers belonging to the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti (GKSS), a union that represents 12,000 textile mill employees in Mumbai, marched through the imposing gates of the Raghuvanshi Mills and took over the premises – and in the process took charge of their own lives.

Although the workers have a daunting task ahead in making the mill financially viable, the mood is one of jubilation, tempered marginally by a sense of disbelief at the turn of events. Proudly putting a machine through its paces, worker Bajirao Patil said: "For three months we had no work. We wondered if this is where our lives stop. But now that we're as good as the *maliks* (owners), I'm sure we'll make this work."

Patil's optimism about the mill's future is rooted in 25 years' work experience. He says that since the Raghuvanshi Mills is now only a spinning mill (the weaving section was sold years ago), capital inputs are not as crucial as they might have been. "Those who want yarn come to us with the raw material; we spin it for them and are paid for that." Since the mill was non-functional for only three months, its erstwhile clients may now flock back.

In terms of land area, the Raghuvanshi Mills is among the largest in Parel, Mumbai's heartland. However, according to its former owner Nayan Mehta, it was making losses consistently. The mill was shut down in 1984 and referred to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR). Mehta offered to revive and modernise it if he was allowed to sell a portion of the mill lands for commercial development. The Development Control Regulations of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) were amended in 1991 to permit mill land classified as industrial land, to be sold and used for commercial purposes if the proceeds from such sales went



PUNEET PARANJPE

The entrance to the Raghuvanshi Mills in Mumbai, with the banner of the Girni Kamgar Sangharsh Samiti, which reads: "Raghuvanshi Mills workers have captured the mill."

A tale of woes at SAIL

Buffeted by market realities and overstretched on several fronts, the public sector steel behemoth faces an uphill climb back to viability.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

THE steel-making giant once considered a jewel in the public sector crown, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), today faces massive haemorrhaging. SAIL, which has the largest workforce among corporate entities in the country, had been a profitable enterprise until recently. However, it suffered a sudden downturn last year and posted losses of Rs. 1,574 crores. In the first quarter of this year, it toted up losses of Rs. 610 crores.

With reports of the government refusing to agree to a financial restructuring proposal and with no other remedy in sight until after the new government takes over, the prognosis is rather grim. If the losses continue, even the infusion of massive doses of taxpayers' money is unlikely to revive the mammoth undertaking, and this could affect the livelihood of 1.75 lakh employees. Talk of referring the PSU to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) has set the alarm bells ringing. The irony is that the crisis has come about despite a 5.6 per cent growth in sales last year.

What has caused SAIL's decline and almost imminent fall? How far is the company itself to blame for the current situation and to what extent did factors beyond its control contribute to the process?

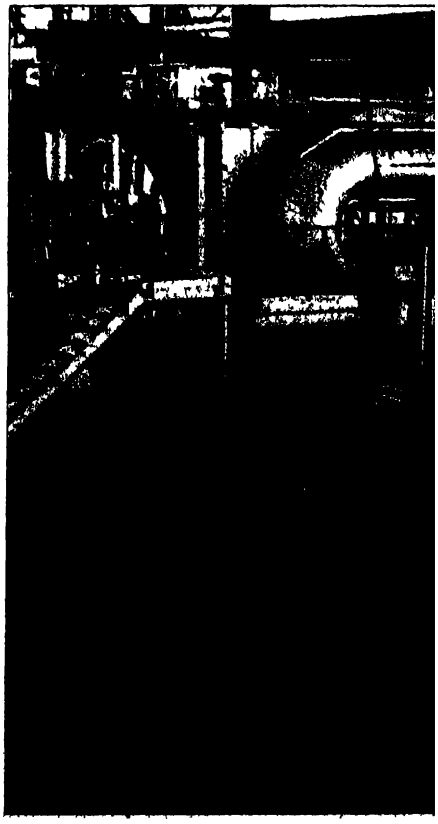
That the decline has occurred in the post-liberalisation era which has witnessed rapid capacity creation in the private sector is not entirely coincidental. When the government decided to decontrol steel and open up the sector for private capital in the early part of the decade, steel consumption had appeared to be growing at a promising rate and there was a rush of investments into the sector. The private sector is in the process of adding fresh capacity to the tune of nearly 11 million tonnes by the year 2000. Nearly all of this will be in flat products.

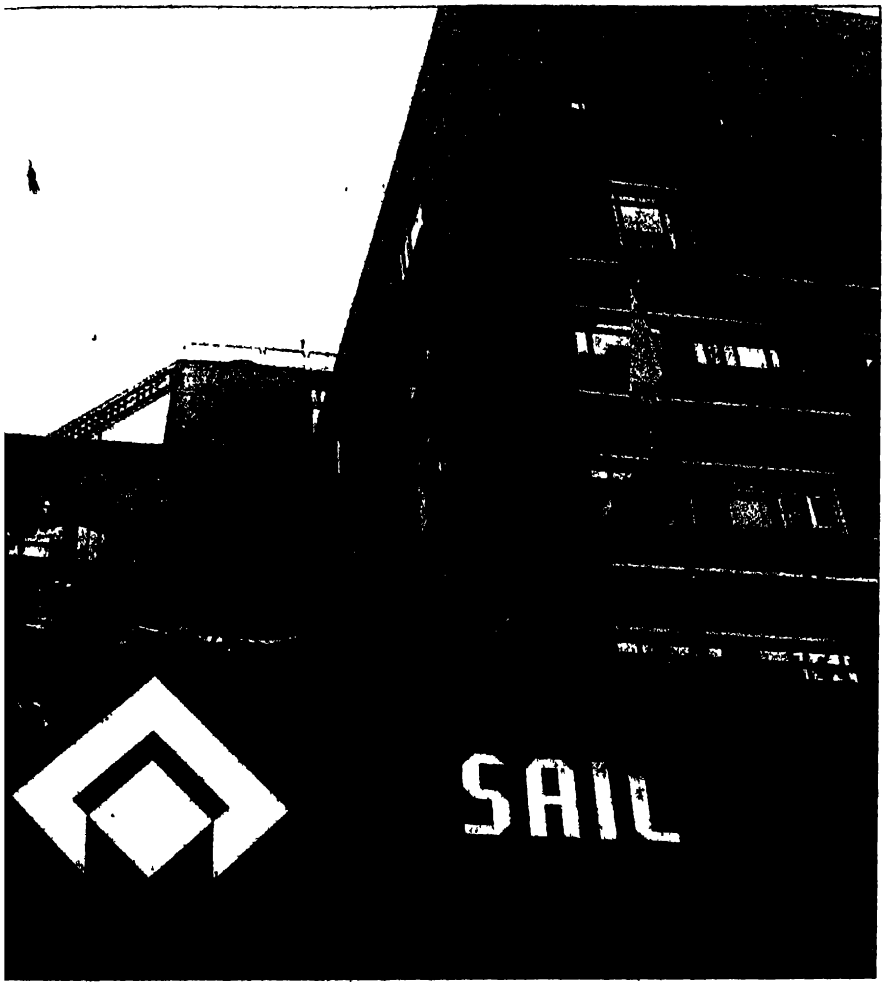
Not to be outdone, SAIL also planned a massive modernisation and expansion exercise at a cost of Rs.12,000 crores over the last three years, a process that envisaged adding 1.5 million tonnes to its capacity of flat products. SAIL is already the largest steel producer in the country with a capacity of 12.4 million tonnes of crude steel. It has a capacity of 10.192 million tonnes of saleable steel, 1.184 million tonnes of mild steel, 1.84 lakh tonnes of alloy steel and 1.86 lakh tonnes of hot-rolled carbon steel.

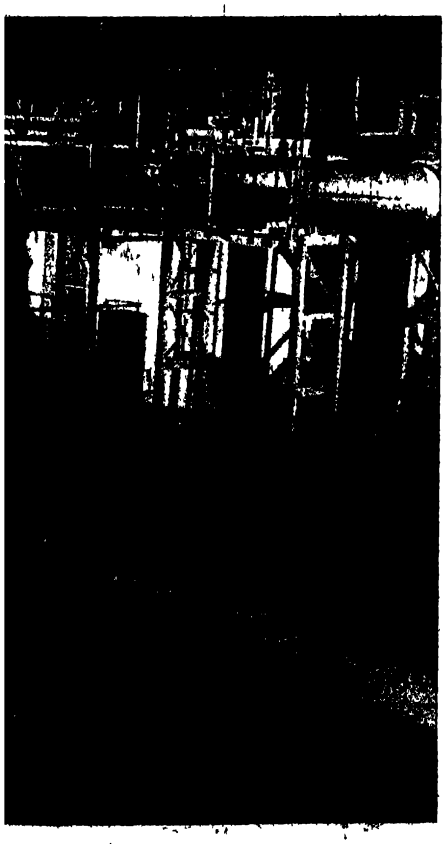
Was this creation of additional capacity in the public and private sector warranted? Demand projections made during the earlier part of the century were rather optimistic and the capacity addition was made based on these projections. However, these projections have been proved wrong. According to a recent paper prepared by the Economic Research Unit of the Joint Plant Committee of the Government of India, domestic demand for finished steel, which is currently around 22.9 million tonnes, is estimated to reach no more than 27.73 million tonnes by 2001-2002. Of the latter, flat products will account for 15.95 million tonnes. According to the paper, even by optimistic estimates the demand will only be 29.6 million tonnes. Projections made by the Ministry of Steel had envisaged a demand level of 31 million tonnes of finished steel for 2001-2002 and 47.04 million tonnes of finished steel for 2006-2007.

How did the projections go awry? First, they were made on the basis of optimistic gross domestic product growth predictions, which have since been belied. Second, even the 5 per cent GDP growth that has occurred owes itself to an increase in the share of the services sector in national income. In fact, it has been found that the linkages between growth in the primary and secondary sectors and GDP have been weakening. Third, the industrial growth rate hovers around 7 per cent, a much lower level than estimated, resulting in an overall fall in steel consumption. This is mainly because the government,









SAIL headquarters in Delhi. (Left) A transfer bar being rolled into a coil at the hot-rolling mill of the Salem Steel Plant.

which was the prime provider of infrastructure, has retreated from the sector in the post-liberalisation phase expecting the private sector to step in to the field. But the private sector has played coy. Fourth, such private investments as there have been in sectors like power, have relied on equipment sourced abroad, and domestic steel-makers have had no part of the pie.

In the case of flat products, which were earlier in short supply and for the manufacture of which substantial additional capacity has been added, the predominant consumer, the automobile industry, prefers to source them from abroad for reasons of quality or other considerations. Maruti Udyog Limited, the market leader in the passenger car sector, imports its requirement of flat steel from Japan. So do most other manufacturers, and this has created a near-crisis situation in the flat products segment. Fifth, construction activity, which accounts for the largest segment of steel consumption (it consumes nearly a fifth of all steel produced in the country) has been sluggish in the last three years not only in India but in the entire South East Asian region. Gross domestic capital formation in the construction field has been much lower than was projected.

Thus, the situation today is that demand predictions have gone awry but ambitious capacity expansion has taken place. How did this happen? Ardhendu Dakshi, former general secretary of the Steel Workers' Federation (SWF), the largest union in the industry, told *Frontline:* "The World Bank not only encouraged the private sector to set up these huge capacities but even canvassed to find funding for them. The unplanned and irresponsible capacity additions in the private sector have been responsible for the state in which SAIL is in today."

The situation has been exacerbated by the growth in imports. Steel imports under the open general licence category were allowed and the duties were brought down from 85 per cent a few years ago to between 20 and 30 per cent now. In fact, hot-rolled (HR) coils used to be imported through advance licences for $225 a tonne until recently, when the government fixed a floor price of $302 a tonne. Steel producers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and South Korea have exported flat products to India at prices no Indian producer can match, leave alone SAIL with its enormous wage bills, interest burden and overheads. While some private producers have matched import prices in a desperate attempt to cut down on inventories and losses, SAIL has been unable or unwilling to do so. The mechanism to fight the dumping of cheap steel into India is rather weak although Indian producers are often subjected to anti-dumping legislation and punitive measures by foreign steel companies.

While some SAIL plants are in sore need of modernisation, should it have gone in for large-scale modernisation and expansion using borrowed funds? Should it not then have simultaneously revamped its marketing set-up to face the competition? Should it not have pruned costs and made itself competitive even while it was making profits, rather than lock the stables after the horses had bolted?

SAIL has hitherto had a domestic orientation with a virtually captive buyer in the government under controlled market conditions. As a public sector unit and a lumbering giant at that, it not only lacked the agility displayed by its private sector counterparts but lacked the marketing

savvy so essential to succeed in a competitive environment, especially when demand projections have gone awry. Insiders say that revamping the marketing and other departments within the company is easier said than done in an environment where SAIL has been treated as a milch cow by successive parties in power and sundry politicians seeking all kinds of favours including employment opportunities for their near and dear, preference in the award of purchase contracts and so on.

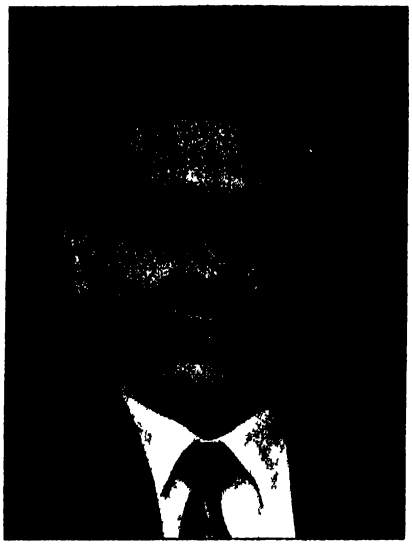
Questions have also been raised as to whether the modernisation and expansion could not have been undertaken at much lower costs than have been incurred. SAIL insiders also say that its modernisation has been sporadic and uneven. Rs. 5,000 crores have been spent on the Rourkela plant alone. While downstream facilities have been modernised with the installation of hot strip mill/continuous casting facilities, raw material handling has not been modernised. Lack of vision in designing a comprehensive modernisation programme has resulted in investments which have not yielded commensurate improvements in productivity and quality, they say. While the modernisation measures in Durgapur are satisfactory, Rourkela and Bokaro have not yielded the expected results, according to knowledgeable sources in SAIL. The modernisation programme was, incidentally, designed by SAIL although it did get consultants to advise it.

The recession combined with overcapacity led to a demand-supply mismatch. SAIL was bound to feel the impact of the mismatch most. The continuing withdrawal of the government from infrastructure development tasks has had a serious impact on SAIL because until recently the government had bought 80 per cent of its steel production.

Following the train accident at Khanna, Punjab, on November 26, 1998, the Railways suspended orders for rails made at SAIL's Bhilai plant which it believed did not meet the requirements. The orders were resumed only in the second quarter of this year after ultrasonic and gamma ray tests proved otherwise. SAIL not only lost business in the first quarter, but it also had to invest in new testing equipment. The Railways have been buying around 1.5 million tonnes of rails from SAIL annually.

A paper presented at a seminar on 'The Impact of the New Economic Policy on the Steel Industry in India' organised by the SWF records an all-round fall in the production of saleable steel in all the units of SAIL except the Durgapur unit.

For SAIL, price levels fell even as input costs rose. Increases in railway freight, and the costs of coal and power pushed up the expenditure bill by around Rs. 700 crores a year, prompting SAIL to undertake a massive cost-cutting exercise. However, McKinsey & Co, the international firm which was consulted by SAIL to recommend measures to achieve a turnaround, reportedly found that SAIL



Arvind Pande, Chairman and Managing Director, SAIL.

had failed to negotiate effectively with its suppliers to obtain inputs at lower prices even as its output prices were falling. Purchase departments in large PSUs often have entrenched interests, and SAIL is perhaps no exception.

Defective distribution channels have been another problem for SAIL. Under controlled market conditions, steel was first shipped to stockyards in various parts of the country before being sent on to the buyers, which added to the transportation cost. Under the freight equalisation policy, SAIL absorbed the additional costs. This policy has since been partially amended but there has been resistance to its scrapping. A multi-tiered system of distribution has led to delays in delivery and higher costs. The Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) has managed to scrap a system that relied on stockyards and cut costs, but SAIL, in typical bureaucratic fashion, has fought shy of revamping the distribution set-up.

There are also historical factors that have aggravated SAIL's woes. Located mainly in the central and eastern parts of the country near coal and iron ore mines, SAIL plants are far removed from the industrialised belt in western India. Private sector suppliers located closer to this industrial belt have a distinct advantage over SAIL in terms of cost as well as delivery schedules.

While other steel plants have better access to imported coal at rates cheaper than those that prevail in the country, SAIL's options in this regard are rather limited. Notwithstanding improvements in energy-saving and other areas, SAIL can hardly hope to match the lower costs of its overseas competitors given its bloated size. SAIL has a workforce of 1,74,736 lakhs, of which 18,249 are in the executive cadre. Its wage bill is in the region of Rs.2,381 crores for 1998-99. Reports say that some managers who have had long tenures have converted their charges into personal fiefdoms and enjoy political patronage which have made them firmly-entrenched. The top management does not always enjoy the freedom to transfer senior executives. A financially attractive Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) offer last year was availed of by 3,000 employees, but knowledgable SAIL sources say that the brighter employees were the ones who left.

AT the core of SAIL's current problems is the huge interest burden it has to bear on account of its over-ambitious modernisation programme initiated a few years ago based on demand projections which have since gone awry. The modernisation programme undertaken at Durgapur, Rourkela and Bokaro cost the company Rs.12,000 crores, much of which was financed by loans from the Steel Development Fund. Currently, SAIL has a debt equity ratio of 3.03:1 with a total debt of Rs.21,000 crores. The interest burden has been mounting. From Rs.808 crores in 1995-96 it rose to Rs.2,017 crores in 1998-99 (including inventory carrying cost). Depreciation amounted to Rs.585 crores in 1995-96, but rose to Rs.795 crores in 1997-98 and to Rs.1,104 crores in 1998-99 thanks to newly capitalised investments in modernisation. SDF loans account for Rs.6,415 crores.

SAIL has submitted a financial restructuring plan to the government, seeking either a waiver of the SDF loan of Rs. 5,000 crores or its conversion into equity. Contributions to the SDF came from SAIL and TISCO in the form of a levy which was neither a tax nor a cess and the fund was to provide soft loans to steel companies. However, Ispat Industries

challenged the proposal even before the government could consider it and the Calcutta High Court restrained the Joint Plant Committee from entertaining SAIL's plea.

The financial restructuring plan submitted to the government by SAIL also envisages writing down the asset value to the extent of capitalised interest accrued between 1993-94 and 1998-99 along with the writing off of loans and advances, including interest accrued on it, given by the Government of India to the Indian Iron and Steel Company routed through SAIL. The interest waiver granted to IISCO in the past by SAIL on loans from its own sources, amounting to Rs.506 crores, is sought to be brought back to SAIL's books of account. All these measures are intended to improve SAIL's debt-equity ratio.

SAIL reportedly hired McKinsey & Co to advise it on a restructuring package for a fee of Rs.8 crores even as its losses mounted. It is learnt that the crux of the McKinsey recommendations is that SAIL confine itself to its core competence, namely, steelmaking, and hive off peripheral and ancillary activities. The Steel Executives Federation of India is aggrieved over the recommendations of McKinsey & Co, which they allege lacks the competence to undertake such an exercise.

Persistent efforts by *Frontline* to secure an appointment to meet with the Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of SAIL, Arvind Pande, or any senior directors of the company, to elicit their views on various issues, including the McKinsey recommendations, failed. And *Frontline* was informed that none other than the CMD was authorised to speak to the press.

According to a note faxed by SAIL officials to *Frontline*, the company has been scouting for partners to set up joint ventures for its captive power plants at Bokaro, Durgapur and Rourkela, its oxygen plant at Bhilai and its fertilizer plant at Rourkela. It is on the look out for partners also for the backward integration of the Salem Steel Plant and for the revival of IISCO. These measures are believed to be in line with McKinsey's recommendations. SAIL intends to transfer some of its captive power units in its integrated steel plants producing totally 542 MW of electricity and 660 tonnes of steam per hour to a proposed subsidiary company and is seeking a strategic alliance partner to maintain that company for a period of 15 years. SAIL proposes to offer 49 per cent of the equity of this subsidiary, which will continue to supply power to its steel plants, to the alliance partner. SAIL has received expressions of interest from seven companies, of which the Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES) and Enron are shortlisted. However, SAIL has to obtain government approval before it can execute its plans.

Production of Pig Iron

Plants	1993-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98
Bhilai Steel Plant	300	278	272	224	324
Durgapur Steel Plant	35	182	103	114	69
Rourkela Steel Plant	48	38	14	31	15
Bokaro Steel Plant	203	256	155	260	350
Indian Iron & Steel	406	403	420	352	402
Visvesaraya Iron & Steel Limited	---	---	78	52	26
Rashtriya Ispat Nigam	985	848	771	700	521
Total	**1977**	**2005**	**1813**	**1733**	**1707**

Source. Economic Research Unit, Joint Plant Committee

Production of Saleable Steel

Plants	1993-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98
Bhilai Steel Plant	3335	3407	3495	3582	3518
DurgapurSteel Plant	642	853	909	1029	1170
Rourkela Steel Plant	1130	1196	1148	1182	1137
Bokaro Steel Plant	3205	3169	3330	3044	2749
Indian Iron & Steel	333	332	302	339	316
Rashtriya Ispat Nigam	1184	1555	2136	2121	2211
Alloy Steel Plant	160	154	187	200	154
Visvesvaraya Iron & Steel Limited	61	58	63	61	50
Total	**10050**	**10724**	**11570**	**11558**	**11305**

Source Economic Research Unit, Joint Plant Committee

Production of Hot Metal

Plants	1993-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98
Bhilai Steel Plant	4251	4336	4383	4397	4518
Durgapur Steel Plant	676	1208	1247	1487	1558
Rourkela Steel Plant	1205	1233	1302	1390	1409
Bokaro Steel Plant	4040	4090	3968	4119	4130
Indian Iron & Steel	796	819	839	789	782
Rashtriya Ispat Nigam	2369	2836	3213	3214	3165
Visvesvaraya Iron & Steel Limited	----	5	161	180	129
Total	**13337**	**14527**	**15113**	**15576**	**15691**

Source: Economic Research Unit, Joint Plant Committee

McKinsey is also learnt to have advised SAIL to divide its remaining four integrated steel plants into two strategic business units (SBUs), one for flat products, comprising the Bokaro and Rourkela plants and the other for long products, comprising the Durgapur and Bhilai plants.

McKinsey has advised SAIL to revamp its Central Marketing Organisation (CMO) in order to save on operating costs, to improve quality and to prune the staff strength by 70,000 in the next five years. A note submitted by SAIL admits that it has targeted the "right-sizing" of manpower to one lakh people in the next five years. The note claims that its marketing personnel have been empowered to resort to aggressive marketing techniques. It says that SAIL has recently succeeded in securing turnkey orders for mega-projects as well as orders for high-value items. Inventory-reduction, which was another recommendation of McKinsey, is also being attempted. With increase in direct despatches and the establishment of dealer networks, the CMO's stock yard system is undergoing a change with unviable yards being closed, says the SAIL note.

SAIL also wants to close down its uneconomical units, shops and those facilities that have become redundant as a result of modernisation. The beleaguered company has proposed to reduce subsidies in social infrastructure and turn them into independent profit centres.

The 27th annual general body meeting of SAIL held on September 22 reiterated the resolve to prune costs through the implementation of the new proposals.

According to senior Steel Ministry sources, McKinsey has also advised that eventually the flat product SBU be sold to the private sector, followed by the long product SBU. Most of the business and financial restructuring proposals put forward by SAIL are clearly based on the McKinsey report, whose prescriptions leave no one in doubt as to their ultimate objective, namely, to privatise SAIL. ■

Transfer of power

As an international force takes control of East Timor, the departing Indonesian troops adopt a 'scorch and scoot' policy.



MAYA VIDON AFP/ AP



Australian soldiers, part of the international peacekeeping force, at work in Dili on September 24.

SETH MYDANS

AS departing Indonesian soldiers marched with their duffel bags toward Dili's port on September 24, the foreign troops who were replacing them in East Timor staged an aggressive show of force, sealing-off and searching the city centre for hours as helicopters circled and clattered above them.

Refugees peeped out from cardboard shelters to watch Australian soldiers sweep through their burned-out neighbourhoods, fingers on the triggers of their guns, as if on the forward lines of a war.

The commander of the operation, Lt. Col. Nick Welch, said that it was intended to send a message to the frightened refugees and to any potential troublemakers that Dili belonged to the international force now. Welch said: "With the random looting and fires, there may have been the perception that we were not fully in control. The reality is we are capable of carrying out our mission."

The show of force, together with the quick departure of Indonesian troops, sparked the first spontaneous celebration in Dili of the victory of East Timor's vote for independence in a referendum on August 30. The celebrations, which started with two boys on bicycles, soon grew to 15 men on motorcycles and then to a pick-up truck filled with whooping, chanting celebrators who waved the green-blue-and-white flag of the East Timorese independence movement. "Thank you for coming, whee-hee." shouted a motorcycle rider, Jose Antonio, 21, as he drove past an Australian guard post.

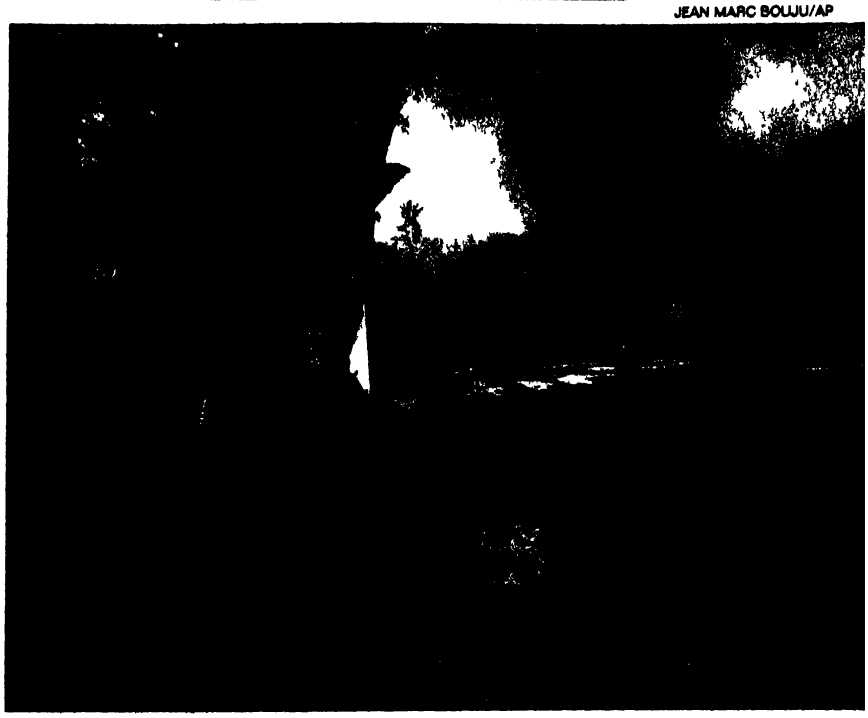
But one man on a van, Mario Victor da Costa, who wore a pale blue United Nations cap, said that as soon as darkness fell, the revellers would leave the streets because "we are still afraid at night". Welch said that no shots had been fired in the sweep, which lasted through the afternoon and into the night, and that his troops had met no resistance. But it also appeared that they made few arrests of armed men and seized only a few weapons.

In an earlier report, the international force had said that it made its first arrest, of Caitano da Silva, a senior member of the violent militias that laid waste to much of the region in the previous three weeks.

Despite the show of force, military officers conceded that they did not have full control of Dili and that it would take

The intention of the operation, according to the commander, is to send a message to the frightened refugees and to any potential troublemakers that Dili belonged to the international force now. "We are capable of carrying out our mission," he said.

JEAN MARC BOUJU/AP





JOHN HARGEST/AP

A group of East Timorese hold high the flag of the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT) in Dili as they celebrate the withdrawal of Indonesian troops. (Above) An Australian soldier near a government building that was set on fire by departing Indonesian troops.

far longer to enforce security in the rest of the territory. "How long is a piece of string?" one colonel countered when asked for a time estimate.

A formal military hand-over of the territory from the Indonesian troops who have occupied it for 24 years to the international force that began arriving on September 20 was to be completed in a few days, the top generals of both forces said at a news session. In Jakarta, Gen. Wiranto, the chief of the Indonesian armed forces, said that the hand-over would be on September 27. But announcements in Jakarta often have little connection with events in East Timor. On September 23, President B.J. Habibie declared an end to martial law in Dili.

The local Indonesian commander, Gen. Kiki Syahnakri, said that by September 25 all 11,500 soldiers who had been stationed in the capital of East Timor would be gone. Those included "territorial forces," many of them East Timorese, who were responsible for much of the violence, together with the irregular militias that they support. Syahnakri said that 4,500 troops who arrived with him in September in what was officially described as an attempt to restore order would be phased out in a few days or in a few weeks.

The process of withdrawal was creating its own momentum as the mood in the mostly empty city of Dili shifted to one of guarded hope. The port was busy with arriving troops, including the first Asian contingent, 127 soldiers from the Philippines. As the foreign soldiers walked down the gangplanks of huge transport ships, the departing Indonesians loaded belongings on one of their own ships at a far corner of the port.

Outside the gates of the port was a tiny sign of commerce: Women squatted and sold mangoes, papayas and bananas. Few people had enough money to buy them.

On September 23, as the Indonesian Army began its final pullout, smashing and burning their barracks and headquarters behind them, international peacekeepers engaged in their first tense encounters with armed men. In one small incident after another, the peacekeepers responded to gunshots, some of them coming from truckloads of Indonesian

soldiers, some apparently fired by irregular fighters.

Maj. Gen. Peter Cosgrove, the Australian who commands the peacekeeping operation, said that despite the increasingly tense situation, his troops from the international force known as Interfet had held their fire. "Interfet has yet to engage an armed militia," he said, referring to the irregular groups created and sometimes commanded by the military. "We are ready to do so, but at this stage the discrimination, restraint and judgment of the troops has been outstanding. We have been able to confiscate weapons rather than take them off dead bodies."

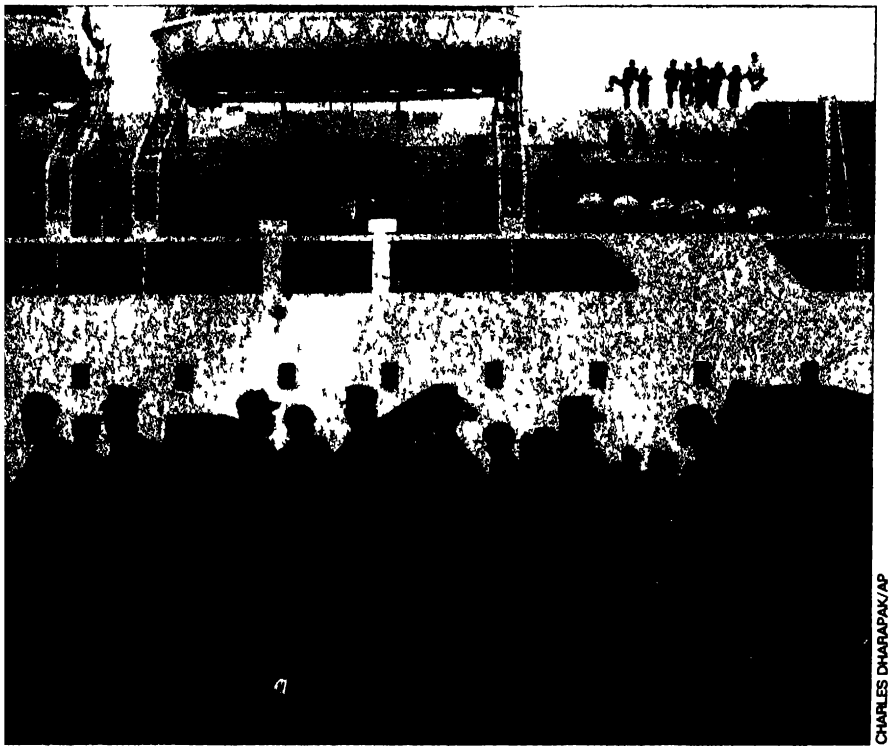
He also said that he hoped that the withdrawal of the Indonesian troops could calm the situation. "Among the territorial battalions – those who are ethnic East Timorese – there are some very hard feelings about the referendum outcome," he said, referring to the vote on August 30.

Once these troops have left, he said, "to a large degree some of the complicating factors will have gone." Nevertheless, both Australian and Indonesian officers said that the next few days would be tense and crucial as the Indonesian military hands over control of East Timor to the international forces.

They said they expected a possible eruption of violence to mark the moment, both as a parting gesture and possibly as an opening salvo by defectors and irregular troops determined not to give up the fight.

With few large buildings left intact in Dili, soldiers loaded up their transport trucks with furniture and other spoils, then set their buildings on fire. Columns of smoke rose above the city.

Maj. Gen. S. Ahmad, who commands one of the last units to leave, said that the prevailing attitude – in effect, the policy – of the departing troops was, "We're not going to leave anything for those idiots to take over." He predicted that "all hell will break loose" in the coming days. Deserters who have decided to fight on here, he said, "will leave something for the people to remember."



CHARLES DHARAPAK/AP

Indonesian soldiers wait to board a ship at the Dili port on September 24.

Plumes of smoke continued to rise from military buildings set afire by the departing troops. But on the sea front, at one building the Australians intended to use, two armoured vehicles and two helicopters kept a protective eye as the Indonesians prepared to leave. The miniature hand-over crystallised the tensions and poignancy of the transfer of power.

"See you again," an Indonesian soldier said, trying to smile as a column filed out past the Australians. "Goodbye, East Timor." With elaborate courtesy, an Australian officer paused as the last Indonesian left the gate. "May I?" he said, waiting to enter. "Of course," the Indonesian responded.

In the empty compound, strewn with litter, the Australians found three barrels of fuel oil, together with long blue hoses, waiting to be set afire.

GIVEN their small numbers and the scattered and dangerous nature of the armed groups they faced, the 3,000 peacekeepers who had arrived moved carefully to secure a few key areas and – apart from helicopter reconnaissance – had not yet ventured beyond the city.

An initial contingent of 120 troops secured the airport in the eastern town of Baucau because of its strategic location as an entry port for supplies. In Dili, young men, some of them concealing weapons, roamed the mostly empty streets. Truck convoys of soldiers – many wearing bandanas as head scarves in the red and white colors of the Indonesian flag – also travelled the city, staring coldly at the Australian troops they passed.

One of the Australian troopers they passed, who gave his name only as Chris, sat with his rifle across his knees at his post outside the fence at the eastern end of the port.

"I've never been in a fire fight and, I hate to admit it, but I'm looking forward to it," he said. "If any of them draws a weapon on me, I'll warn them to put it down, and if they don't, I'll just cap them."

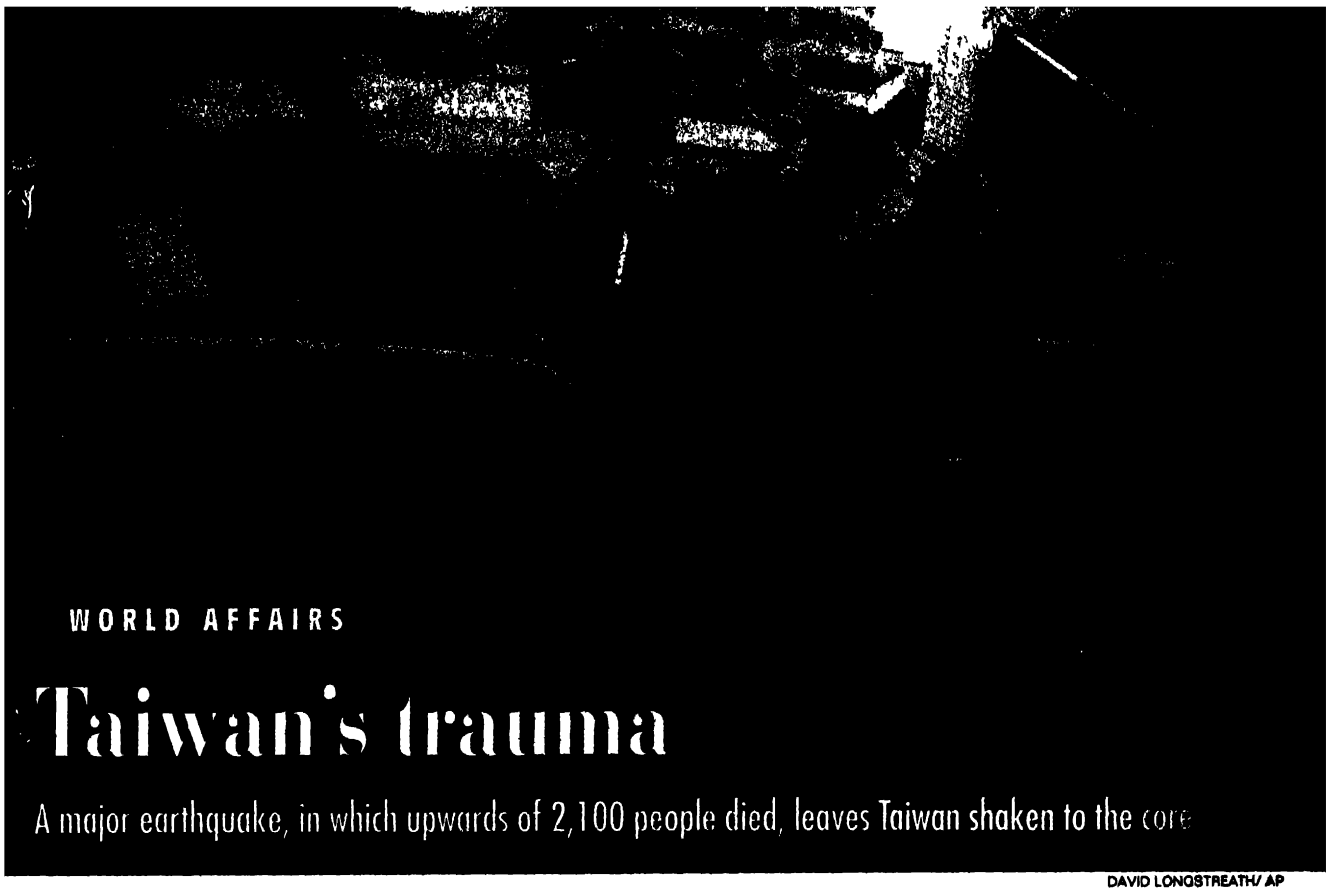
As he spoke, half a dozen young men, one of them carrying a club, lounged nearby on a couch that had found its way somehow to the beach front beside the fence around the port. "They seem friendly," the trooper said. When the convoy of territorial troops drove slowly by, he waved a greeting. They stared back at him.

Military officials gave few details about shooting incidents in the city. Most were in the general area of the port, Cosgrove said. One incident witnessed by reporters illustrated the tensions and emotions of this moment of military transition.

Responding to a report that shots had been fired, two jeeploads of British troops burst into an Indonesian military barracks, only to find the soldiers smashing and looting their own living quarters.

As the British withdrew, the Indonesian soldiers followed them angrily, leveling their guns at them. Driving away in their armoured jeeps, the British returned the gesture with their mounted machine guns. ■

New York Times Service



WORLD AFFAIRS

Taiwan's trauma

A major earthquake, in which upwards of 2,100 people died, leaves Taiwan shaken to the core

DAVID LONGSTREATH/ AP

Rescue teams search a building for possible survivors.

SETH FAISON

THE front half of Wang Chong-shih's third-floor apartment has disappeared, but the rear half remains intact. When Wang opens his bedroom door, instead of looking down a narrow hallway, he looks outside at the neighbourhood.

"It's pretty strange," said Wang, 57, who owns a camera store. "Part of my home is still here, as it was before, and the rest is gone." The same can be said for the entire city of Tungshih, which has reported the highest number of deaths from the earthquake that devastated Taiwan on September 21. Out of the 2,100 deaths reported, 430 residents have died in Tungshih, a city of 60,000 people located a few miles into the mountains in central Taiwan. More than 7,800 people have been injured and 360 have been listed missing. One street in the middle of the town looked clean and remarkably unaffected; the next one resembled a wasteland of rubble.

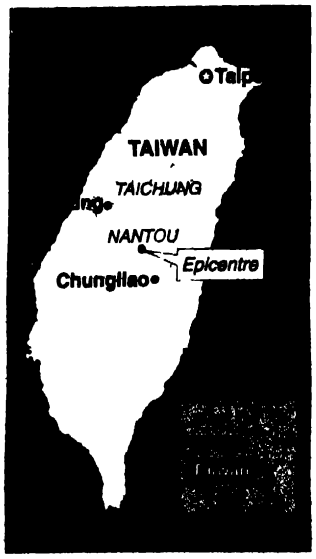
The port of Taichung, one of the four international ports in the country, was heavily damaged, rendering five wharfs inoperable. Officials estimate that it will take at least two years to return to full operations.

Beyond the obvious damage to life and property, the earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richter scale, seems to have left a deep psychological scar. Survivors feel lucky, yet they are burdened with the knowledge that they knew so many of those who died.

"No one in my family was hurt," said Wang, his eyes widening momentarily, before he grimaced with his next thought: "Half my neighbours are dead." On Ben Street, where Wang's half-home stands, many of the buildings collapsed when the quake struck.

The Cathay Tea House was standing, seemingly undamaged. But next door, a house seemed to have vanished, leaving remnants of a tile roof on the ground and, inexplicably, a child's chest of drawers that was somehow thrust forward and left intact on the sidewalk. One drawer hung open, showing a neatly folded stack of cotton shirts inside.

Several doors down the street, rescue workers dug through the rubble of a collapsed five-storey building, where more than 20 people were still believed to be buried. Rescue workers from South Korea, wearing navy blue vests emblazoned with the name "Samsung", looked on as Taiwanese soldiers dug through the rubble. The soldiers were guided by a makeshift map of the building's layout, drawn up with the help of a resident who had escaped the ruins.



A pair of dogs, also wearing Samsung vests, took turns to sniff the debris for the scent of a human. Shortly after noon, one of the dogs indicated that it had found something, but an hour of excruciatingly careful digging yielded nothing.

"They can smell a person, but the problem is that they cannot identify the spot exactly," said a Taiwanese rescue worker. "There's too much chaos." Rescue work has also been slowed down by the col-

Economic fallout

CALVIN SIMS

THE devastation caused by the earthquake will slacken Taiwan's economic growth for 1999, according to government officials. They warned that repairing the buildings, highways, power generators and other structures could take years.

Although it is still too early to determine the extent of the damage, some officials have used figures as high as $5 billion to $10 billion as the total cost of reconstruction and compensation payable to the victims. If the preliminary estimates stand, the September 21 quake could be one of Asia's costliest natural disasters.

Finance officials said that the government had ample money to rebuild the shattered public works and that the quake would have little long-term effects on the economy, which had been rebounding this year after a sharp slowdown in the Asian financial crisis.

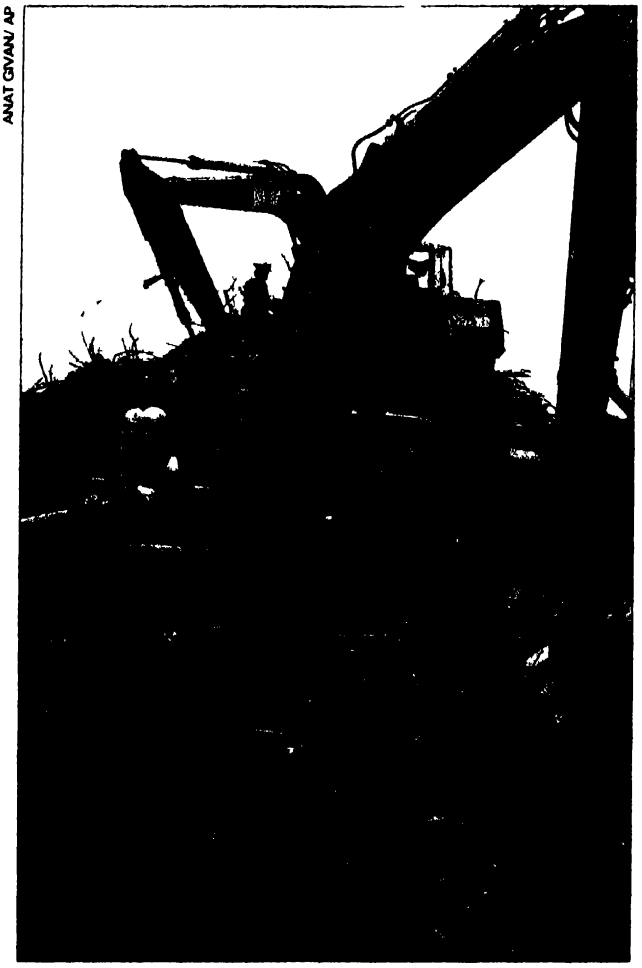
"For this year, the earthquake will have a negative effect on the economy, and we will fall short of our growth targets," said Chi Schive, vice-chairman of the Council for Economic Planning and Development, which had forecast a 5.74 per cent growth rate for 1999.

Some economists are predicting that the quake, which caused widespread water and power failures that disrupted semiconductor production and temporarily shut down many businesses, will limit economic expansion to a range from 5.3 to 5.5 per cent.

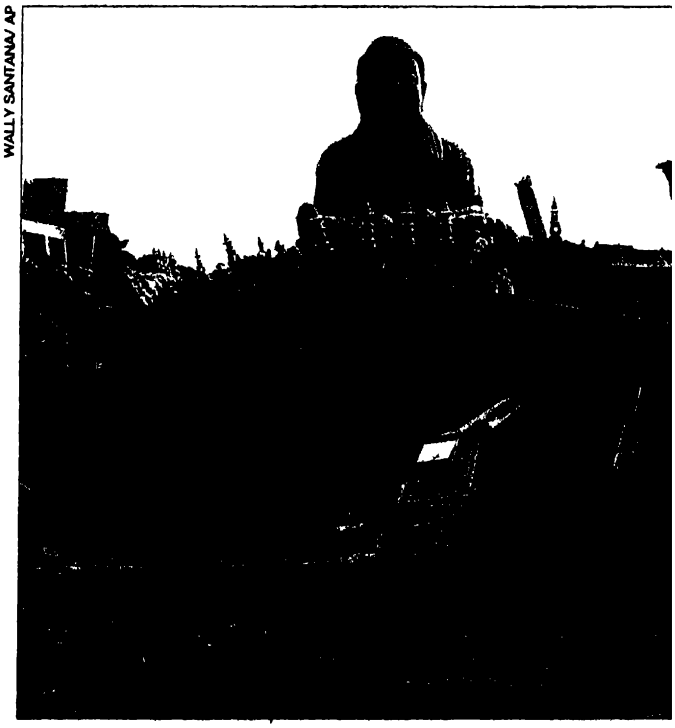
Taiwan is a leading manufacturer of semiconductors and maker of personal computer equipment, with a combined annual production of $40 billion. A protracted disruption in production could have major effects on foreign markets, driving up the prices of computer chips and equipment.

The Hsinchu Science Park, where 25 computer-chip factories produce 90 per cent of the semiconductors made on the island, has been idle since the quake knocked out power generators and substations. Industry analysts estimate that Taiwanese chip makers are losing $60 million in revenues each day they are not

ANAT GIVAN/ AP



WALLY SANTANA/ AP



Heavy equipment at the site of a hotel that collapsed in Taipei.

A statue of the Buddha, what remains of the temple complex in Wang-Fo in central Taiwan.

lapse of bridges on two roads that connect Tungshih. Some towns farther inland have been unable to receive any outside help, despite efforts by the army to deliver emergency supplies by helicopter.

At a park on Ben Street, Liu Yu-chun, a 20-year-old woman sitting with her sister in a broken chair outside the remains of her family's cosmetics store, mused about the fact that she was alive.

Liu considers herself lucky. At first she laughed easily at her fortune, though she grew more pensive as she described how odd it felt to have escaped unscathed on a street where so many neighbours have disappeared. Five houses collapsed right across the street.

"I don't know whether to be happy or sad," said Liu, thoughtfully resting her hands behind her head. "I don't know how I should feel." On September 20, for no particular reason, Liu broke her habit of sleeping on the third floor of the family home and settled in with her sister on the second floor. After the quake jolted

producing.

Chi said that any production slowdown caused by the quake would probably be offset next year by the positive effects of the government's spending on reconstruction. "If we don't count the loss of human life and social disorder, we will come through this natural disaster in pretty decent shape," Chi said. "There will be a balancing out."

In fact, the major industries were largely unscathed, as major manufacturing cities such as Taipei and Hsinchu, just south of the capital, were spared significant damage.

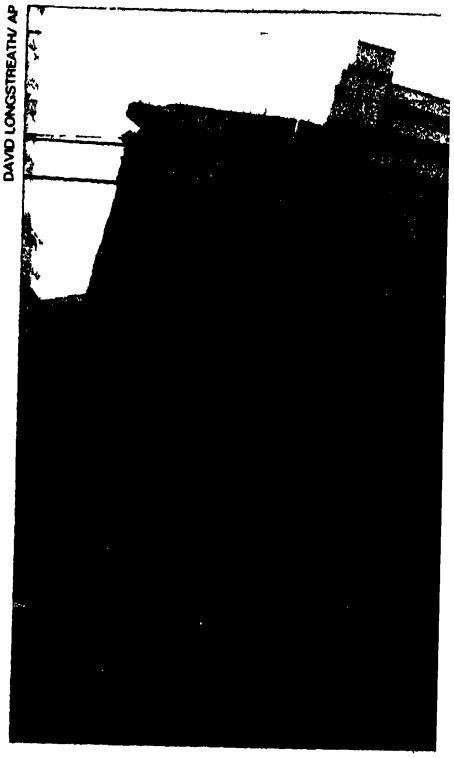
Peter Kurz, an analyst with Merrill Lynch in Taipei, said plans to spend heavily on public works would be a boon to industries such as cement and steel, sectors that will be used in constructing roads, bridges and housing.

The quake has devastated public works, and officials said that rebuilding would be long and laborious, probably spanning years. Engineers have to go back to the drawing board to determine how best to reinforce structures, roads and bridges to survive possibly more powerful quakes.

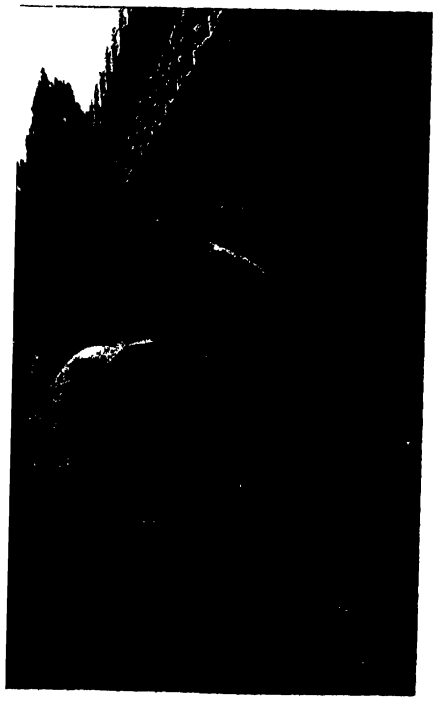
Hundreds of thousands of buildings have been damaged, along with parts of 25 roads and highways, five so seriously that the government is uncertain when they will reopen. Five major bridges that link to main highways have also collapsed.

In some cases, roads, bridges and buildings will be relocated away from fault lines or they will simply not be rebuilt. The quake and its continuing aftershocks caused huge cracks at one of the nation's largest dams, at the Sun Moon Lake Reservoir, where water was emptied as a precaution. Workers also found structural damage at the Nantou County dam complex. ■

New York Times Service



DAVID LONGSTREATH/ AP





WALLY SANTANA/ AP

Anxious Taiwanese women outside an apartment building (above) destroyed in Dali.

them shortly before 2 a.m., Liu realised that she might have been crushed by the remnants of a neighbouring house that smashed through a window had she remained on the third floor.

"I was extra lucky," she said. "I don't know why." With the packaging of almost all the cosmetics in the store damaged, Liu wondered whether she should be giving the products away to rescue workers.

The disastrous collapse of Wangchao Mansion, a 13-storey apartment building completed last year and widely known as the fanciest and most expensive address in Tungshih, attracted crowds of rescue workers. What was left of the building was wedged against another building at an impossible angle. More than 100 residents are believed to be buried inside. Taipei's former Mayor, Chen Shui-bian, also showed up. Chen, who heads Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, is one of three leading candidates for the presidential elections scheduled for March next.

Road repairs in Taichung and Nantou Counties, near the epicentre are expected to take months, if not years. ■

New York Times Service

Mortification in Paris

An incident relating to the alleged mistreatment of a young woman employed as domestic help by an Indian diplomat in Paris turns into a major embarrassment.

THOMAS ABRAHAM
in London

INDIAN embassies abroad are supposed to project the country as being dynamic and modern, and try to erase the prevalent images of poverty, backwardness and social inequality. These efforts have, however, received a severe setback in France, after a young woman employed as domestic help by an Indian diplomat in the Indian embassy in Paris ran away from her employer's house and told the French authorities that she had been maltreated by her employer. While Indian diplomats are staunchly denying any mistreatment, the French media have been full of reports about the apparently horrific injuries on her person, which according to her, were inflicted by her employer, besides the terrible working conditions she had to endure.

The accounts given by the maid, Lalita Oraon, and the Indian embassy are so much at variance that only an enquiry will clear up the matter. (The French authorities have begun an enquiry.) According to information made available till now, on September 5 Lalita, who was employed at the house of Amrit Lugon, First Secretary (Economic) in the Indian embassy, left her employer's flat and walked out into the streets of Paris. The French police found Lalita, who had been with the Lugons since January and knows neither French nor English, wandering in the streets, clearly lost. They contacted the Indian embassy that evening and reported that an Indian citizen had been found wandering. She was then identified, but was not handed over to the embassy. Instead, she was placed in the charge of the Brigade des Mineurs, a police wing that deals with juveniles.

At some stage Lalita was examined by a panel of three doctors, who did not find anything wrong with her. The medical examination, however, revealed that she was only 17 years old and not 19 as stated in her passport, making her a minor.

Embassy officials told the police that Lugon was planning to send Lalita back to India, and that she had probably run away after getting wind of this. Lalita, however, told the police that she had been ill-treated by her employer. In the light of her allegations, the French authorities were reluctant to hand her back to the embassy. Embassy officials then said that they would send her back to India on September 7, and offered to meet her at the airport with her passport and ticket.

The French authorities, however, decided to place her in the care of a non-governmental organisation, the Comite Contre l'Esclavage (Committee Against Modern-Day Slavery). This organisation campaigns against various forms of exploitation, including the mistreatment of domestic helps. Lalita told the organisation that she had worked every day from six in the morning till midnight, that she was beaten and abused by her employers, and that she was paid a paltry sum. (This is not the first time that the NGO has had a run-in with the Indian authorities – a few years back, it raised the issue of an Indian diplomat in Geneva paying his domestic help poorly.)

THE case took a new turn on the night of September 7, when Lalita tried to escape from the Convent of St. Joseph of Cluny, where she was being lodged, by jumping over a 5-metre-high wall. Lalita, who suffered serious injuries in the fall, was found by a motorist and taken to the Cochin Hospital, one of Paris' main hospitals.

According to French media reports, she was found wandering with her clothes blood-stained and her feet bare. At the hospital she was examined by Prof. Bernard Debre, the head of the hospital's urology department. The doctor reported that Lalita bore severe wounds in her genital region which had become septic. French officials then said that they suspected that she had been abused by her employer, and pressure began to mount for a judicial enquiry.The head of the Committee, Phillipe Boudin, stated that he had been told by Lalita earlier that she had been drugged by her employer and his friend, a doctor, and injured.

The Indian embassy came to Lugon's defence, and denied all allegations of wrongdoing. In a statement released by it, it called on the local press to "cease its campaign of defamation against the diplomat" and criticised the "mendacious statements by individuals and organisations who are themselves responsible for Ms. Oraon's actual plight."

Indian diplomats alleged that the NGO was behind this negative campaign, and said that "Ms. Oraon is not a laboratory animal on which these individuals and organisations should experiment with their social concerns." The release said that Lalita had been employed to care for the Lugons' two small children, but that since her work had not been satisfactory, the Lugons were planning to send her back to India.

Indian diplomats were also incensed that the French authorities refused to give them access to the maid, besides refusing to hand her back to them so that she could be sent home. When asked about the injuries that Lalita had suffered, embassy officials said that they must have been sustained when she tried to escape from the convent. They pointed out that an earlier medical examination conducted on her after she was taken in by the French police had not revealed any injuries.

The medical examination report of the Cochin Hospital, however, states that the injuries in the genital area had been caused earlier than the injuries to the vertebrae and legs that were attributed to her fall from the wall.

Given the wide inconsistencies in the accounts given so far, it is difficult to determine where the truth lies. The focus of the French police enquiry will be to determine how Lalita was injured and who was responsible for the acts of violence against her.

Among the other unanswered questions is why Lalita tried to escape from the convent. The Indian embassy itself does not appear to have conducted an internal enquiry, and is standing by what Amrit Lugon has said. ■

The siege within

The civil war in Angola, heightened by the renewed offensive by UNITA rebels, has displaced millions and left them in the grip of starvation.

JOHN CHERIAN

IT is the bloodiest of the civil wars that has devastated the African continent in this century. The civil war in Angola, the second oldest conflict in Africa after the Sudanese civil war that started in the late 1950s, has been going on virtually non-stop since the Portuguese left the colony in 1974. Many observers had expected that after the end of the Cold War, peace would finally dawn on the country, as in neighbouring Mozambique which is now concentrating on the herculean task of reconstruction. In 1992, Angola seemed to be heading in the same direction as Mozambique when President Eduardo Dos Santos and the leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Jonas Savimbi, signed a peace accord in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Provincial elections were held and UNITA members joined the new government at senior levels. But when Savimbi lost the presidential elections held two years later, the UNITA leader relaunched a full-scale war.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, Savimbi fought a proxy war for the West. His forces were equipped and trained by many countries. The apartheid regime in South Africa was his main supporter in terms of logistics and supplies. Western intelligence agencies were also deeply involved until the early 1990s. After the Cold War was over, Savimbi had very few friends but the area under his control had the richest diamond deposits in the world. International companies based in South Africa and other countries continued to have indi-



NICKY DE BLOIS/AP



CLIVE MITSHALL/AP

A boy crawls out of an improvised bomb shelter after the end of a round of shelling by UNITA forces at Kuito, a city southeast of Luanda. (Below) Food supplies on an airport tarmac in Negage.

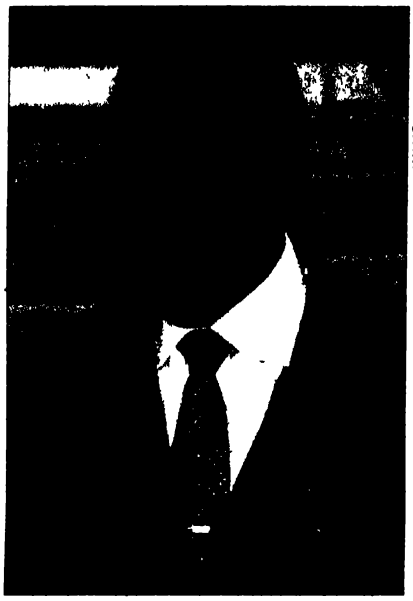
rect links with UNITA. The trade in diamonds and other minerals, worth millions of dollars annually, kept the UNITA killing machine in fine fettle.

In 1997, there were reasons for optimism again when Savimbi's long-time ally, Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator of the Congo, was ousted. The new government was no friend of UNITA. Savimbi seemed to be on the defensive for some time. But the renewed civil war in the Congo in 1998 and its spillover into countries in the region gave another opportunity to Savimbi. The government in Luanda also seemed to have been lulled into complacency.

When Congolese President Laurent Kabila sent a message seeking urgent military help to fight rebels, Luanda sent an elite fighting force which helped save Kinshasa, the Congolese capital *(Frontline,* February 26, 1999). Savimbi saw in the absence of the elite troops an opportunity to launch a full-scale offensive. UNITA made big territorial gains and surrounded many major cities, which were already overcrowded with people and refugees, as a result of three decades of uninterrupted war. UNITA has gained control of over 70 per cent of Angolan territory. The Government has launched what it calls the "last war for peace" against the rebels. But the Army is yet to make a breakthrough.

TWO million people lead a precarious existence in Angola. They are fully dependent on aid. According to the humanitarian agencies working in the country, another three million people, all internal refugees, live in inaccessible areas and their condition is impossible to verify. According to the Sergio Vieira de Mello, United Nations Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, 70 per cent of the population live in besieged provincial capitals such as Huambo, Malange and Kuito or in areas controlled by the government near the coast.

Intermittent shelling of the provincial capitals and the targeting of U.N. planes by UNITA rebels have prevented the delivery of humanitarian aid. Hundreds of civilians have also been killed. Today, the average citizen in Angola is under siege, unable to cope with the collapse of the economy and his or her means of livelihood, soaring inflation and lack of access to arable land. According to U.N. sources, of the two million people known to be in urgent need of assistance in Angola, only about 600,000 receive humanitarian assistance.



WANG YAN/XINHUA/AP

President Eduardo Dos Santos.

Chairman of the U.N. Angola Sanctions Committee Robert Fowler said in late August that out of the country's total population of 11 million, one million were killed since the war began 20 years ago and two million have been internally displaced. Fowler said that the current sanctions against Angola were directed against UNITA which made it difficult for aid workers and humanitarian agencies to operate. In the past four months, six aid workers were killed. UNITA specialises in the indiscriminate killing of civilians, through shelling, ambushes, infantry attacks and landmines.

In a recent interview with the BBC, Savimbi claimed that there is no humanitarian catastrophe in Angola. The U.N. and other agencies in the field have estimated that at least a hundred Angolans were dying every day and they expect the toll to go up if the fighting continues on the present scale. Fowler said that the aim of the U.N. sanctions committee, was to limit the capacity of Jonas Savimbi to wage war.

Sanctions have been in force in the country in some form or the other for the last six years. However, as events have shown, they have had minimal impact on Savimbi's capacity to wage war against his own people. Fowler said that the sanctions first sought to limit Savimbi's access to arms and munitions. With Savimbi undeterred, the U.N. tried to curtail UNITA's diplomatic activities and limit the ability of Savimbi and his senior associates to travel and raise money abroad. The U.N. Security Council has also passed resolutions, limiting Savimbi's access to products that fuel his war machine – petroleum, oil and lubricants. Only last year did the U.N. Security Council pass the important resolution which made the purchase of diamonds offered for sale by UNITA sources illegal. Fowler said: "We are hoping to limit his (Savimbi's) ability to make war in two obvious ways. First of all, to make it less easy for him to make money by selling diamonds abroad and to ensure that he earns less money from the sale of diamonds." This would be done by forcing Savimbi into the parallel gray and black markets where more unscrupulous dealers would give him less money for his diamonds.

The focus of the U.N. will be on stopping the sources of arms by making it "more embarrassing, more dangerous and expensive" for people to sell arms to UNITA. Anders Mollander of Sweden, a member of the Angola sanctions committee, while addressing the media in the last week of August gave a graphic account of the suffering of the Angolan people. Mollander said that during his visit to Angola in 1992, he had seen children starving and aid workers classifying people into those who could survive on normal food and those who had been starving for so long that they could not eat normally. He visited a football stadium full of starving people who were too weak to move or talk. "I understand that it is not as bad as that now, but we are getting there," said Mollander.

Mollander admitted that UNITA was using more sophisticated weapons now, including cannons mounted on armoured carriers, multiple-launch rocket systems and a variety of heavy artillery. It is resorting to heavy artillery bombardment on cities mostly inhabited by refugees. They were in the first place herded into these cities by UNITA. The government is now forced to feed them as well as protect them from the constant attack from heavy artillery.

According to a 200-page report "Angola Unravels", released by Human Rights Watch, Bulgaria and Albania are the main source of weapons for UNITA. Other countries that have helped channel arms to UNITA and smuggle diamonds out include Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo and Zambia. The international community seems to have become immune to the suffering of the Angolan people. Instead, Angola is a country where profits are there for the asking, if you are ready to deal in guns and diamonds. ■

Sweeping charges

The Cox report has clearly gone beyond available evidence in levelling nuclear espionage charges against China.

M.V. RAMANA

TOWARDS the end of the 1990 film *Flashback*, Dennis Hopper predicts that "once we get out of the eighties, the nineties are going to make the sixties look like the fifties." Unfortunately, that prediction has not come true. Instead, as the 1990s end, some things do look like the 1950s all over again. In what appears to be the beginning of a new Cold War that certain interests within the United States would like to initiate, China is being assigned the role that had been earmarked for the Soviet Union earlier. Attempting to gain political mileage from the situation is Christopher Cox, a Republican Congressman from California and the Chairman of the House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The committee was set up in 1998 after disclosures that two U.S. aerospace corporations were under criminal investigation for providing data relating to rockets to China. Its full report, classified Top Secret, was released on January 3, 1999; a declassified version, the so-called Cox report, was released on May 25. The report accuses China of stealing nuclear secrets from the U.S. and using "elements of the stolen information" to build warheads for its new Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). Among the specific systems listed are the W-70 enhanced radiation warhead (popularly known as the neutron bomb), the W-88 thermonuclear warhead, and the Minuteman II, the Minuteman III and the Trident C-4 missiles.

The Cox report received wide media coverage, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, including India. Less attention was paid to the responses it generated. After having issued various statements attacking the Cox report, China released an official document on July 15 entitled "Facts speak louder than words and lies will collapse by themselves". The issues raised by the Chinese official responses, as well as numerous critiques of the Cox report within the U.S., suggest that the Cox report and some of the allegations therein go beyond what was implied by available evidence.

Two questions need to be analysed. First, was China involved in nuclear espionage? Second, does information thus obtained give China a new, substantial capacity to design weapons that it was previously incapable of?

According to the Cox report, the answer to the first question is yes. The report states: "The People's Republic of China (PRC) has stolen design information on the United States' most advanced thermonuclear weapons."

There are many people who think that the Cox report goes beyond what the evidence would suggest. For example, John Spratt, a Democrat in the House of Representatives and one of the members of the Cox committee, called the charge a "sweeping" one. Spratt criticised the haste with which the report was produced and said that his objections to some sections of the report were not taken into account.



KARIN COOPER/AP

Christopher Cox, Republican Congressman and Chairman of the House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with People's Republic of China.

The sweeping nature of the charges is also clear from another example. The report claims: "The stolen information includes classified information on seven U.S. thermonuclear warheads, including every currently deployed thermonuclear warhead in the U.S. ballistic missile arsenal." Spratt maintained that "the select committee did not find evidence that China obtained design information on all our (that is, the U.S.) most advanced nuclear weapons."

It would not be surprising if China, like most nations with nuclear ambitions, does indulge in nuclear espionage. But to prove it is another matter. Certainly nobody in either country has stepped forward and admitted to spying. Even Wen Ho Lee, who was fired from the Los Alamos laboratory for security violations, was not charged with any crime; he denied being involved in espionage (*Frontline*, June 18). Thus, it is difficult to conclude from public reports whether or not China stole classified information.

What is worth noting is how the U.S. obtained details about China's nuclear arsenal and plans. According to William Broad of *The New York Times*, details about Chinese weapons designs became clear only after "a Chinese nuclear expert who had been recruited to spy for the United States delivered an intriguing report to his American handlers". In other words, the U.S. got this information through its own espionage networks – what is diplomatically termed "intelligence". The U.S. has an annual intelligence budget that is estimated at $30 billion (the actual sum is classified), and for it to talk of Chinese espionage amounts to the pot calling the kettle black.

With regard to the second question, it is important to remember that China has worked on nuclear weapons for decades. China's first hydrogen bomb test came less than three years after its first atom bomb test. In comparison, the United Kingdom took over five years, the Soviet Union over six years, the U.S. over seven years and France nearly nine years to test a hydrogen bomb. While the Soviet Union helped with technologies to produce fissile material, the break between the two countries occurred in part owing to the Soviet Union's refusal to transfer nuclear weapons designs to China.



The first hydrogen bomb test – the mike test – by the United States.

Some U.S. scientists who have visited Chinese weapons laboratories and talked to their counterparts also attest to the fact that the Chinese programmes are, for the most part, quite advanced. Harold Agnew, a past director of the Los Alamos nuclear weapons laboratory, found that in some cases Chinese capabilities were better than that of the U.S. As an example he mentions an advanced X-ray camera called the pinex for which the Chinese design was superior to the American one. Such evidence for the advanced nature of China's nuclear programmes has led some American critics of the Cox report to point out that Beijing, even if it did spy, has made major breakthroughs on its own.

Further, there is a lot of information on different aspects of nuclear weapons technology – including the weapons that China is accused of spying on – available in the public domain; much of this can be found on the Internet. When a set of weapons scientists with large financial resources and government support gain access to such information, even coarse details may suffice to suggest research possibilities for newer weapons designs. Making use of publicly available data as a guide to research cannot be considered espionage.

Even if China resorted to espionage, it is unlikely to have acquired complete details about any weapons system. Any espionage is more likely to yield in par- design tips and, perhaps, computer -s. But, as Harold Agnew wrote in a - to *The Wall Street Journal*, "No -on would ever stockpile any device based on another nation's computer codes." Thus, even if some classified data or computer codes from the U.S. had reached China, its scientists would still have had to do extensive research and conduct explosive tests in order to devise usable nuclear weapons based on them.

What is worth noting is how the U.S. obtained details about China's nuclear arsenal and plans... through its own espionage networks – what is diplomatically termed "intelligence".

The Cox report states: "With the stolen U.S. technology, the PRC has leaped, in a handful of years, from the 1950s-era strategic nuclear capabilities to the more modern thermonuclear designs." China may well be in the process of developing more modern thermonuclear designs, but this would not imply that it stole those designs from the U.S. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that China is working on a new, more modern range of missiles. A few months ago, China conducted a test of the DF-31, a mobile ICBM. There are at least two reasons to expect it to work on such missiles and deploy them.

The first is that current Chinese ICBMs are large and cumbersome. Hence they may not survive a pre-emptive nuclear attack by, say, the U.S. Smaller mobile missiles that are more easily hidden require modern, miniaturised warheads, the kind that China is believed to have tested in the 1990s. The second reason stems from institutional pressures. Nuclear weapons laboratories derive their rationale for existence and financial support from developing new or modified weapons designs. Chinese weapons laboratories, therefore, are likely to push for modernising the arsenal to further their own institutional goals. In this process, they may well use any information that may become available from spying. Nevertheless, with China signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), it would be difficult, if not impossible, to verify adequately any new designs that weapons laboratories may develop from now on.

What is worth noting is that these modernisation programmes have had long gestation periods. This suggests that the Chinese government does not place a high priority on developing these missiles. Once again, there are reasons for this low priority, and for the assumption that even if the weapons laboratories did develop more modern missiles, China would not deploy them in large numbers.

China adheres to a no-first-use policy, which means that it will use nuclear weapons only if attacked by nuclear weapons. Given such a policy and the relatively small size of its arsenal, estimated at around 400 warheads with only about 20 ICBMs capable of reaching the U.S., the Chinese strategy is to target cities rather than missile silos and other military sites. It matters little whether a large nuclear weapon explodes in the centre of Los Angeles or Moscow, or whether it explodes 2 km from the centre of the city. In either case, hundreds of thousands of people will die.

Unlike China, U.S. and Russian strategies involve localised hardened targets like missile silos. This requires highly accurate missiles like the Trident with high-yield warheads. Such accuracy, however, comes at a price. The re-entry vehicle of a very accurate missile has to be extremely narrow so as to reduce the

impact of high winds that may buffet the missile as it re-enters the atmosphere. This necessitates one of two requirements. One is to keep the warhead away from the tip and add ballast in front of the warhead so as to prevent the re-entry vehicle from tumbling as it re-enters the atmosphere. This, however, leads to a loss of payload capacity.

The alternative is to develop a warhead that is small enough to fit close to the tip of the missile. One of the special features of the W-88 warhead that is employed on Trident missiles, for example, is that its primary fission explosive (that ignites the secondary fusion explosion) is not spherical and can be placed near the tip of the missile.

Developing such a small warhead would, even given China's level of technological prowess in this field, require major advances, especially in manufacturing the supplementary parts that go with a warhead, the fuses, electronic components and so on. According to Richard Garwin, a physicist who has had extensive experience in nuclear weapons work, these technologies may be more of an impediment than the explosive parts themselves. *(Frontline,* July 16, 1999). In his judgment, therefore, "even if China were confident that it had every detail of the W-88 and its Mk-5 re-entry vehicle, it would not reproduce the weapon."

China has worked on nuclear weapons for decades... Some U.S. scientists who have visited Chinese weapons laboratories attest to the fact that the Chinese programmes are, for the most part, quite advanced.

On the "enhanced radiation" weapon (the so-called neutron bomb) design that China is accused of stealing, Chinese officials claim that work on it started in the late 1970s and achieved success during the mid-1980s. Indeed, in 1988, *The Washington Post* had reported that China had tested a "neutron bomb" design. This indicates that China may not have had to rely on espionage as the Cox report suggests. Nevertheless, at a recent conference in Shanghai, a senior Chinese weapon scientist said that such bombs were not deployed because they were not suited to the country's military plans. Once again, institutional pressures from weapons scientists rather than any initiative from the armed forces may have been responsible for the 1988 test.

The signs of vested interests are evident all over the Cox report and the media hysteria over it. Two such interests are obvious. Clearly the Republican Party welcomes anything that can be used against President Clinton and his administration. And, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the defence establishment has been left without a major enemy; China provides the best substitute.

Unlike the case of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, however, the U.S. has strong business interests in China. These are behind sections of the U.S. government and business community arguing for an "engagement" with China. U.S. policy towards China will ultimately depend on how the conflict between these two camps is resolved. As of now, the report has damaged relations between the two countries, but only to a small extent.

In the final analysis, the Cox report and the brouhaha surrounding it says more about the current climate in the U.S. than it does about China. It comes at a time when high levels of military expenditure and exorbitant, technically ineffective programmes such as Ballistic Missile Defence are sought to be rationalised by invoking threats of irrational "rogue nations". Alongside this is the bogey of a new peril from terrorism, based on a presumption that there are "others" who are unethical and fundamentally opposed to the U.S. Feeding indirectly on such images, the Cox report's allegations about espionage adds to the sense of the U.S. being under threat, internally and externally.

In such a milieu, one effect of the report is likely to be a curtailment of civil liberties and scientific freedom, especially when it comes to foreigners, within the U.S. And, if the supporters of the report and its message, including nuclear hawks of many stripes, have their way, these allegations would be used to decelerate the already slow pace of nuclear disarmament. If that happens, the world will continue to remain within the confines of the nuclear prison. ■

M.V. Ramana is a research associate at the Centre for Energy and Environment, Princeton University, United States

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Distinctive landscapes

In recent times, the work of Venkatappa, the painter from Mysore, has received relatively scant attention. A fresh look at the artist's technique.

HANS MATHEWS

IN his time and place the painter Venkatappa was thought to be a great artist But history seems not to have favoured him An account of 20th-century Indian painting written today would very likely pay scant attention to his work, finding more interest in the man himself, and in the circumstances of his life

He was long attached to the court of the royal ruling family of the Wodeyars in Mysore where he was not always or entirely accepted on his own terms, as an *artist* rather than a 'mere artisan (as his painter-father had been in the Wodeyar palace) Later in life, having fallen foul of the Maharajah, Venkatappa's 'independence' and care for his 'dignity' as an artist made him a cultural hero, so to speak, to the Kannadigas of a newly independent India (An essay by Janaki Nair in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (35, 2, 1998) last year looked rather closely at this)

Whether or not Venkatappa's painting itself should get much attention from the historian is a delicate question Were the pictures to be set beside the work of contemporaries such as Nandalal Bose – or the younger Benodebehari Mukherjea's Darjeeling landscapes, say – we would not know, off the cuff as it were, just how to value them as examples of *art*

Nandalal and Venkatappa were both prized students of Abanindranath Tagore, and both in their early work built on their teacher's manner to produce fine samples of the Bengal School of painting But Nandalal, after he went to Santiniketan at Rabindranath Tagore's urging, developed into a versatile painter, capable of drawing from a range of pictorial traditions, and what Nandalal did at Santiniketan prepared the ground for



PHOTOGRAPHS T L PRABHAKAR

"Reflection, Ooty Lake" (1926).

a specifically Indian modernism (which, spurred by Rabindranath's pictorial experiments perhaps, emerges in the work of his students Ramkinkar Baij and Benodebehari Mukherjea).

No such distinction can be claimed for Venkatappa, who came straight back, from the larger world of the Tagores in Calcutta (in which he had found a place as Abanindranath's gifted pupil), to the rather constricting culture of the Wodeyar palace; and though he made a new place for himself there as an artist, the painting that secured him his position does not impress much anymore.

Two examples of that work can still be seen at the Jagan Mohan Palace in Mysore: a picture of Ganesha receiving *puja,* and the once-famous Mad after Veena. The painting here has a strange feel; a touch at once fastidious and febrile (although the latter is not the best word). And though the Bengal School impulses are clearly at work, these pictures hold the eye in ways the 'revivalist' look of most Bengal School paintings does not.

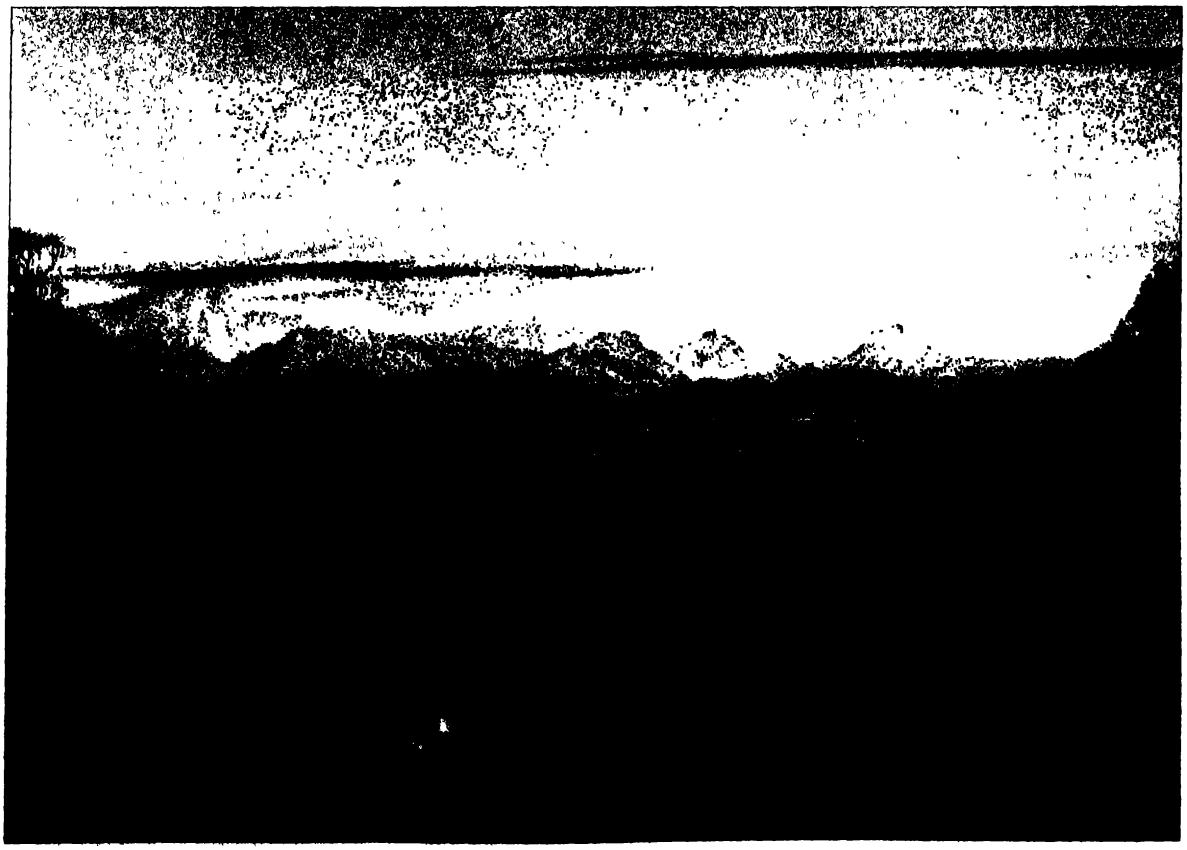
But they do not interest enough, really, to figure as more than curiosities in the story of how Indian painting develops through this century; and it looks as if one could not say much more of the painting reproduced here either (though Venkatappa himself valued his landscapes highly, refusing to sell them and consenting even to show them only to those whom he considered discerning viewers).

One could venture to say, in fact, that Venkatappa's view of the Ooty lake tries to put to its own uses the sorts of visual habit photography was beginning to induce.

These pictures are apt to strike our eyes as very competent now – and sometimes marvellously crafted, as the view of the Ooty lake is – but little else; and if you went today to the Venkatappa Gallery in Bangalore to see its collection of landscapes, you would very likely come away with nothing more than the pleasure any display of consummate skill produces.

SOME of these works are worth a closer look, though: as samples of early 20th-century watercolour and tempera landscape painting in India, if nothing else. By putting things so – stressing place, period, medium and genre – one means to suggest that watercolour and tempera landscape, in the Indian art world of the 1920s and 1930s (when these pictures were painted), might have served pictorial purposes that we no longer pursue: and perhaps cannot even recognise now, given how modernist practice has shaped our ways of looking at art.

Our view of the Ooty lake does not bear any of the usual marks of modernist



"Dawn", Ooty (1929)



"Sun Rise," Ooty (1926).

painting. It does not draw attention to facture, or acknowledge the *flatness* of the surface on which it is painted, or in any evident way suggest that the painter wants his picture to do very much more than *relate visual fact*, let us say, in as convincing a way as his medium will let him. How this picture *depicts* its bit of the visible world, using the special resources of watercolour, *represents* that bit of the world *as it would appear*, one might say, to an observer with normal sight on a clear day: or so it seems. (A painting which depicts an object can – within the limitations of its medium, depending on how that medium has come to be used – try to represent that object as it would normally look, in a certain light and so on, without trying to make the image *itself* look *exactly like* the object: without trying to fool the eye into taking the image for the object, that is to say, in the way a mirror might.

Understood so, as an example of naturalism, Venkatappa's picture of the Ooty lake could not be thought to be modernist at all, of course: because the desire for aesthetic autonomy – which is supposed to have driven modernist painting forward to disclose more and more perspicuously the essence of painting as an *art* – would be entirely absent. But this is only one reading of modernist work (and a caricature, actually, of the Formalist understanding of it); and however usefully it might apply to Europe or America, Indian modernist painting might well have to be limned in different terms (because, for one, the desire for autonomy – if it did emerge here – would probably not have worked itself out as a Formalist expects.)

IT might be better at this point to put aside these sorts of questions and look as directly as one can at the painting itself. One thing that surprises is the way this picture *sends* the eye over the scene it shows: the eye's motion acquires an even *velocity*, so to speak – which watercolour landscape does not usually allow. There would be many formal causes for that, of course; but, given that this picture was painted in 1926, one is prompted to think that the growing presence of photography would be a formal factor here.

One could venture to say, in fact, that Venkatappa's view of the Ooty lake tries to put to its *own* uses the sorts of visual habit photography was beginning to induce. It would be hard to characterise those habits now, given how the development of photography through this century has formed *our* visual habits (which, for example, now enable a black and white photograph, by not being in colour, to have effects of a kind it could not have had in the 1920s). But what this picture does with our eyes does warrant what has just been claimed.

One should try next to indicate what this picture's 'own uses' might have been for Venkatappa; and that again is difficult. We could begin by noting the two ways of employing watercolour which Venkatappa could best understand: which were, first, the already mentioned Bengal School's 'revivalist' practices; and, second, the very particular ways of English watercolour landscape.

Both modes of painting seem to have attracted Venkatappa; and in other works from the same year we see him trying to balance the very different formal



"Bear Shola Hills and Bryan's Park", Kodaikanal (1934).

demands they make. One could set the pictures titled "Dawn", "Sun Rise" and "Twilight" next to one another to see how. "Dawn" is conspicuously English; while line and colour in "Sun Rise" is more 'revivalist' (but awkwardly so: the detailing of the silhouetted tree only distracts the eye). In "Twilight", however, a satisfying formal synthesis has been achieved.

When it is set beside these works we can see how our view of the lake attempts something novel; and what was claimed for it above should seem more plausible now. One could even hazard saying that Venkatappa is trying here – by, as it were, 'reflecting' his picture 'off' photographed landscape – to refine or extend certain formal possibilities that watercolour painting itself offered him at that point in time.

One would have to reach, of course, to defend this claim. But there are details that help: certain choices that were made, for instance. Look at the straight trunks of the trees at left; they could as well have been angled in individual ways. That would have rendered the picture more 'scenic', perhaps in the way photographed landscapes of the time could be; but as such the picture would probably have made the eye 'swim' too much in its space. As they are, the straight trunks subtly steady the eye's motion across the picture: and one might suppose then that the work managed to 'poise' in some unusual way those who, among its first beholders, were familiar with watercolour landscape.

This is the sort of thing at any rate that makes one think that Venkatappa is using photography as he was just said to be (rather than painting a picture which would lead the eye as 'naturally' as a photograph might). But to make such claims good one would have to see whether, and how, Venkatappa continued to make use of the visual habits photography might induce; and that would not be easy to do, given how the later landscapes look.

There is a little room to work: one could, for instance, take the two Panoramas of 1929 (one of which is 'natural' and 'English' in ways the other is not, with its 'heightened' colour and its oddly formed clouds) and set them beside the rather differently 'lit' "Bear Shola Hills and Bryan's Park", Kodaikanal of 1934. But the pictures that come after these do not encourage us to go on: and we are tempted to conclude that Venkatappa too soon left off trying to exploit the photograph formally.

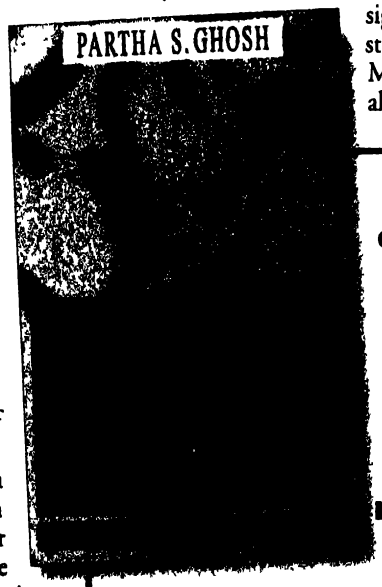
Whatever has been claimed for Venkatappa here will not be enough to make him a principal character in the story of 20th-century Indian painting (however that is told). But perhaps what has been said can serve to draw attention to the painting again, in ways that acknowledge his particular gifts. ■

Neither wave nor saffron?

A. G. NOORANI

BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: From Periphery to Centre by Partha S. Ghosh; Manohar; pages 460, Rs. 800.

AFTER the French scholar Christopher Jaffrelot's classic *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (1996) and the Danish scholar Thomas Blom Hansen's erudite and incisive work *The Saffron Wave* (1999), we have an Indian academic addressing himself in equal earnest to the two questions on which they had laboured. How did the Bharatiya Janata Party manage to travel from the periphery to the centre of Indian politics – from two seats and 7.68 per cent votes in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections to 86 seats and 11.5 per cent votes in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections? The answer is obvious and was provided repeatedly by one of its leaders L. K. Advani; namely, its Ayodhya movement, launched on the basis of the Palampur resolution of 1989 on the eve of the general elections. That, however, is a formal answer. The considerable transfer of votes would not have been possible but for an ideological affinity between the BJP and some leaders and workers in other parties, chiefly the Congress(I).



The book is one of the most objective and impartial works by an Indian scholar of integrity and dedication who has brought together a mass of useful material enlivened by candid appraisals.

The second question is whether the so-called "saffron wave" is receding and, relatedly, whether the BJP is shedding its ideological baggage. The answer to the first part will be provided in the election results. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Rajendra Singh's revival of the triple mosque issue recently – Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi – shows that the RSS has not changed one bit. Nor has the BJP. Advani said emphatically in Bhubaneswar on September 19 that "there is no question of giving them (triple demands) up. Only deference is being shown to the sensitivities of the coalition partners.

Partha Ghosh has worked hard to collect data and ranges wide in his work to make it a useful source of reference on the last decade of India's politics generally, besides the communal situation. The book is marked by excessive reliance, generally, on secondary sources and a lack of rigour in analysis in many places. Ghosh rightly points out that "distortion of history in school texts is not a phenomenon peculiar to the BJP. In the 1950s and 1960s, when the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) was nowhere in sight of power even in strongholds such as M.P. and Rajasthan, let alone the Centre, there were complaints of distortions of history. Textbooks in circulation in the Hindi-speaking States as well as Gujarat and Maharashtra were heavily loaded in favour of India's Hindu past and against Muslim rule. When this question was raised in Parliament in 1966, a committee consisting of K. G. Saiyidain, J. P. Naik, Gopinath Aman and others was appointed to look into the matter. The committee reported that there was substantive evidence in the allegations that there was a Hindu bias in the textbooks of certain States and that historical events were "presented in such a manner as to arouse and perpetuate prejudice against certain religious groups. Besides, 'the books were overweighed with Hindu mythology,' the literary texts were full of 'prayers to Hindu deities' and 'Hindu beliefs are presented in a manner as if they are universally held by all Indians.'" The footnote at the end of the paragraph (page 240) does not cite the committee's report but a book which mentioned its findings. Opinions are quoted at length, and they are not always from ones known for expertise in the matter under discussion.

"Was Partition avoidable?" the author asks and cites the opinions of four writers of varying equipment without leaving the reader any the wiser as to his own views. Elsewhere, he expresses his views plainly enough.

These blemishes detract from the quality of the work but do not affect its essential worth. It is one of the most objective and impartial works by an Indian scholar of integrity and dedication who has brought together a mass of useful material enlivened by candid appraisals. At places they are wide off the mark. "Unlike majority (sic) Hindus, who wanted to wrest their rights through a political struggle with the British, the minority Muslims chose to do the same by aligning with the British. Even Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the father of Muslim modernisation in India, subscribed to this line of argument." Apart from the inappropriate characterisation ("line of argument"), Sir Syed was *the* foremost advocate of this policy. It was opposed with compelling logic by Badruddin Tyabji, then Congress president, and also by a substantial body of the *ulema*. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad belonged to this school. The Sir Syed-Tyabji correspondence is very relevant to the situation of Indian Muslims today (For the text, see the writer's *Badruddin Tyabji*; Publications Division, 1969).

There is one formulation that raises an important issue: "Religion played an important role in the growth of Indian/Hindu nationalism and Muslim separatism." The amazing stroke (Indian/Hindu) apart, Hindu nationalism is surely no less "separatist" and a

lapse from Indian nationalism than Muslim communalism is. One is reminded of Jawaharlal Nehru's remark on January 5, 1961 that "the communalism of a majority community is apt to be taken for nationalism." How right he was. Serbian "communalism" proved "separatist" and wrecked the Yugoslav federation constructed by Tito, a Croat. Not every Congressman shared Nehru's outlook. Morarji Desai had no hesitation in declaring at the National Democratic Convention in New Delhi on November 29, 1964: "The Hindu majority is clean-hearted and fair minded. I cannot say the same about the majority of Indian Muslims" (*The Hindustan Times*; November 30, 1964).

The two-nation theory was first propounded by V. D. Savarkar in his essay 'Hindutva' in 1923. In his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937 he amplified the theory: "There are two nations in the main, the Hindus and the Muslims in India." He rejected "the conception of Territorial Nationality not cemented by any Cultural, Racial or Historical affinities and consequently having no common will to incorporate themselves into a Nation". This doctrine of "cultural nationalism" was echoed by RSS chief M. S. Golwalkar in his *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966) and was ardently reiterated by the BJP in its election manifesto of 1998. A whole chapter is devoted to "Our National Identity: Cultural Nationalism". It asserts that "the cultural nationalism of India... is the core of Hindutva". The BJP astutely decided not to issue a separate manifesto in 1999 for fear of upsetting its gullible allies. Its 1998 manifesto is tacitly affirmed. It has not been abandoned, as Advani's speech on September 19, 1999 makes clear.

The origin of Mohammed Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory bears recalling. In an article published in *Time and Tide* (London) on January 19, 1940, he said: "A Constitution must be evolved that recognises that there are in India two nations, who both must *share the governance of their common motherland.*" This implied power-sharing in a *united* India, not its partition. The point was also made earlier in the article which rejected "unqualified Western democracy" and insisted that "all Governments, Central or Provincial, must be Governments that represent all actions of the people". On his part, "in evolving such a constitution" Jinnah was prepared to cooperate with the Congress "so that the present enmities may cease and India may take its place amongst the great countries of the world."

If only two months later, on March 23, 1940, he got the Muslim League to adopt the Pakistan resolution, it was, as is widely realised, as a bargaining chip. On December 20, 1986, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam spokesman in Chennai told *The Sunday Observer* that it would accept a "viable alternative" to Eelam if it was made possible for "two nations to co-exist in our country".

Jinnah's intellectual equipment on this subject, like that of most lawyers, was limited. The concept of "consociational democracy" was articulated by Arend Lijphart in his book *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1982). In 1996 he noted that while "inter-group hostility and violence have increased" in India, it has adopted some elements of his concept. ("The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation"; *American Political Science Review,* June 1996).

But power-sharing was precisely what most in the Congress and all in the Hindu Mahasabha were opposed to. Hence, the ungenerous Motilal Nehru Report (1928). One of the finest political minds in the country and also a man of sterling integrity, Prem Bhasin, formerly general secretary of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), alluded to the latent reality in *Janata,* a journal founded by Jayaprakash Narayan (Annual Number 1998). He wrote: "The ease with which a large number of Congressmen and women – small, big and bigger still – have walked into the RSS-BJP boat and sailed with it is not a matter of surprise. For, there has always been a certain affinity between the two. A large and influential section in the Congress sincerely believed *even during the freedom struggle that the interests of Hindu Indians could not be sacrificed at the altar of a united Independent India.*" He named two stalwarts, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, explicitly; Vallabhbhai Patel, haltingly. This group *preferred* partition to power-sharing in a united India. Lala Lajpat Rai had in the famous article in *Tribune* (December 14, 1924) proposed a partition of Punjab on communal lines (emphasis added, throughout).

None of this can excuse the havoc Jinnah wrought. When discussing the Indian Finance Bill (1925), he stated on the floor of the Legislative Assembly: "... I, Sir, stand here with a clear conscience and I say that I am a nationalist first, a nationalist second and a nationalist last... I once more appeal to this House, whether you are a Mussalman or a Hindu, for God's sake do not import the discussion of communal matters into this House, and degrade this Assembly, which we desire should become a real National Parliament. Set an example to the outside world and our people!" When, in 1940, he endorsed the poisonous two-nation theory and demanded Pakistan, he ought to have known that he was playing with fire.

Partha Ghosh has no hesitation in tracing the lineage of the BJP to the old Hindu communal constituency which came into being in the 19th century. Bitterness in the aftermath of Partition gave it an edge. It existed, however, for years earlier. This school would also have flourished even in a united India, along with its Muslim counterpart. Secularists in both communities would have fought jointly against them. The pass was sold by secularists in both the Congress and the Muslim League. The BJP has profited by it in India, as has the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. (On the lineage vide B. R. Purohit; *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism*; Sagar, Sathi Prakashan; 1965). It is the minorities in both countries who bore the brunt of Partition.

Partha Ghosh does a fine job, as only a scholar of strong secular commitment would, exposing thoroughly the bogey of "the pampered Muslim" with a wealth of data. Muslims constitute about 13 per cent of the Indian population but are grossly underrepresented in jobs, professions and education even fifty years after Independence.

"The National Sample Survey of 1988 provides the following figures: (1) A total of 52.3 per cent Muslims are below the poverty line (BPL); (2) the monthly income of Muslims is only Rs. 150; (3) 50.5 per cent Muslims are illiterate; (4) Muslims educated up to high school are 4 per cent; (5) in government services their share is 4.4 per cent; (6) for starting any business enterprise 3.7 per cent Muslims got financial loan; (7) 5 per cent of Muslims got bank loans from the scheduled banks; (8) among Indian entrepreneurs who get industrial loans, only 2 per cent are Muslims. Male illiteracy among the Muslims is 42.4 per cent compared to 25.3 per cent among the Hindus. The corresponding figures of female illiteracy are 59.5 and 45.2, respectively. Less than 1 per cent (0.8)

Muslims are graduates while 4.5 per cent Hindus are."

In Central government employment, Muslims account for 4.4 per cent. Only 3 per cent of Indian Administrative Service officers are Muslims. Muslims are underrepresented in the police force. It will be long before anyone will think of reforms on the lines of those suggested in Chris Patten's recent Report on the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Catholics comprise 43 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland. The RUC is 92 per cent Protestant (*International Herald Tribune;* September 10, 1999).

Contrary to the BJP's propaganda, there is no monolithic Muslim votebank. The Muslim in Tamil Nadu, for instance, might perceive the situation differently from his counterpart in Bihar or West Bengal.

The author has not confined himself to the BJP's political agenda. He has also analysed its foreign policy and economic policy. He provides an interesting quote from Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech in May 1978 as Minister for External Affairs at Jawaharlal Nehru University. "The only way to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons is to bring about complete cessation of the production of nuclear weapons and simultaneously cut off the manufacture of all weapon-grade fissionable material. There can be no doubt about India's policy. We have set an example by abjuring the manufacture or acquisition of nuclear weapons. We have pledged ourselves to developing nuclear technology exclusively for peaceful purposes."

The chapter containing the conclusions is sparse in analysis. "The moot question is, now that the BJP has come to power, if it would mean the takeover of political power by Hindu zealots with the collapse of the inter-communal social fabric of India. BJP is a Hindu communal party but its communalism has limits. The same Advani who talks about Hindutva with so much aplomb castigates the Shiv Sena for its naked Hindu aggressiveness when the latter defeats his party at the Aurangabad municipal polls. As a political party with national ambitions BJP knows that mobilising religious sentiments from a position of responsibility is quite another."

The author does not deign to reflect on the RSS factor. The limits to the BJP's features are set by the RSS and no less by the outlook of its leaders who are the products of its upbringing. Advani has demonstrated that. ■

■ **BOOKS**

Of State and nationalism

M.S. PRABHAKARA

India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality by Sanjib Baruah; University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1999; pp xxiii + 257, $36.50.

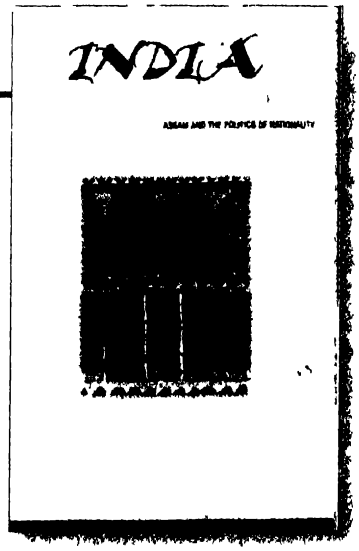
COMBATIVE and polemical in its tone and substance, this passionately engaged but dense narrative challenges the received concepts of the State and Nationalism as articulated in Indian nationalist discourse – a structure and an idea invested with an immaculate, eternally valid and near-mystical properties. The narrative does not claim to be, and indeed is not, a dry, impersonal and normatively detached academic exercise either. On the contrary, the author makes clear in the introductory chapter his committed engagement as an "interested and implicated observer". Baruah is indeed deeply involved personally and professionally in the memories and experiences of his narrative – as an "ethnic Assamese" (a term he says he is uncomfortable with even while using it) at a personal level, and as a political scientist teaching in the United States at the professional level.

The focus of the narrative is the Brahmaputra Valley, historically the core of Assam. However, the narrative also touches on the peripheral areas of this core which once formed a part of what one might call the "geographical Assam". These peripheral areas were politically, economically and culturally in varying degrees of proximity and distance from the core, the relations marked by amity or hostility or indifference and ignorance. Indeed, the present problems plaguing Assam cannot be understood except in the context of the historical process of the changes in the very physical contours of Assam. A crucial element of these changes which has a bearing on the present situation is the widely shared perception among the majority of ethnic Assamese that they have only been passive spectators, if not the pre-destined victims of conspiracies hatched by foreigners and outsiders which they could barely comprehend, of these developments which have fundamentally affected their land and their history, their past and their future.

Chapters 2 to 5 dealing with the geographical and territorial background of the growth of Assamese nationalism delineate these changes and the underlying rationale of both the colonial regime and independent India. The process involved an artificially imposed enlargement of the territory of the Province of Assam by the colonial regime and, since Independence, an insensitively imposed process of progressive dismemberment of the State of Assam. Integral to this process was migration into Assam, the last land frontier providing opportunities for those enterprising enough to seize them, and its inevitable impact on the demography of the region. These developments have posed grave challenges to the concept and, even more importantly and irrespective of its "empirical validity", the self-perception of the Assamese as a distinct and internally coherent people, a nationality within the broader framework of a pan-Indian civilisation and the Indian nation-state, a *jati,* and to use Baruah's expression, a "sub-nation". (The Assamese word *jati,* meaning a people and a nation, has a significance going far beyond the relatively restricted meaning the term has in other Indian languages.)

THESE chapters together chart the historical and ideological terrain which provided fertile ground for the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam. A notable feature of the narrative is that it brings together diverse themes from sources which one would not normally tap, as for instance, the interesting analysis of the songs of Bhupen Hazarika, to reinforce some of the arguments and to weave together the complex political and ideological landscape in Assam and the rest of northeastern India, where received notions and ideas of nation, nationality and sub-nationalism continue to be in contestation.

What one misses, however, is an equally in-depth treatment of the economic issues of development and underdevelopment that have contributed to the tensions. Indeed, the argument about the failure of the centralised Indian state and, concomitantly, of the necessity of a federal arrangement to overcome the tensions between the nation-state and disaffected nationalities (or sub-nations) overemphasises the organisational features of the Indian dilemma and fails to look at the far more serious structural weaknesses arising out of unequal relations of production and distribution. The sharp and telling analysis of the superstructural contradictions and weaknesses does contrast with the relatively weak treatment of the corresponding contradictions in the sub-structural material base.



The real subject of the book is the larger dilemma postulated in its very title – India Against Itself. This is a dilemma that is self-evidently as much an Assamese dilemma as an Indian one.

The rest of the narrative deals with the agitation itself, and the other ideas and forces that are causally related to the Assam agitation. The challenges posed by the insurgencies in the core territory of Assam by the United Liberation Front of Asom (to India) and by the Bodo agitation (to Assam and in its later stages, to India) and together to the neatly contrived concepts of sub-nationalisms of India's States and less well-defined regions and peoples existing in manageable and manipulable relations of violently articulated tension and understated complicity with the great nationalism of the Indian nation-state are yet to be resolved. Implicit in the analysis is the belief that even if these were to be eventually managed, the issues raised will not disappear and are likely to take fresh forms and manifest themselves in other areas.

The above is a necessarily selective summary of the themes of the book. However, its real subject is the larger dilemma postulated in its very title – India Against Itself. This is a dilemma that is self-evidently as much an Assamese dilemma as an Indian one in that the various people of India, even those whose repudiation of Indian nationhood is apparently absolute, continue to negotiate, sometimes in violent confrontation and sometimes by making openly opportunistic deals – the two processes are not mutually exclusive – a working arrangement to live together in that necessarily flawed structure, the nation-state of India.

Is that admittedly flawed structure worth defending? Does it, can it, engage its citizens in any reasonable dialogue? Setting aside the Indian dilemma, is the very concept of a nation-state, what Baruah characterises as the "contingent and contested nature of nations and nationalities", and the dismissively derided process of "nation-building" in societies that have emerged from centuries of colonial rule worth one's loyalty? Can a nation-state sustain itself without the ideological prop of aggressive and exclusivist nationalism? Is there a necessary dichotomy between "nations" or "peoples" on the one hand and the "nation-state" on the other as categories that have a right to self-determination, that holy Wilsonian cow which is lined up with remarkable selectivity only when existing post colonial states striving to consolidate themselves as nation-states are confronted with separatist movements?

Formulations on the "declining relevance" of the nation-state inform the argument of this narrative throughout. Linked to this is the sharp criticism of "nation-building" both as an envisaged objective and as an operational exercise. Given the fact that India and Assam is the theme of the narrative, it is perhaps natural that the criticism in this regard is made only in respect of these processes as they are at work in nation-states that have emerged from colonial rule. The obverse side of Baruah's often valid criticisms of unilaterally imposed exercises in "nation-building" is the process of re-colonisation that is also at work in these entities, often with the complicit support of civil society structures and non-governmental organisations heavily funded by the West. This broader agenda which stares one in the face when one sees them at work in societies ravaged by war and starvation, appears never to have been questioned.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the single minded objective of the U.S., the one and only imperial power since the end of the Second World War, has been the effective debilitation of other nation-states – except of course of itself and those under its wings. Even in the latter case, a weakening is sought, although this is problematic, as is evident in the rivalries among the U.S., the European Union and Japan. The major part of the task was accomplished with the destruction of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the "existing socialist states" of Eastern Europe. Unlike earlier battles, this battle has not directly involved weapons of war and the physical occupation of defeated territories. Rather, apart from the systematic subversion and appropriation of international instrumentalities like the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to serve the national objectives of the U.S., the most effective weapons have been ideological and technological ones – the beguiling promises and visions of consumerism and the so-called liberalisation and globalisation.

This is not to question the destructive, even self-destructive, potential of nationalism. An Indian scarcely needs to be reminded that the culmination of the national struggle was as much national independence as national slaughter. Indeed, the current ascendancy of Hindutva nationalism can be causally linked to the symbols and forces mobilised during the national struggle. However, to argue that the excesses of rampant nationalism of the Indian state in northeastern India could have some-

how been mitigated if only the Indian polity had a working federal system, seems such an inadequate remedy to the horrors the narrative has delineated with such passion. Only the wilfully blind can fail to see the horrors and cruelties perpetrated by the very structures and organisations and individuals, who, while themselves being victims of rampant nationalism of the Indian state, posit against it even more restrictive and exclusivist sub-nationalisms.

A key element of Assamese nationalist discourse is the position of the Assamese language in the province and the State of Assam at all points of its constitution and reconstitution.

One last point about Baruah's treatment of what he calls "cultural politics of language". A key element of Assamese nationalist discourse is the position of the Assamese language in the province and the State of Assam at all points of its constitution and reconstitution, and the contested relations between Assamese and Bengali before and since Independence. The standard view of the "fears" about the future of the Assamese in their one and only homeland is that those who have migrated (or more accurately their descendants) into Assam from former East Bengal (legal), former East Pakistan and present day Bangladesh (illegal) being Bengali-speaking would, over a period of time, outnumber the indigenous Assamese-speaking people, thus endangering the very existence of the people and their tongue.

Baruah cites the observation of C.S. Mullan, the superintendent of the 1931 Census in Assam, on migration into Assam of "land-hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims, from the districts of eastern Bengal and in particular from Mymensingh". The culmination of this process, envisaged in metaphors of war and invasion, would be that in another 30 years, it would not be improbable that "Sibsagar district would be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home". This reading has for long been a favourite text of Assamese nationalist discourse. It was also a constant in the polemics of the leaders of the anti-foreigner agitation. Baruah, however, notes that the critics of the agitation found Mullan's "fears" to have been misplaced. "Contrary to Mullan's mischievous prediction," Baruah quotes one such critic, "the entire East Bengal Muslim peasant community adopted the Asomiya language as their mother tongue."

It is surprising that the real nature of the "fear" of Assamese nationalists about the present and putative future identification of their home language is missed on both sides of this polemical divide. The fear is not that the descendants of erstwhile migrants will, at some point in the future, claim to be Bengali speakers, and thus reduce Assamese speakers to a minority in Assam. Rather, the real fear is that this section of the population, most of whom have been probably using Assamese for at least two generations, will not merely continue to speak the language but indeed claim it as their own, stealing away, as it were, a crucial cultural patrimony which defines the Assamese people. This is the significance of the inscriptions on the graves of those killed in the Nellie massacres of the 1983 elections – the overwhelming majority of whom were of East Bengal origin – being in Assamese.

Incidentally, and as seen from the perspective of this reviewer from his present domicile, similar are the "fears" of the Afrikaners in South Africa about the future of Afrikaans under a democratic dispensation and without the kind of state and official patronage it enjoyed under apartheid. However, the real "fear" is not about the future of Afrikaans as such, but that the language, like so many other claimed symbols of Afrikanerdom cherished as the unique patrimony of the white Afrikaner, is being taken over, used or abused in vibrant and independently creative ways by other people who, despite their historic contribution to the growth and development of Afrikaans had been despised and made outcasts under apartheid. Closer home, one thinks of the condescension with which a creative endeavour by Bengali Muslims used to be greeted not so long ago by those who too viewed Bengali language as their own unique and exclusive patrimony. How things have changed! For, if Bengali as a language and literature has any future at all in the long run, it will have to be in Bangladesh, where it is the national language, unlike in India, where it is only one of several. ■

■ BOOKS

SUSAN RAM

Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri; Flamingo, 1999; pages 198; Rs.469.95 (paperback).

THE movement of peoples across borders and cultures that has, in the era of globalisation, broadened and accelerated beyond all previous experience, poses a special literary challenge. At one level, the cultural collisions, dislocation, loneliness and loss of identity thrown up by the process offer writers rich possibilities: locations, themes and characters abound, and the act of cultural juxtaposing promises interesting literary results. The scale of the canvas can, as Salman Rushdie has shown, elicit extraordinary results. But writers also face being swamped by such plenitude. The task becomes one of negotiating the material in such a way that intimacies emerge out of the vastness, the exotic is rendered familiar and the reader, irrespective of geographical location or cultural background, is jerked into new perceptions and understandings.

In her debut collection of short stories, Jhumpa Lahiri impressively unfolds the possibilities of the diaspora fiction genre, while also indicating some of the problems. Of Bengali origin, born in London and raised in the United States, she writes in the main within the bounds of her own experience; most of her stories explore uprooted Bengali experience in or around Boston, a beacon city for India's upwardly mobile by dint of its universities and career opportunities. Her instinct to explore her themes and characters within this well-defined, bipolar geography underlines the necessity, within this genre, for delimitation and control; it is when she strays beyond its parameters that problems surface.

LAHIRI'S Boston is a city of parks and tree-lined streets and quiet orderliness, a foil for Calcutta's clamour and vivacity. Here, her characters, Indian and American, lead unremarkable lives, grappling with everyday challenges, coping with inadequacy or failure, seeking to survive the visitation of tragedy. Their take on life is that of the educated middle class professional for whom income is assured; existential challenge lies in the essential unpredictability of human relationships and the whole business of living.

Chronicle of the cultural interface

For Mrs. Sen, the wife of a visiting Indian academic, homesickness for family, friends and the sheer exuberance of Calcutta is compounded by immobility in her new surroundings, her fear of driving through the fast, impassive Boston traffic locking her into loneliness and accentuating the fragility of her links with life back home. Mr. Pirzada, a Bengali from the other side of the border, is initiated into the mysteries of Halloween by a small Bostonian girl of Indian Bengali origin. Through the prism of his presence, she in turn seeks to make sense of events taking place far from Boston and her history lessons in the American Revolution; the year is 1971, India is at war with Pakistan, and Mr. Pirzada must fear for his family caught in the maelstrom of a nation in the making. Sanjeev, an MIT-trained engineer making it very good indeed in corporate America, finds his life turned upside down and his basic assumptions challenged by Twinkle (Tanima), his lively and precocious new wife.

Working within the confines of this canvas, Lahiri exhibits the deftness of the gifted miniaturist, unlocking mysteries to throw light on sensitive areas of human experience. In the best of the stories, she pursues an identifiable literary strategy: something offbeat or unexpected or quirky is introduced, and this becomes the means by which problems are brought out into the open, confronted and resolved.

In the fine opening story, "A Temporary Matter," a nightly electricity cut – a rare event in Boston or indeed any Western society – creates interludes of intimacy, shadowed by folk memories of India, in which Shoba and Shukumar can at last begin to deal with the grief bequeathed by their stillborn child. For Sanjeev and Twinkle, the newly married couple whose first weeks together are explored in the story "This Blessed House", a trail of Christian iconography and bric-a-brac secreted in their new home by its previous occupants proves deeply unsettling, destabilising the husband's instinctive male assertiveness and setting the marriage on quite a different course.

In other stories, the perceptive abilities of a child cut to the heart of things. In the story "Sexy", Miranda, a young American woman, is shaken out of her obsession with Dev, a married Bengali investment banker, by seven-year-old Rohin, every bit as precocious and forthright as the boy in the story of the emperor's new clothes. Elsewhere, Eliot, an American boy on the threshold of adolescence, is edged into India across the evenings spent at the home of Mrs. Sen, his Bengali babysitter. In this beautifully observed story, one of the best in the collection, East meets West in the shared experience of loneliness and the poignancy of Mrs. Sen's situation is handled with utmost delicacy and control, unsullied by any hint of mawkishness.

In the best of her storytelling, Lahiri



eschews showiness in favour of simplicity, delicacy and sustained understatement. This results in moments of acuity and insight. The immaculately attired Mr. Pirzada, escapee from subcontinental chaos and mayhem, makes a small girl feel a stranger in her own home through the superb ease of his gestures. Eliot, observing his mother in the new universe of Mrs. Sen's flat, suddenly finds his own perceptions turned upside down: it was his mother, Eliot had thought, in her cuffed, beige shorts and her rope-soled shoes, who looked odd. Her cropped hair, a shade similar to her shorts, seemed too lank and sensible, and in that room where all things were so carefully covered, her shaved knees and thighs too exposed. She refused a biscuit each time Mrs. Sen extended the plate in her direction and asked a long series of questions, the answers to which she recorded on a steno pad.

IT is when Lahiri moves outside her Boston setting to assay India as the backdrop for stories that her grip on her material falters. In the story that lends its title to the collection, the Bengali diaspora feeds back into India in the shape of Mr. and Mrs. Das and family, visiting from the United States. Their interaction with the homeland is observed by Mr. Kapasi, a part-time guide who chauffeurs them on a day trip to the Sun Temple at Konarak. Through the story runs the theme of misinterpreted signals: Kapasi believes the (by Indian standards) scantily dressed Mina Das to be interested in him and the interpreting work he does at a doctor's clinic, while she assumes that Kapasi, by his very Indianness, will be able to interpret her failing marriage and falling out of love with life.

But the authenticity of their doomed encounter is undermined by stilted dialogue, elements of cliche and loaded symbolism exemplified by a gang of menacing monkeys.

Set loose from her Boston moorings, Lahiri allows herself to wander rather too freely. In the story "A Real Durwan", she attempts an Indian morality tale with surreal undertones. Magical realism surfaces unconvincingly in "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar", accompanied by overwriting and awkward sentences: "thus, her soliloquies mawkish, her sentiments maudlin, malaise dripped like a fever from her pores" (p. 161). Detached observation, a hallmark of Lahiri's writing elsewhere in this collection, becomes edged out in this story by elements of judgment and caricature.

Lahiri as a chronicler of cultural interface, rooted firmly in the Boston she knows and with her antennae tuned to the muted anguish of her middle class protagonists, emerges from this first collection as a writer of deftness, control and understatement. In the best of her stories, she binds reader to character so artfully that the reader longs for the narrative to continue beyond its typically low-key ending.

Lahiri, it seems, is a writer well-positioned to move from short story writing to a more sustained fiction. What is not yet clear is whether she is interested in making such a journey. ■

The practical effects of development

RICHARD BERNSTEIN

Development as Freedom by Amartya Sen; Knopf, 1999; pages 304, $27.50.

IT is often remarked that democracies do not fight wars against each other. Less noted is this arresting observation offered by economist Amartya Sen: "No famine has ever taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy – be it economically rich (as in contemporary Western Europe or North America) or relatively poor (as in post-Independence India or Botswana or Zimbabwe)." Never in the history of the world! That statement is not the only remarkable one in Development as Freedom, Sen's thoughtful, expansive, sober, but not easily accessible reflection on the relationship between economic well-being and political freedom.

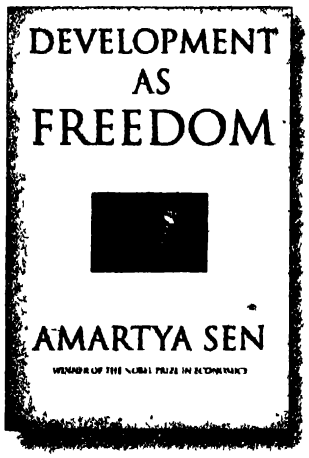
Sen's work on the causes of famines and on the measurement of poverty gained him the Nobel Prize in Economic Science in 1998.

Some of his earlier findings are repeated in this volume, but the overall argument – that freedom is the principal goal and purpose of development – gets full elaboration here.

In his new book, Sen attempts to shift the focus of an old debate. The modern discussion about how economies grow and how people can benefit from that growth goes back at least as far as the 18th century, to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, a work much cited by Sen.

Economists have tended to look at such quantifiable things as income levels, gross national products and the availability of primary goods as the main measures of economic well-being. Sen looks instead at the practical effects of development, the impact it has on the way people actually live. Freedom in this sense becomes "the primary end" and "the principal means of development". The crucial concept, which Sen develops in a demanding but rewarding chapter titled "Freedom and the Foundations of Justice", is what he calls "capabilities", specifically the capabilities that development should provide for people to live the way they want to.

In this view, poverty is not simply a lack of money because a lack of money in one place can mean something very different elsewhere. Sen uses the example of American blacks, who are much richer than Chinese citizens or the inhabitants of Kerala, but have lower life expectancies than people in either places. In his result-oriented framework, poverty is not simply a low income level; it is what he calls "capability deprivation". "An alternative to focussing on means of good living is to concentrate on the actual living that people manage to achieve (or going beyond that) on the freedom to achieve actual livings that one can have reason to value," Sen writes. "Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)." Many of Sen's analytical concepts come together in his chapter on famines and other crises. Here, as elsewhere, he emphasises capabilities.



Famines, he argues, are not the result of food shortages *per se*. In fact, they usually occur where the food supply is adequate. The problem is that people have lost the "economic power and substantive freedom" to buy food. The remedy, Sen writes, lies in "systematically recreating a minimum level of incomes and entitlements for those who are hit by economic changes." Moreover, he argues, "the minimum level of purchasing power needed to ward off starvation can be quite small." Famine is also central to Sen's overall concept of freedom because in democracies, where information flows freely and elected officials are judged on the results of their rule, the worst food shortages have been alleviated – even in poor countries. Hence Sen's attention-getting statement about the non-occurrence of famines in fully functioning democracies.

There is much else in this book, which is not always easy going for the lay reader (in fact, in places, Sen's supposedly non-technical writing will seem technical enough). Still, even when it is tough going, this is a book that rewards a reader's effort, not least for the calm, practical wisdom that Sen brings to difficult subjects.

One of his most eloquent and probing arguments is his refutation of the doctrine, fashionable among dictatorial regimes in Asia, that there is something called "Asian values", in which discipline and obedience bring better results than the protection of individual rights. Sen, who was born in India, argues that this is a misreading of Asian values and that freedom, not the lack of it, leads to economic well-being.

SEN'S analysis of poverty includes what he calls the "missing women", which he has written about before. Sen says that "the terrible phenomenon of excess mortality and artificially lower survival rates of women in many parts of the world" is an underestimated element of "capability deprivation". These mortality rates, he says, have caused more than 100 million women – half of them Chinese – to be "missing".

Sen also makes a fascinating comparison of the development experiences of China and India, a contrast that leads Sen to conclusions about the importance of social spending – on health care and education especially – that liberals favour and conservatives distrust. "Those who see themselves as financial conservatives," he writes, "sometimes express scepticism about human development." Sen continues, striking a rare note of asperity: "What really should be threatened by financial conservatism is the use of public resources for purposes where the social benefits are very far from clear, such as the massive expenditures that now go into the military in one poor country after another... Financial conservatism should be the nightmare of the militarist, not of the schoolteacher or the hospital nurse." ■

New York Times Service

The second self

CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

Out of Place: A Memoir by Edward W. Said; Alfred A. Knopf; pages 295, $26.95.

LATE in his absorbing memoir, *Out of Place*, Edward W. Said describes an incident that occurred during his first year in the United States, 1951, when he entered his junior year of high school at the Mount Hermon School in Northfield, Massachusetts, after having been educated mainly in English and American schools in Cairo.

He writes about being assigned to write an essay for English class, "On Lighting a Match": how he dutifully researched the subject in encyclopaedias, histories of industries and chemical manuals and compiled what he had found. After turning his piece in, his teacher almost immediately asked to see him and complimented him on his research. "But is that the most interesting way to examine what happens when someone lights a match?" Said reports the teacher asking. "What if he's trying to set fire to a forest or light a candle in a cave or, metaphorically, illuminate the obscurity of a mystery like gravity, the way Newton did?"

Said continues: "For literally the first time in my life a subject was opened up for me by a teacher in a way that I immediately and excitedly responded to. What had previously been repressed and stifled in academic study – repressed in order that thorough and correct answers be given to satisfy a standardised syllabus and a routinised examination designed essentially to show off powers of retention, not critical or imaginative faculties – was awakened, and the complicated process of intellectual discovery (and self-discovery) has never stopped since."

This story is one of many entertaining epiphanies in a narrative that takes the author from his birth in Jerusalem in 1935, through childhood in Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon, and up to 1962, when he had all but completed his doctorate at Harvard but had not yet become a leading spokesman for the Palestinians. (Because the book was written before a recent accusation that he has exaggerated how much of his childhood was spent in Jerusalem, he does not tackle that issue head on but has dealt with it elsewhere.)

The narrative includes an almost Proustian portrait of the author's parents: Wadie Ibraham, a prosperous Cairo businessman from Palestine who moved to the United States as a teenager and served in the American Expeditionary Force in the First World War, and Hilda, some 20 years younger than her husband, born in 1914 of a Lebanese mother and a Baptist minister and educated in Beirut, Lebanon, which, he ruefully adds, was "the happiest part of her life".

But most of all, *Out of Place* is a portrait of the child these two unusual people worked so hard to construct, a child named Edward, after the Prince of Wales, his mother told him, and Said after his father, although its original source could never be determined by the author.

What this construct got from his father, among other things, was an unrelenting need always to be busy regardless of results and endless instructions that he found hard to follow: typical was his father's suggestion when he heard his son practising the Cub Scout oath and referring to God and king. " 'Why are you saying that?' he asked me, as if I had devised the words myself. 'You're an American, and we have no king, only a President. You are loyal to the President. God and President.' "

What he got from his mother was love and protection and a passion for the arts. (When he was nine, Said writes, she had them read *Hamlet* aloud together, he taking the male parts, she the female plus Polonius in "implicit solidarity" with her husband's tendency to spout platitudes). But she could also withdraw her love with devastating effect.

Together the parents monitored their child so carefully that they would even inspect his pyjamas to confirm that he was having wet dreams, and when they found no evidence, they accused him of "self-abuse", much to his shame and guilt. What all this attention accomplished, Said writes, was completed by the schools he attended, which condescended to him as an Arab and judged him to be lacking in sufficient "moral stature". (At Mount Hermon, although he consistently ranked first or second in his class, he was made neither valedictorian nor salutatorian.) The result, far from his parents' or the schools' conscious design, was that Said grew up feeling flawed, defeated, clumsy and forever "out of place".

Yet at the same time, the author gradually began to detect a second self within him, and the emergence of this doppelganger lends this memoir its irresistible dramatic tension. The other self first emerged in outbursts of physical force and endurance, belying the uncoordinated weakling that the author pictured himself as being. Then that self saw through the hypocrisy of his treatment as a second-rate person and rebelled.

Next he began to tap the dazzling intellectual and artistic gifts that his mother had nurtured and the metaphorical match struck at Mount Hermon had illuminated: Eventually it would light the way to his becoming a prolific writer and the distinguished professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. And finally the second self grew into a politically committed spokesman for the Palestinian cause, although here in these pages Said touches on that issue only glancingly.

The growth of these two selves was not neatly schematic. At every point in his story, the author's persona remains painfully and sometimes amusingly contradictory. In fact, not until 1991, when he was found to have chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, was he able to alter his pattern of driven activity, which he calls one of his father's legacies, and begin to recall the past and write the present memoir. Once he did, his remarkable memory provided such rich detail that at moments it nearly overwhelms his story.

Some might call *Out of Place* a classic immigrant's voyage to America, where, in an important sense, everyone is out of place. But Said fails to express appreciation at having fulfilled what was apparently, subliminally at least, his father's dream for him. True, he does offer some begrudging praise of the United States: "I feel a much sharper sense of dissociation about its relationship with Israel than my Palestinian contemporaries, who see it as a Zionist power pure and simple but do not acknowledge any contradiction in the fact that they also send their children to college here or do business with U.S. corporations."

Yet his portrait of the country is less of a haven for the dispossessed and more of a refinement of the colonialist outlook toward Third World people. Maybe the brighter side of his experience is another story. ■

New York Times Service

A lasting monument

JOHN CARLIN

Mandela: The Authorized Biography by Anthony Sampson; Illustrated; Alfred A. Knopf, New York; pages 672; $30.

EARLY in 1994 Nelson Mandela presided over a meeting of the executive committee of the African National Congress. South Africa's first fully democratic elections were going to be held in April, the ANC was clearly going to win and the issue on the table was: what should the position of the new government be on the delicate question of the country's national anthem?

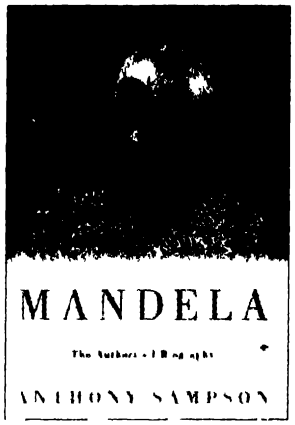
The existing anthem was clearly unacceptable. "Die Stem," a sombre martial tune, celebrated the triumph of the Afrikaner trekkers as they drove upward through South Africa in the 19th century, crushing indigenous resistance. The unofficial anthem favoured by black South Africans, "Nkosi Sikelele," was the richly soulful expression of a long-suffering people yearning to be free.

The ANC executive meeting had barely begun when Mandela was called away, but the discussion continued without him. An overwhelming majority swiftly emerged in favour of scrapping "Die Stem" and replacing it with "Nkosi Sikelele." Tokyo Sexwale, a leading ANC figure who spent time with Mandela in prison, vividly remembered the mood at the meeting during Mandela's absence. "We were enjoying ourselves. It is the end for that 'Die Stem' song, we said. The end. No more."

Then Mandela walked in. "We were all like small primary schoolchildren," Sexwale recalled. "When he found out what we had decided he said, 'Well, I am sorry. I don't want to be rude... but this song that you treat so easily holds the emotions of many people whom you don't represent. Yet, with the stroke of a pen, you would take a decision to destroy the very – the only – basis that we are building upon: reconciliation.' "

Mandela carried the day. "Nobody," Sexwale said, "raised a finger to object."

TODAY, and ever since Mandela became President following the ANC's enormous victory in the 1994 elections, South Africa has two anthems, always played in succession at official ceremonies: "Nkosi Sikelele" and "Die Stem." The issue of the anthem was all about generating a national mood, persuading people politically by touching their hearts. Mandela's colleagues capitulated because they knew he had a special acumen for this art – they had long ago come to accept that "the old man" was far more skilful than any of them in the craft of political symbolism.



A facet of Mandela the politician that is often obscured by Mandela the myth is that he is, in Anthony Sampson's phrase, a master of imagery. This is a quality all the more remarkable in that he is most certainly not a master of oratory. Next to him Al Gore is Shakespeare's Mark Antony in full flow. But in all other respects Mandela's carefully honed charm and talent for political theatre are every bit as sophisticated, Sampson suggests, as that of the Great Communicator himself, Ronald Reagan.

THE central challenge any serious biographer of Nelson Mandela confronts is to track, dissect and explain how it was that he managed to reconcile a nation so bitterly divided by the perversions of apartheid; to bring stability where the scale of the injustice, and the potential for bloodshed, was biblical. Anthony Sampson's authorised biography of one of the century's great individuals, of South Africa's indispensable man, achieves just that. And he does so, at Mandela's express bidding, without stooping to hagiography. The triumph of *Mandela* is that it successfully demythologises the man without in any way undermining his heroic stature.

The author, who has now written three books about South Africa, came to know Mandela during the 1950s. An Englishman who moved easily in black Johannesburg society, Sampson was the editor of *Drum*, a Johannesburg magazine aimed at the black African market. He was not alone in those days in seeing Mandela as a dandy, a showman – a perception not diminished by the amazing expenses he incurred in having his suits made by the very same tailor employed by South Africa's diamond king, Harry Oppenheimer. "Showmanship," in fact, is a concept that recurs in Sampson's biography. And it acquires new and deeper meaning as Mandela's story unfolds, until we come to grasp that his histrionic gifts are central to an understanding of his political triumphs.

Sampson writes that in the early days he was not alone among ANC sympathisers in wondering whether any serious political substance lay behind the dazzling smile. All doubts were put to rest after Mandela's arrest in 1962.

At his trial, which Sampson covered for *The Observer*, Mandela's response, when asked to plead, was: "It is not I, but the Government, that should be in the dock. I plead not guilty." Staring the death sentence in the face, he challenged the court to do its damnedest. He hoped to live, he said, to see his democratic ideal realised. "But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Theatre it undoubtedly was. But the stakes were too high to doubt Mandela's sincerity. And what lay there for all to see was that his grand gestures were in perfect harmony with a black population that had been demoralised by the arrest of its leaders and hungered for a heroic reminder that no matter what, the struggle continued.

Mandela was to remain the "dramatic personification of his people", as Sampson puts it. Before prison he personified defiance. After it he personified reconciliation.

The 27 prison years, to which Sampson dedicates a third of his book, are the key to understanding Mandela's transformation from warrior to peacemaker. Trawling through a wealth of letters and prison records that had not previously seen the light of day, conducting interviews with jailers and prisoners alike, Sampson paints a dramatic picture of what he calls "the psycho-politics" of prison life. Mandela "was able," Sampson writes, "to stand back from himself, to see himself as others saw him. He learned to... empathise and persuade,

and to extend his influence and authority, not just over the other prisoners, but over the warders."

His regal bearing, his air of warm command, were qualities he deliberately taught himself to project. Add what Sampson describes as the "essential integrity" he exuded and you come to understand how it was that, having achieved mastery over his prison, he charmed and cajoled the senior government officials with whom he held talks secretly in jail – and later at the negotiating table – to submit to his personal authority and political will.

If Mandela's political progress provides the core of this biography, Sampson does not shirk the challenge of exploring the private pain that he endured – and caused – as a consequence of his decision to put "the struggle" ahead of his family. We learn of the resentment some of his children harboured toward him, of the awkward emotional paralysis they came to feel in his presence. And running through the book is the subplot of his former wife, Winnie, who is presented in all her transformations, from Cleopatra to Boadicea to Lady Macbeth.

Mandela adored her, but charting the intimate progress of Mandela's dawning realisation after he emerged from prison that she was not worthy of his love is a task that, finally, eludes Sampson. Borrowing Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s description of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sampson says of Mandela that "he combined extreme heartiness with impenetrable reserve".

In recent years Mandela's self-effacement has tended at times to self-deprecation. He has felt impelled to say and do things seemingly intended to deflate his giant reputation, to keep the perils of pomposity at bay. That is why he has fallen into the habit of telling stories against himself, like the one his aides have grown tired of hearing about the five-year-old girl who cut him down to size after she asked him why he had spent so long in jail. Mandela having explained, in all solemnity, the reasons for his incarceration, the girl replied: "You must be a very stupid old man."

No doubt in time other biographers will be tempted to lend substance to the little girl's perception, to smash the icon. Anthony Sampson's work will endure as a corrective to any such endeavour, as a lasting monument to Mandela's imperishable greatness. ■

New York Times Service

■ BOOKS

Pinning it down in words

MICHIKO KAKUTANI

More Matter: Essays and Criticism by John Updike; Alfred A. Knopf, 1999; pages 900, $35.

"IF one sets up to be a writer," John Updike once declared in a speech, "one should be able to write anything, from a sonnet to a sermon, or at least be willing to try." This industrious Victorian ideal of an all-around man of letters seems daunting in our current age of electronic distraction and wilful specialisation, but Updike has succeeded in the course of his five-decade career in taming if not mastering virtually every literary form from the novel to the short story, from the poem to the essay.

In this, his 50th book, he brings together his most recent non-fiction – that is, the book reviews, essays, addresses, comic *feuilletons* and random, autobiographical jottings written since *Odd Jobs* (1991) and *Hugging the Shore* (1983). Like those earlier collections of prose, *More Matter* attests to Updike's remarkable versatility (his familiarity not only with the world of books but with the worlds of movies, paintings, photography and cartoons as well) and to his ardent drive to turn all his observations into glittering, gossamer prose. Indeed, the longtime observer of his career cannot help but suspect that things only seem real to Updike if they can be caught and pinned down in a net of words, that his fascination with the muchness of the world is matched only by his need to transform that interest into something hammered and lovely and all his own.

IN this volume, Updike ranges freely across the cultural landscape, tackling both large questions of religion, relations between the sexes and the American Zeitgeist, and smaller, Andy Rooney-like matters like the difficulty of opening childproof pill bottles and the problems created by recalcitrant burglar alarms. He gives us smart, sparkly profiles of Lana Turner and Gene Kelly, grapples thoughtfully with the work of Herman Melville, Edith Wharton and Henry Green, and amplifies the self-portrait he gave us in his 1989 memoir (*Self-Consciousness*) with a series of autobiographical asides. His classic study of Mickey Mouse's evolution can be found in *More Matter*, as can a wonderfully astute appraisal of Saul Steinberg's drawings and their darkening vision of America and the American dream.

As usual, Updike's book reviews demonstrate his own interest as a craftsman in the techniques employed by other writers and in the limitations imposed on imaginative freedom by culture and experience. He is able in passing to give the reader a sense of the arc of an author's life (he describes Dreiser, for instance, as a "writer of starts and stops, of elephantine gestation periods and quasi-religious periods of hesitation and meditation"), and he can just as easily map the spiritual geography of a writer's oeuvre. Of Graham Greene, he writes: "The entire climate and topography of Greeneland is a kind of self-portrait; its features are pain, guilt, ennui and lassitude." And of Edith Wharton, he observes: "She learned from Proust the dignity of nostalgia and the value of each character as a specimen, an index to the species and to broad laws of behaviour."

Although Updike tackles a wide variety of authors, from American contemporaries like Norman Mailer and Philip Roth to such foreign writers as Harry Mulisch, Ivan Klima, Manuel Puig and Orhan Pamuk, he seems less willing in this volume than in *Hugging the Shore* or *Odd Jobs* to embrace writing that significantly departs from his own conviction as a novelist that "a fiction writer's life is his basic instrument of perception – that only the imagery we have personally gathered and unconsciously internalised possesses the colour, warmth, intimate contour and weight of authenticity the discriminating fiction-reader demands." He cavalierly lumps the work of John le Carre together with that of Tom Clancy, Robert Ludlum and Frederick Forsyth, and in a much-debated review that originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, he dis-

misses Tom Wolfe's latest novel, *A Man in Full*, as "entertainment, not literature, even literature in a modest aspirant form".

This curmudgeonly tone also creeps into other pieces, which lament the declining market for short stories, the embattled state of literature in an age of electronic entertainment and the coarsening of the American psyche. "We feel bad," Updike writes, "because a once-sinewy nation, exultant in the resourcefulness that freedom brings, now seems bloated and zombified, pillaged and crumbling, all around us. Enough of our original Puritanism remains to generate self-disgust."

Updike himself points out that as he has gotten older, his "thoughts have become not only fewer and smaller but more spiteful and timorous", and this tendency makes *More Matter* a less captivating book than his previous non-fiction collections, which showcased his gifts as an enthusiast capable of using his own knowledge of the alchemical processes of art to convey the magic of others' creations.

Matters are not helped in this volume by the author's decision to include virtually every snippet of writing he has produced in recent years – including picture captions for a *Playboy* spread on Marilyn Monroe, dutiful responses to questions posed by assorted publications (like why does he live in New England?) and one-paragraph-long reviews of books like *The Hidden Life of Dogs*. An imaginary dialogue between Bill Gates and Johann Gutenberg reads like a silly exercise in the obvious, while another piece on the male body feels like weary vamping on old gender cliches.

Read selectively, however, *More Matter* delights more often than it disappoints. In his strongest pieces, Updike's awesome pictorial powers of description combine with a rigorous, searching intelligence to produce essays of enormous tactile power and conviction. In such pieces, the author's sheer joy in writing, "in making sets of things and in bringing something imperfect closer to perfection", is communicated to the reader. In this volume, Updike suggests that for him writing provides the "thrill of the fixed, the interlocking", and a hedge against disorder and death. And in satisfying his own "itch to charm" and inform, his best pieces manage both to edify and to beguile. ■

New York Times Service

■ BOOKS

Secrecy as publicity

There are some books that remain under wraps until publication day, in contrast to the usual rush to get as much pre-publication exposure as possible.

MARTIN ARNOLD

ONE of the seemingly immutable axioms of modern-day book publishing is that the purveyors of new books try noisily and at times shamelessly to get as much advance, pre-publication publicity as conceivable for their product. But every year there are a handful of titles for which there is the opposite impulse, with publishers just as aggressively trying to suppress any early word of a book's contents. These choice titles are embargoed. This year on the American book publishing scene, there have already been four interesting examples.

The books were *The Sword and the Shield* (Basic Books), a secret history of the KGB by Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin; *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (Viking) by John Cornwell; *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (Random House) by Edmund Morris; and *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (William Morrow) by Susan Faludi.

Generally books are embargoed because the publisher has sold an excerpt to a magazine or made a deal with a television news magazine programme for first-use rights (called first serial rights). But there are other reasons for secrecy. For instance, if the book is alleged to contain news, or the mere fact of its publication is news, then by releasing it to stores and reviewers on the same day, a lucky publisher can orchestrate a tremendous burst of publicity, and, hopefully, sales. (An example of this was *Hannibal* (Delacorte Press), Thomas Harris' sequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*. It went on sale this year but was so anxiously awaited by readers and store owners that the mere acknowledgment of its existence produced a crescendo of book-selling publicity.)

Of course, sometimes a book is potentially so controversial or it is such a lemon (or both) that the publisher wants to give it some shelf time in the stores before it is buried in a wash of bad reviews or mocking news stories.

THERE are two ways to attempt to enforce an embargo. First, there is the confidentiality agreement. To receive a copy of the book the recipients, usually reviewers, have to agree to look and read but not tell until a mutually decided-upon day. That is the most commonly employed method, and it keeps the book's secrets, yet allows reviewers time to read and digest it. The other way is for the publisher simply to keep all the copies out of sight, hidden until they are shipped, timed to arrive on the reviewers' desks and in the bookstores on the same day. Sometimes, although certainly not always, the secret can be kept. But publishers admit there is nothing more deleterious to the peace and sublimity of a publishing house than the dreaded decision to embargo a book and the worry that the embargo will be broken.

The embargo was placed on the KGB book, which was based on a secret archive, because its American publisher, Basic Books, had a contract with the original publisher, Penguin U.K., to issue it simultaneously so that the publisher on one side of the Atlantic would not be scooped on the other side. But ABC News independently learned about the existence of the archive, if not its contents, and broke the story nearly a week before the book's scheduled publication, and this led to newspaper headlines.

Jack McKeown, president and chief executive of the Perseus Books Group, of which Basic Books is an imprint, said: "Frankly, in retrospect, I don't think we were hurt. It turned out we were better off. *Hurricane Floyd* would have buried us, and we wouldn't have gotten a great amount of news coverage." The book had a first printing of 80,000, but there are now 105,000 copies in print in the U.S., and the book will be No. 7 on *The New York Times*' non-fiction best-seller list on October 3.

Faludi's book, *Stiffed*, was embargoed because *Newsweek* had bought first serial

rights. Lynn Goldberg, the publicist for *Stiffed*, said that the magazine had a two-week window to publish it first, plus the right to have it on the newsstands for a whole week before the book went on sale. "So we had it embargoed until September 21," she said, "but *Newsweek* ran it on September 6. An embargo is not only hard to put in place, but it's also hard to dismantle, so we kept the publication date at September 21," but, of course, as soon as the magazine was out, those who wanted to break the embargo did so.

The book about Pius XII was embargoed because the publisher had sold first rights to *Vanity Fair* magazine, which published an excerpt in its September issue.

Perhaps the book embargo that will have the most notoriety was the one on the Reagan memoir. Random House has refused to discuss the book until its publication date, September 30. It was embargoed mainly for the usual reason: Random House had sold the first serial rights to *Newsweek*, and, obviously, if the book's contents became known before the magazine was in readers' hands, the bang of exclusivity that *Newsweek* paid for would be lost. But there was another reason the book's contents were guarded with such ardour. The writer, Edmund Morris, placed himself in the book as a fictional Zelig-like narrator who first met the future President on Reagan's high school football field, which was long before the real Morris was born.

So in this case the main reason for the embargo was that the contract with *Newsweek* mandated one, but there was also the desire to get the book into the stores with some momentum before reviewers could decipher what was history and what could well have been borrowed from Woody Allen.

The book embargo has a relatively short but nonetheless illustrious history. In 1979, *The Nation* magazine printed an article based on a pirated copy of President Gerald R. Ford's then-unpublished memoir, *A Time to Heal* (Harper & Row and the Reader's Digest Association), which had sold first serial rights to *Time* magazine. An appeals court eventually upheld *The Nation*'s right to do just that.

But the first book that anyone remembers being embargoed was *All the President's Men* (Simon & Schuster), the seminal 1974 Watergate book by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. ■

New York Times Service

■ THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

First things first: a presidential slogan

WILLIAM SAFIRE

SUBTLY, stealthily, almost subliminally, a political slogan has been drummed into the heads of Americans all year long. The rallying cry was never shouted; the insistent phrase was never capitalised in speeches or printed on buttons. But it has quietly gripped the United States and is doing its job of persuasion.

Speaking of the budget surplus in his State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton said: "We should not spend any of it until after Social Security is truly saved. *First things first.*" He had inserted that phrase during a rehearsal on January 16, 1999, in the White House theatre at the suggestion of Gene Sperling, a domestic-policy aide. Michael Waldman, the speechwriter, seized on it as an easy-to-grasp way out of the anticipated GOP charge that Clinton was opposed to tax cuts.

The rallying cry was never shouted; the insistent phrase was never capitalised in speeches or printed on buttons. But it has quietly gripped the U.S. and is doing its job of persuasion.

The noun in the phrase (infinitely better than "Let's prioritise") had the added advantage of being plural. That meant it could cover not just Social Security but a range of other outlays. But how could all of them be "first"? Answer: Taken as a group, they were first in contrast to the one proposal that was designated to come last.

Throughout the year, Clinton resolutely repeated the familiar phrase whenever asked about tax cuts: "*First things first.* When we have met our obligation of showing what we need for debt reduction, for Medicare and Social Security and education, then we will be in a position to know how much is left for a tax cut."

Press releases followed the line in lock step: "The President will urge Congress to work with him to enact a responsible budget that puts *first things first.*" John Podesta, the White House chief of staff, was programmed to use the phrase at least twice at every Sunday talk-show appearance when asked about the GOP tax bill: "Send it down to us so that we can veto it and then move forward, putting *first things first.*"

By September, Clinton was able to work the three-word agenda prioritiser into almost every appearance, no matter what the subject: "I want America to say," he told elementary-school pupils in Olney, Madison, "let us put *first things first*, nothing is more important than our children."

The familiar phrase was first popularised first in 1894. (Nope; the redundancy works best with a noun in the middle, not a verb.) The Rev. George Jackson titled his collection of sermons "First Things First: Addresses to Young Men," which included his ringing harangue on "Modern Idolatry."

It was taken up early in 1992 by David Wilhelm, the Clinton campaign manager: "*First things first*, and the first thing is winning." (But it was set aside for James Carville's "It is the economy, stupid.") Clinton, meeting later that year with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, told reporters he had explained that his emphasis on the economy "was not a symbol of isolationism, but a necessary commitment to putting *first things first.*"

Part of the brilliance of Clinton's relentlessly repeated slogan putting everything else behind is that it resists argument or parody. How can Republicans respond? With *last but not least?* ■

New York Times Service

The soldier's wife

A Burmese short story by Mo Mo (Inya), translated by Usha Narayanan.

WHAT a terrible pain it is! What kind of illness could this be! The pain is in my abdomen and in the whole of my back. Not like any ordinary type of pain. Oh, I can't express it myself clearly. The pain is so severe that I can't breathe easily. If it goes on like this for long, I won't be able to stand it.

It has been like this for nearly an hour. I have been suffering quietly, without crying out loudly. According to the nurse, this will go on for six more hours. Perhaps this may go on for another day! For a person who is suffering so much, even one hour seems like a lifetime. Childbirth is not a small matter to suffer!

Dear nurse, please take me to the Labour Room, I cannot stand the pain; it is getting to be too much. The nurse said, "Oh! it is a long way to go. Even your water has not burst as yet. The first baby is always like this. It will take a long time. Wait! wait a little more."

For the nurse, it was nothing new. She went away coolly. I was left behind, exhausted. The patients on either side of my bed were fast asleep. How I wished to change places with them!

Catching hold of the bed pole I got down from the bed. I walked towards the verandah and looked down. I was on the third floor of the Central Women's Hospital. As I looked down I could see my husband sitting in the dim light. He saw me at once and signalled to ask if there was any news. It must be about eleven o'clock at night.

Later, when I returned from the Delivery Room, I saw some snacks and coffee laid out on the table next to my bed. So, my husband had made enquiries with the attendants and had come to know that I was in the Delivery Room. A little later an attendant called out my name and asked if there was any news. My husband must have sent him. I told him the good news that I had a baby boy. My husband, who was sitting up the whole night in the garden downstairs, must have gone home to sleep only after he got the news.

It is now 7 a.m. After drinking coffee I dozed off. I woke up only when they called out my name. It was lunch time.

"What would you like to have from home, sister?" I said I would like to have a *longyi*. "By the way, is not my husband coming up?"

"I will tell him. You see, he is not supposed to come here."

Oh, my God. What strict discipline this hospital has! At meal time, other hospitals allow a member of the family to visit. Here only the hospital attendants could go up and down bringing the messages to and fro. Though they do not ask for tips, they are normally paid money – anything from half a rupee to three rupees. They had a good opportunity of making extra money, especially at meal time when the food was brought up.

Mo Mo (Inya) was born in Daik-U, Burma, in 1944. Inya, part of her pseudonym, was the name of the hostel where she stayed as a student of Rangoon University which she joined in 1964. Her very first novel won an award in 1972. In 1974 she received a national award and during the period 1980-86 her short stories won several awards. She also wrote poems. Her novels have been translated into English, Russian, Japanese and Chinese. She died in 1990.

I wanted to see my husband just to tell him how tired I was after the delivery – how I still feel dizzy and how some pains still linger in the abdomen. I wished to talk about the birth – just like a soldier back from a victorious battle talking proudly about his deeds. I had so many things to tell my husband. Is not this the time when a woman wished to cuddle up against her husband's chest to be fussed over by him? People say women always want to see their husbands' faces the first thing on return from the Labour Room after birth of the child. That gives her a lot of comfort. So I wanted to see my husband's face. After all, I had gone through the big adventure single-handed!

I was thinking so much of meeting my husband that I could hardly eat my food. I was wondering why my husband had not come to my room. Of course, I knew him to be a stickler for discipline. So he must be waiting for the visiting hours. Yet, he knew that this hour was the most important one for me and I had always been a timid person. I had to bring out our first baby all by myself.

At half past four, the visiting hour had arrived and a big crowd of visitors was rushing upstairs as if they had come out of the cinema hall. I tried to sit up and tidied my hair to look presentable when my husband came. I am sure he would be the first to be here. Poor thing! I wonder how long he had to wait for this hour.

But alas! There was no sign of my husband. After half an hour, his mother and sister turned up. "My brother said he would be coming later," his sister said. I was no longer interested in what they had to say. Even the fried chicken and the lovely meal in the tiffin carrier could not attract my attention.

When my husband came in finally, I was eating the meal. I kept on eating the food without looking up. When he saw tears falling into the plate, he shook my arm and said "Are you not well? Please tell me, darling, please!"

When I went on eating without raising my head, he realised that I was annoyed with him.

"Look here, Chaw darling, you are behaving like a child! You are now the mother of a child, you know. The whole night I had no sleep and so I fell asleep today and woke up only at 5 p.m. So I sent mother and sister ahead and I stopped on the way to buy some snacks for you to eat. That's why I am late."

"Don't you call me the mother of a child. You think I slept the whole day?" Tears came streaming down my face as I spoke, and my husband was just laughing away.

"I know, I know, my darling Chaw. I understand how you women have to suffer. People never stop composing poems on mothers – how a mother's love is great. Now, you too belong to this group of great mothers."

This translation is dedicated to the wives of Kargil martyrs.

In the end, I was comforted by my husband.

II

ONE day my husband said, "Chaw dear, look who's here, your great friend and her husband."

I was so happy to see my friend Myint and her husband so unexpectedly.

"My dear Shwe Myint, I am really so happy to see you both. Have you come on leave, Captain Soe Myint?"

Myint said, "I have been wanting to come and see you, and since he also came home on leave, it was just right. Here we are. I never expected that you would be having the baby now."

Myint and I have been very close friends. Wherever we lived we managed to be at each other's side on important occasions. When I got married Myint was with me and when she got married at the Registrar's office, I was there to be the witness.

Myint is not like me at all. She is strong-willed, smart and hard-working. Me, I am delicate. While Myint graduated from the university and got a job, I failed in my examinations and settled down to marriage with Maung, my husband.

"Myint dear, you had better fix a meal for yourselves. For me, my mother-in-law sends food."

"Don't worry about us, Chaw dear, you take care of yourself."

While Capt. Soe Myint was looking the other way, I whispered a question to Myint. She answers shyly: "There is no change in me at the moment, but he wants a baby and is crazy about the idea."

"Then when will the two of you be able to live together?" I asked.

To this, Myint answered with an unhappy face, "We cannot live together for sometime as yet, Chaw. As you know, my mother is in indifferent health and so I can't leave her alone and be with my husband. Even if I can get leave from my work or get transferred, I may have to live alone as my husband has been deployed in a forward area."

I sighed. I commiserated with Myint. Their situation was such that husband and wife had to live separately. As the husband was in the armed forces, he had to give priority to his duty. Love had only second place. My friend Myint was an ideal companion to him and I really appreciated it. A soldier's wife might not be very brave herself. But she must have very strong character to face situations such as this. I recalled Myint's life before their marriage. Myint wrote to me then, "Dear Chaw, I have decided to accept him. You know, my mother does not like war. So she does not like a soldier also... You see, he is coming to Rangoon on leave on 6th and 7th of July, 1969. Will you go and meet him at the station?"

I went to the station and welcomed Capt. Soe Myint. They had met each other when the Captain was on duty at Chaw's small town. He had then declared his love and admiration for her and was waiting for her response. And Myint was ready with an answer in the affirmative.

Thus, their reunion came about. Myint and her beloved Captain were sitting on the banks of lake Inya. A friend of mine and I were sitting a little away from them. My friend grumbled and said, "How I feel bored as I watch those two!"

Capt. Soe Myint had to return to his Regiment the next day.

So we asked her, "How is this? Your man has to return so soon? This is the time you should be most happy."

Myint said, "What can he do? He has come on duty here. When I got his letter, I took leave just to come and meet him."

I sighed. Capt. Soe Myint was on duty in Magwe and so it was not so easy for him to see Myint in Daik-U-So. So they were meeting in Rangoon just to be together for one day.

AS for me and my husband, it was not like this at all. Since we fell in love, I never went anywhere alone. We went shopping together, we went to the cinema together. Wherever I went on business – even to a chemist's shop to buy some medicine when I was not well – I phoned him up to accompany me and he obliged me. I talked to him of small matters with exaggerated sounds.

I commiserated with Myint. Their situation was such that husband and wife had to live separately. As the husband was in the armed forces, he had to give priority to his duty.

Did Myint and her man find time to talk of love and utter sweet nothings, I wondered.

Myint and I used to write to each other once a year if at all. When I received a letter from Myint, I knew there would be some news.

One such letter said, "Come quickly, we are getting married at the Registrar's office on the fifth of January '70." I rushed to Pegu where they signed at the Registrar's office and went to the Shwemaw-daw Pagoda for prayers.

While climbing the stairs to the Pagoda, I whispered to her, "Is this visit just for signing at the Registrar's for the marriage? When will you two be able to live together, my dear Myint?"

Myint said, "You see he cannot take long leave now. He will have to go back tomorrow. We'll arrange a reception when he gets leave next. We may be able to live together only later."

"If that is so, you need not hold any reception."

"It is my mother's idea and not mine to hold a reception. I couldn't care less."

"Then the two of you should have waited until he got long leave."

"You see, Ma Chaw, we are not sure when that will happen. So we had to get one job done."

After they decided on the Big Day, Myint came to Rangoon alone. She looked quite cool. She had to arrange the wedding clothes, the invitation cards, flowers and so on. My brother and I helped Myint in all this. She did all the work with a pleasant face. We did not hear any grumbling from her.

In contrast, there was a lot of hullabaloo prior to my wedding day. I discussed with my husband what he and I should wear on the day of the wedding. We even talked about what flower I should wear. He wanted me to wear an orchid. But I wanted the fragrant thazin. My husband gave in to whatever I wanted. When he said impatiently, "Oh! wear what you like", I was annoyed and said if he could not be patient with me even before our marriage what it would be like after the marriage. Then he pacified me. My friend Myint had to manage everything alone, she told me. "A person who decides to be a soldier's wife has to be prepared for sacrifices and have a lot of understanding. As my husband is on full-time duty he cannot spare time to come and help me in these matters. Being a perfect companion, I managed to do everything by myself."

I was very proud of my friend. Her face was fresh and there was no sign of fatigue on it. I admired her a lot.

When my son was one year old, Myint visited me alone. This time, she was dressed in a pretty maternity gown.

'Hello, Shwe Myint. Have you come

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Relive the sensation

to show off, or what?"

"My dear friend Chaw, I want my baby born in Rangoon. I have come here so you can take care of me."

"Good. Has Capt. Soe Myint seen you in this condition?"

"No, I have written to him, but he has not got leave as yet."

"Dear Myint, you two were together for only 10 days after the marriage. Now it is time of childbirth, and you are still planning to be together."

"Life is such, Chaw dear. I have a friend whose husband is also a soldier. Six days after their wedding, the husband had to return for duty to the front. When he returned the next time, he found his wife with a baby who did not know him. Myint was laughing while telling me the story. For them it was a joke.

Myint's daughter is a little heroine. Her father is a big army official fighting for the country on the front, doing his duty well, and the mother is a real brave woman.

But for me, when I was expecting my first baby, my husband was by my side all the time, looking after me. "Don't lift any heavy weight, don't eat chilli or any hot food, don't bend down to pick up anything," he used to say. He took care of me so much!

The next time I saw Myint was when she turned up suddenly in a three-wheeler in front of my house. She needed the assistance of two persons even to walk. She was in great pain. We took her at once to the Dufferin Hospital and admitted her there. The three of us waited patiently downstairs. I was all the time thinking about Myint who was alone upstairs." Was she suffering too much? Will the delivery be easy?" When I was in a similar situation, I had my husband by my side – for any emergency. Knowing that he was at hand, I could bear the suffering. But Myint was alone – all by herself. Of course, we were near her but it is not the same as having her husband by her side.

Myint's delivery did not take place even the next day. Perhaps the position of the baby had changed during the train journey. We were all very worried. Myint's sister-in-law began to cry: "Oh! how difficult the situation is!. Her husband is not here. Should something serious happen, what can we do?"

I said, "Don't worry! This is a reliable hospital. Even if an operation is necessary, there is nothing to worry about. Everything will be all right!" I felt like crying myself. When I went home, I discussed with my husband if we should engage a mid-wife.

But when I visited the hospital again, the big worry in my mind disappeared as a little baby girl had been born. This news was given to me by her sister-in-law, who went upstairs by giving a tip to the people in charge, just like others who were going upstairs the same way. We were all very happy for Myint.

During the visiting hour in the evening, we found Myint fresh and happy.

"I am sure your husband Capt. Soe Myint would be very happy to hear this good news. Shall I send a telegram to him or call him at Magwe?"

"No, he is at the front, it seems," Myint said. "If we send the message to his Regiment's headquarters, they might inform him."

"Has he not got leave as yet?" I asked.

Myint answered coolly, "He could not get leave now, it seems. Anyway he is not needed here right now. He might leave after a month."

"We all wanted a daughter. It is a baby girl and so it is just right. We have even chosen the name 'May' for the baby."

Myint wanted the birth announcement to be made in the press. She gave me a piece of paper with the baby's name, "Zani May" (Heroine) written on it. I was very pleased with the name.

Yes, Myint's daughter is a little heroine. Her father is a big army official fighting for the country on the front, doing his duty well, and the mother is a real brave woman.

I praised Myint wholeheartedly. When I was having a baby of my own, I was not satisfied even when my husband was by my side looking after me. I don't know how I would have behaved if I had to go through everything like her all by myself.

Myint is after all a woman like us. She must be longing to have her husband by her side, to see his face, and tell him how much she is suffering. I am sure she too would love to be fussed over by her beloved husband.

Yet there was not a tinge of sadness or longing on her face. Instead I saw a fresh happy fulfilment on her beautiful face. I patted her hands and murmured quietly. "Myint, dear, you are brave, very brave." ■

Renaissance man

The birth centenary of 'Kalki' R. Krishnamurthy occasions an appraisal of the contributions made in numerous fields by the Tamil novelist, freedom fighter and social crusader.

S. VISWANATHAN

LOVERS of Tamil literature across the country celebrated the birth centenary of "Kalki" R. Krishnamurthy on September 9.

Krishnamurthy was freedom fighter, social crusader, novelist, short story writer, journalist, humorist, satirist, travel writer, script-writer, poet, critic and connoisseur of the arts – all rolled into one. A prolific writer, he wielded his pen with force and tenderness for three decades (1923-1954). He wrote on varied subjects during an eventful period in Indian history. His writings include over 120 short stories, 10 novelettes, five novels, three historical romances, editorial and political writings and hundreds of film and music reviews.

Although there is practically no subject he left untouched and no genre he did not experiment with, he is best known for his historical romances, which are acclaimed as classics and remain popular to this day, nearly five decades after his death.

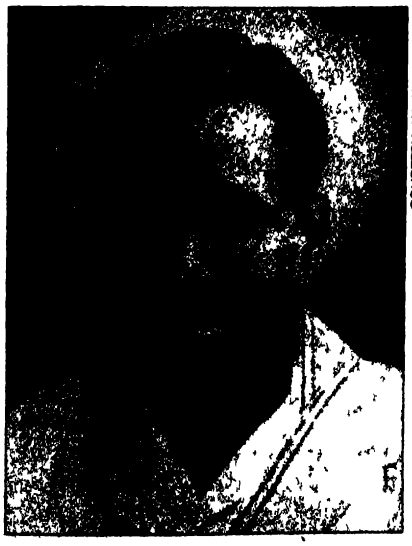
His historical novels, *Parthiban Kanavu* (Parthiban's Dream), *Sivakamiyin Sapatham* (Sivakami's Vow) and *Ponniyin Selvan* (Ponni's Son) – which were first serialised in *Kalki*, the weekly he edited, and later published as books between 1943 and 1951 – attract 20,000 to 25,000 additional readers for the magazine, whenever it re-serialises these stories, according to K. Rajendran, son of Krishnamurthy and the present publisher of the weekly. (*Ponniyin Selvan* re-appears for a fourth time now.) It is amazing that whereas works of several contemporary writers fail to see even a second edition, each of these novels has been re-published eight times over the past 15 years (1984-1999).

KRISHNAMURTHY was born on September 9, 1899 at Puttamangalam in the old Thanjavur district in an orthodox, large Brahmin family with limited means. Father Ramaswamy Aiyar was the village karnam (accountant), drawing a monthly salary of Rs.10. With the yield from land, he managed to maintain the family. After primary education in the village, Krishnamurthy joined the National High School at Tiruchi, about 100 km away.

When Mahatma Gandhi launched his Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921, thousands of students gave up their studies to participate in the movement. Krishnamurthy was one among them. With the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination just three months away, he left school and joined the Indian National Congress. Gandhi's speech at a public meeting in Tiruchi inspired him.

In 1922, he was awarded a one-year imprisonment for participating in the independence struggle. It was during this period that Krishnamurthy came into contact with two great persons, who were to play a major role all his life – veteran Congress leader C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) and T. Sadasivam, who was to become a life-long friend and partner in journalistic ventures.

Krishnamurthy's first attempt at writing fiction also came during that period. In 1923 he joined as a sub-editor in *Navasakthi*, a Tamil periodical edited by Tamil scholar and freedom fighter V. Kalyanasundaram, popularly known as "Thiru Vi. Ka". Krishnamurthy's first book was published in 1927.



COURTESY *KALKI* MAGAZINE

Leaving *Navasakthi* in 1928, Krishnamurthy stayed with Rajaji at the Gandhi Ashram in Tiruchengode in Salem district and helped him edit *Vimochanam*, a Tamil journal devoted to propagating prohibition. In 1931, he was again imprisoned for six months.

Next year Krishnamurthy joined *Ananda Vikatan*, a humour weekly edited and published by S.S. Vasan, as its *de facto* editor. The magazine soon became a household name in middle class families. Krishnamurthy's witty, incisive comments on politics, literature, music and other forms of art were looked forward to with unceasing interest by readers. He wrote under the pen names of "Kalki", "Ra. Ki", "Tamil Theni", "Karnatakam" and so on. *Vikatan* published many of his short stories and novels (as serials).

In 1941 he left *Ananda Vikatan* and rejoined the freedom struggle and courted arrest. On his release after three months he and Sadasivam started *Kalki*. He was its editor until his death on December 5, 1954.

THE success that Krishnamurthy attained in the realm of historical fiction is phenomenal. Sixty years ago, at a time when the literacy level was low and when the English-educated Tamils looked down on writings in Tamil, *Kalki*'s circulation touched 71,000 copies – the largest for any weekly in the country then – when it serialised his historical novels.

Noted historian Professor K.V. Rangaswamy Iyengar says that Kalki established his reputation as a novelist with *Parthiban Kanavu*. In his "introduction" to the novel, Rangaswamy Iyengar describes it as "a star of the first magnitude (that) had appeared in the firmament of historical fiction." "It was the first attempt, to my knowledge, to utilise the ancient history of a famous South Indian dynasty and region as the background of an attractive story," says

Rangaswamy Iyengar.

Describing *Sivakamiyin Sapatham* as a brilliant piece of writing, Rangaswamy Iyengar says that because of its stylistic qualities, the novel will have a permanent place in Tamil prose.

Although Kalki's historical romances captured the hearts of thousands of readers, recreating for them the glorious Tamil life during the periods of Pallavas and Imperial Cholas, critics were divided on their literary merits. One criticism was that Kalki's novels dwelt rather overmuch on royalty and not enough on common people. The sudden twists and turns, which characterised serialised stories, made the stories unrealistic. There has, however, been a re-appraisal of Kalki, particularly among Marxist critics, in recent years. *Semmalar*, the monthly organ of the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers Association, brought out a special number to commemorate Kalki's birth centenary.

Marxist critic Arunan says: "Kalki might not have gone into the inner layers of the social structure of those days, but he did give glimpses of the social life through his descriptions of the experiences and exploits of the royalty" (*Semmalar*, September, 1998). "At least, parts of people's history are touched," he says and adds: "*Ponniyin Selvan*, for instance, gives detailed accounts of the conflicts between Saivites and Vaishnavites and their impact on society."

Analysing the reasons for Kalki's continued relevance, Maran, another critic, says that Kalki, whose main concern was to arouse people's consciousness against colonial rule, sought to remind the people of their cultural heritage. Kalki's writings sought to instil pride in the greatness of Tamil language, literature, art, culture and valour. "Even after Independence, there is still a need to fall back on the cultural heritage. Kalki's works perhaps continue to serve that purpose" (*Kanaiyazhi*, August, 1999).

Stating that Kalki was a social force, not an ordinary writer, writer D. Jayakanthan says, "In politics, literature, criticism of the arts and Tamil renaissance, no other person has served as much as he did."

One of the criticisms against Kalki's short stories was that they were propagandist, but Kalki, for whom writing was part of political activity, a mobilisation exercise, was unconcerned about such criticism. If writing stories with a purpose was propagandist, he said, he did not mind being dubbed propagandist. Inspired by the national movement, he sought to instil patriotism in his readers and his stories did succeed in doing so. "He knew the art of creating interest in and writing convincingly on any subject," observed Dr. M. Varadarajan, novelist and literary historian (History of Tamil Literature). "He understood the spirit and force of the spoken language and used it as a powerful medium for his writings."

Se. Ganesalingan, Sri Lankan Tamil writer, says that Kalki "democratised" literature and enabled even the common people to appreciate it. In simple Tamil he judiciously blended humour and satire with real incidents.

In writing historical fiction, Kalki was influenced by English novelists Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lytton and French novelists Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, according to Sunda, Kalki's biographer.

Kalki's early interest in listening to *harikathakalakshepam* (musical religious discourse) and his acquaintance with the pamphlets of Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu propagandist and scholar, Arumuga Navalar, helped him acquire the skill of story-telling.

Kalki's crusade against drink, untouchability, superstition, oppression of women and many of the decadent practices in Brahmin families of those days is testimony to his progressive thinking. Thiru Vi. Ka., veteran labour leader, and Rajaji (who took classes in socialism for jail-mates) imparted in him socialist ideals, according to some critics. Soorya, a character in his novel *Alai Osai* (The sound of the waves) belongs to the Socialist group in the Congress. "Soorya is none other than the author," says Rajendran.

Kalki considered *Alai Osai*, which was serialised in *Kalki* in 1948-49 and published as a book in 1963, as his best. The novel won for him the Sahitya Akademi award posthumously in 1956; it has for its backdrop the freedom struggle and deals with social reforms and politics. His other social novels include *Thyaga Bhoomi* (The land of sacrifice) and *Kalvanin Kadali* (Bandit's sweetheart), both of which have been filmed. *Thyaga Bhoomi*, which has the salt satyagraha as its backdrop, dealt with women's rights and untouchability. It was serialised in *Ananda Vikatan*; stills from the movie, which was being filmed at the same time, were used as illustration. After a successful run for six weeks, the film, directed by veteran K. Subrahmanyam, was banned by the colonial Government on the grounds that it indirectly aroused the people to fight for freedom.

S. Krishnaswamy, film historian and son of Subrahmanyam, told *Frontline* that the film had a theme that was "extraordinarily revolutionary" for the period it covered; it represented the high watermark of the liberation of Indian womanhood. "The film combined the spirit of Indian womanhood with the spirit of national freedom," said Krishnaswamy. According to Aranthai Narayanan, film critic, the film ranks on a par with the works of Satyajit Ray or Mrinal Sen in thematic as well as production values. "Kalki's dialogues were sharp, particularly in the court scene; the heroine's offer to pay alimony to her husband who deserted her long back and wants to rejoin her, was revolutionary," says Aranthai Narayanan. Krishnaswamy has made a teleserial of the story in Hindi with Bharat Bhushan in the key role.

Parthiban Kanavu, Kalvanin Kadali and *Poiman Karadu* were also filmed. Kalki wrote the script and some lyrics for *Meera*, an M.S. Subbulakshmi starrer.

Kalki's contribution to the cause of Tamil music is also noteworthy. He spearheaded a movement that wanted Carnatic musicians to include more Tamil songs in their concerts and composed a number of songs. His Tamil translation of Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, was published as *Satya Sothanai*.

Kalki was in the midst of some controversies. One related to his response to an observation by a respectable writer that Subramanya Bharati was a "mahakavi"; although Kalki was a great admirer of the nationalist poet, he did not agree with this estimation. The other related to some contemporary writers' charge of plagiarism against Kalki. Kalki admitted that among his over 120 stories, the themes of some six or seven were adaptations.

The release of a postage stamp in honour of Kalki was among the highlights of the centenary celebrations. Sometime ago, the Tamil Nadu Government announced the nationalisation of Kalki's works; this will enable publishers to come out with reprints of his works. The celebrations have already inspired publication of a number of new books, which include *Kalki: Selected Stories* by Penguin Books and *Kalki Kalanjiyam* by Vanathi Pathippagam, which has published Kalki's books for decades. The Penguin book is an English translation of 12 selected short stories of Kalki by his granddaughter Gowri Ramnarayan. ■

A mission for total safety

Averting radiation leaks and ensuring total safety at nuclear power facilities are the principal goals of scientists and engineers at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
recently in Trombay

Right from day one in the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, safety has been one of the most important aspects of its programme. We look at safety not as an administrative process or review or regulation but as a scientific discipline. In the Department of Atomic Energy, safety is a comprehensive programme. From the cradle to the grave, so to say, we have technologies in place not only to generate electricity but to ensure safety.
– Dr. Anil Kakodkar, Director, BARC.

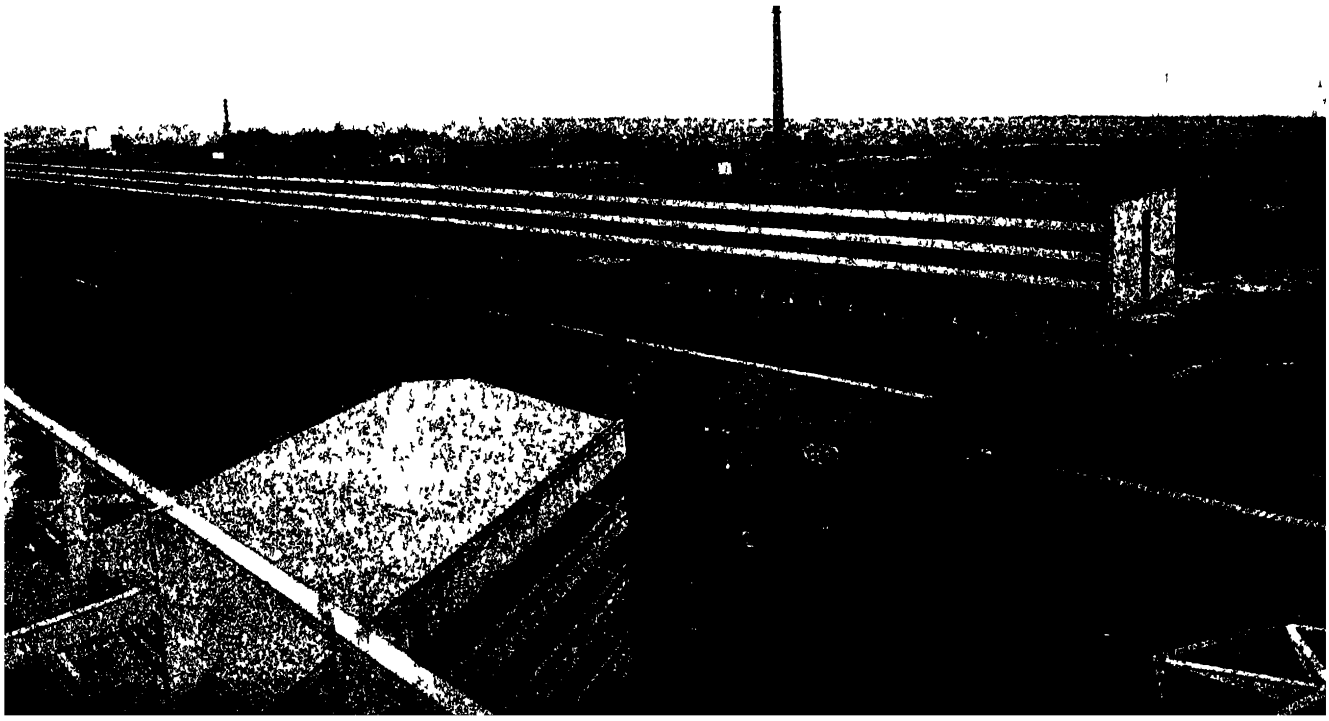
THERE is a touch of pride in Dr. Anil Kakodkar's voice as he outlines the total commitment to safety that drives scientists and engineers at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay, about 30 km from Mumbai. And as was made clear during a two-day visit to the laboratories and vast engineering halls at BARC, the pride is wholly justifiable. As part of their mission to ensure total safety, hundreds of scientists and engineers simulate a Loss of Coolant Accident in a nuclear reactor, study the effects of an earthquake-like situation, and build up a series of measures to ensure that radioactive releases into the atmosphere from nuclear power stations are well below permissible limits.

Safety is the watchword right from the stage of designing a nuclear reactor. Kakodkar, one of the foremost nuclear engineers in the country, said, "Design of a nuclear reactor is one important aspect of safety. You have to evaluate the normal and abnormal conditions under which a reactor will behave. Radiation protection is another important area (of safety)."

Y.S.R. Prasad, Chairman and Managing Director, Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPC), defined safety in the nuclear field as "avoiding the release of radioactivity into the atmosphere". The NPC operates 10 nuclear power reactors, two each at Tarapur in Maharashtra, Rawatbhatta in Rajasthan, Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu, Narora in Uttar Pradesh and Kakrapar in Gujarat. Prasad said, "In the 30 years since the Tarapur reactors were commissioned, we have had no incidents of release of radioactivity into the atmosphere which has harmed people." This safety culture is in no small measure due to the vision of Homi Bhabha, the founding father of India's nuclear electricity programme.

VIVEK BENDRE

The Modular Laboratory building at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre premises in Trombay, near Mumbai.



Radiation in excess can damage the environment and affect human beings. What is more, radiation cannot be seen. However, although in the public mind, radiation and radioactive materials are associated with nuclear reactors alone, the fact remains that radiation is always present in the atmosphere. It is also used in medicine for treatment of cancer. Radioactive materials such as uranium, thorium, radium and potassium are present on land, in sea, in the air and even in human bodies. The human body contains potassium-40, which emits radiation. Cosmic radiation is also constantly streaming towards the earth from outer space.

When the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was created in August 1954, Bhabha mandated that the Atomic Energy Establishment (AEET) should handle radiation in such a manner that it caused no harm to people and to the environment. He stipulated that standards should be so set that others could be asked to emulate them.

Dr. Umesh C. Mishra, Director, Health, Safety and Environment Group, BARC, said that Bhabha's mandate had been followed "in letter and spirit". Thus, unlike in most nuclear countries, he said, in India, environmental surveillance is undertaken even before a nuclear facility starts functioning. "We established a chain of Environment Survey Laboratories (ESL) at all major nuclear sites long before any statutory regulations were established by government agencies."

ESLs were established several years before the reactors at Tarapur, Rawatbhatta, Kalpakkam, Narora and Kakrapar attained criticality. There is also an ESL at Jaduguda, Bihar, where the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) has its complex for mining and processing natural uranium *(Frontline,* September 10).

The ESLs study samples of soil, grass, plants, milk, water, fish, crabs, and so on, around the site of the nuclear power plants and collect data about the baseline radioactivity before the reactors start generating electricity. The ESLs have kept up with the times and have state-of-the-art equipment and talented scientists to ensure compliance with radiation exposure limits for the public set by the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

The ESLs collect samples of drinking water, food items, air, sea water, goat's thyroid, and so on from a number of locations over a radius of 30 km all through the year. (Goat's thyroid is a sensitive biomarker for the presence of even extremely low levels of iodine-131 in the environment.) In addition, the scientists routinely sample the atmosphere for tritium or estimated particulate activity. Grass is analysed for deposited radionuclides.

All the ESLs report to Mishra. His group comprising more than 500 scientists is responsible for providing radiation protection services for all the DAE units, covering the entire nuclear fuel cycle, and all radiation users in the country, including industrial, agricultural, medical and research installations.

The ESLs, said Mishra, collect data throughout the life of the plant so as to be able to detect any degradation in the environment. No facility in India has so far been decommissioned, but even if one were, the ESL would continue to remain functional so that the results of the decommissioning can be known, said Mishra.

These ESLs, situated in the residential colonies of nuclear facilities, are open to the public. "Initially, an impression that we are secretive gained ground. But it was never our intention," Mishra said. The data collected by the ESLs, he added, were available to the public too. University students use it for project work and some are trained there.

Mishra noted that while in many other countries, radiation protection personnel were drawn from among, or reported to, employees in the nuclear plants concerned, in India they reported to the Health, Safety and Environment Group. "This means we do not compromise on safety," he added.

The safety culture is in no small measure due to the vision of Homi Bhabha, the founding father of India's nuclear electricity programme.

IF radiation is released from a nuclear plant and it warrants immediate action, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) is informed. The AERB, the watchdog body for nuclear installations, lays down safety policies and standards connected with the application of radiation and radioisotopes. Its Safety Review Committee reviews all safety aspects of nuclear operations under the DAE; the executive functions in respect of the implementation of safety rest with the Health Physics Division of BARC.

Mishra said, "We report our findings to the AERB, which will decide whether it is safe to continue the operation of the plant."

Every nuclear power station has a Health Physics Unit which keeps tabs on

Eye in the sky

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

AN image of a helicopter appears on a computer console inside the Modular Laboratory building, with its host of research centres, at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). As it flies over Kalpakkam, Sadras and nearby places on a map of India, a green dot appears. As the helicopter moves farther afield, the dots turn blue, and then red. Dr. M.C. Abani, Head of the Radiation Safety Systems Division (RSSD) at BARC, explained: "The green dot indicates that there is no radiation. When the helicopter flies over a contaminated area, the colour changes. Blue and red dots indicate slightly higher levels of radiation." Abani said that the simulation had showed that at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu, where the Madras Atomic Power Station is located, "there is no (dangerous) level of radiation".

The helicopter is an Aerial Gamma Spectrometry System (AGSS), developed by BARC. It has two sophisticated instruments – a global positioning system (GPS) and a gamma spectrometer. In the event of a radiation emergency, the AGSS helps assess the severity of the accident and the extent of the deposited activity over the area. Dr. K.S. Pradeepkumar, officer-in-charge, Site Emergency Control Centre, RSSD, said: "If there is any large-scale radioactivity scram, you have to identify and map the area affected. This system can scan hundreds of square kilometres quickly, identify the affected area and help us take countermeasures."

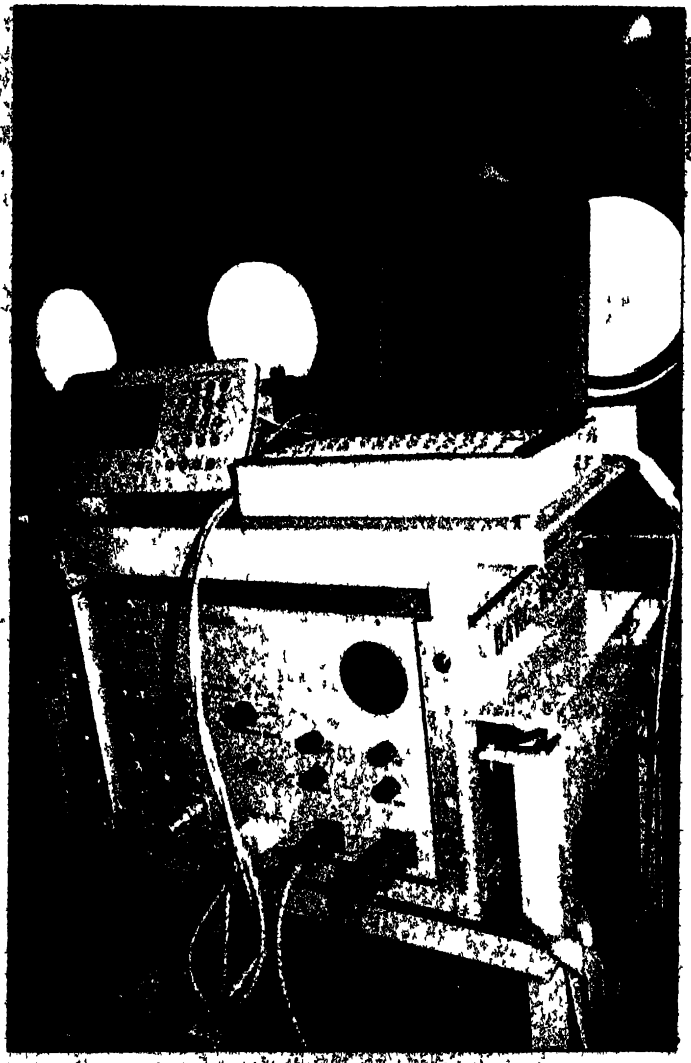
Dr. Umesh C. Mishra, Director, Health, Safety and Environment Group, BARC, called it "a marvellous system. The GPS, which was linked to satellites,

uld, dispense informa-
on on the latitude, longi-
de and altitude. The
mma spectrometer
lped detect radiation.
This is of interest not only
) us but to the defence ser-
ces in case of nuclear, bio-
gical and chemical
arfare. This system is also
eful if detecting lost or
olen radioactive sources,"
id Mishra.

Dr. Anil Kakodkar,
irector, BARC, called
e GPS "a good system"
hich could relay data on
diation within a short
me.

BARC had developed
ground-based system
ith the GPS for use
hen information on lat-
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he Environmental
adiation Monitor with
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RMNA), with a
mma spectrometer,
uld be despatched to
y part of the country to
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in from Mumbai to
ne; it showed no radia-
on waves on the com-
ter screen en route. The
ilways had permitted
e BARC to monitor the rest of the
untry, Mishra said.

BARC is a member of the Global
vironmental Radiation Monitoring
twork (GERMON), which is a com-
ed programme of the World Health
ganisation (WHO) and the United
tions Environment Programme
NEP). They came together to pro-
de it after the accident at the nuclear



The helicopter-borne Aerial Gamma Spectrometry System, which could help assess rapidly the intensity of any environmental radiation in the event of a nuclear accident.

reactor at Chernobyl in April 1986 which led to the release of intense radioactivity into the environment.

The three objectives of the network were: to collect global radiation data on a routine basis; to assess the impact on public health and environment rapidly in case of accidents; to provide information on environmental radiation resulting from a major nuclear accident; and to help those countries that did not monitor their environment radiation to set up monitoring programmes. Every three months, member-countries communicated their data to the headquarters in Paris.

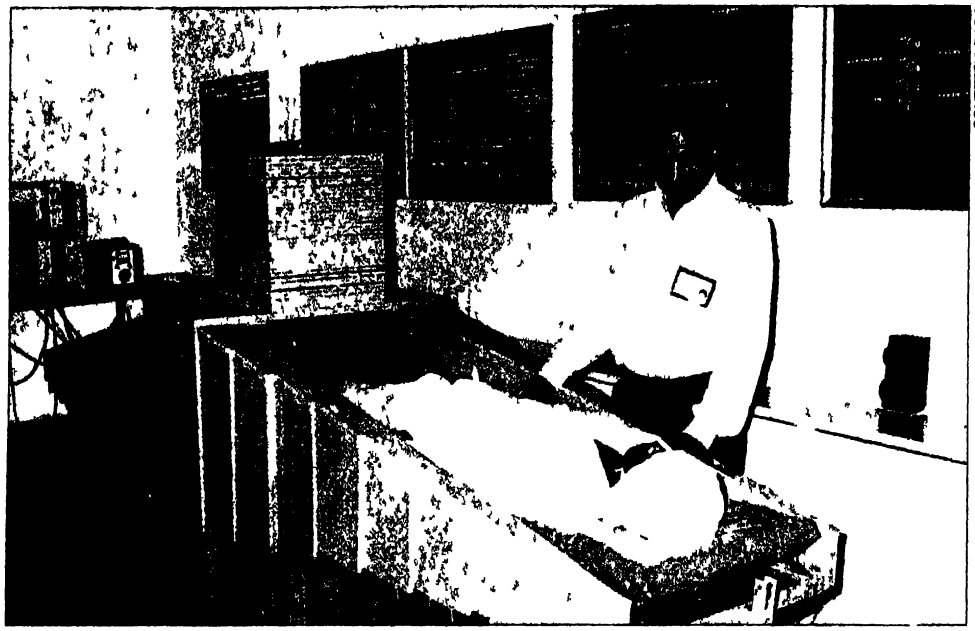
Sixteen GERMON stations have been set up in various parts of India, and 12 more are to follow. Each station consisted of an ionisation chamber and gamma dose monitors; beta gamma air particulate activity monitor to measure radon/thoron daughter products and long-lived fission products typically expected from nuclear accidents; and air sampling system where the filter is analysed for gamma emitting radionuclides.

BARC and the Indian industry have developed a wide range of systems, devices and instruments for radiation protection. BARC had sensitive instruments that could measure radiation at a level far below the harmful level. Indian industry manfuctured plastic suits, masks, badges, and so on, needed by radiation workers. India was therefore not dependent on other countries for these instruments – except the hyperpure germanium detector, which was mainly required for research. S. Kannan, Head of the Radiation Protection Instruments Centre at BARC, said, "We make instruments for radiation protection, radiation measurement and quality assurance." ■

: radiation dose received by workers
d the release of radioactivity into the
nosphere. It reports to the Health,
fety and Environment Group of
ARC.

Every radiation worker is personally
nitored, irrespective of whether or not
or she is at risk. Every such worker
ars a badge which records the dose he
she receives. If there is any possibility
t the worker may have been exposed to radiation through inhalation or ingestion, he or she is subjected to bioassay. Urine and excreta samples are analysed for radio-nuclides. The whole-body monitoring laboratory at BARC examines every year several thousands of radiation workers for any sign of radiation. Whole-body counters have also been installed at the Tarapur Atomic Power Station, the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station, the Madras Atomic Power Station, UCIL, Jaduguda, and the Nuclear Fuel Complex, Hyderabad. The radiation doses received by a worker are monitored all through his or her life and the data is stored.

Mishra said, "We have data to show that the incidence of cancer among our workers is far lower than among the general population. This is because of better medical coverage and education. We can therefore conclude that there is no



COURTESY BARC

An employee in a nuclear power station undergoing checks for possible radiation ingestion. The whole-body monitoring laboratory at the BARC keeps tabs on the level of radiation that employees at nuclear power stations may be receiving.



COURTESY BARC

The Environmental Radiation Monitor with Navigational Aid (ERMNA), a system that can be deployed in surface transport vehicles to study radiation status along the route.

adverse impact of radiation on workers in the nuclear industry in our country."

Data is maintained about doctors and nurses who administer radiation therapy to cancer patients in hospitals run by the DAE. Exercises are run on machines with the help of dosimeters to see whether the right amount of radiation is delivered.

NUCLEAR power stations conduct three types of emergency exercises: plant emergency, site emergency and off-site emergency. Unless these drills are conducted to check the preparedness of the staff, the AERB will not give a nuclear power station the operating certificate.

Plant emergency is a localised emergency, whereas site emergency extends over the campus of the station. Off-site emergency is a much bigger exercise: it covers the public domain over a radius of 16 km and is conducted every two years.

Mishra said that particular emphasis was laid on re-training personnel. In key installations such as power reactors, research reactors and fuel reprocessing plants, only certified health physicists who qualified in written examinations, plant-related check-lists and interviews were recruited. This applied to both radiation protection workers and plant personnel. Regular training courses were held on radiation protection. "We have talented manpower. This is a big asset," Mishra said. Besides, only qualified engineers were recruited for operating the reactors.

According to Dr. Ashok Mohan, Technical Advisor to Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, re-training and movement of qualified personnel from one nuclear power station to another had an important bearing on safety.

Radiation may have two kinds of harmful effects – somatic and genetic. The former affects only the individual concerned; the latter affects the children of the individual too. Mishra said that there were many misgivings that exposure to radiation could lead to genetic deformities. He added: "This is not possible. This type of dose cannot be delivered... Even occupational radiation workers (in hospitals) receive only small doses and are always monitored. We have not observed any deformities of any type – either somatic or genetic – in our occupational workers or their children."

Ashok Mohan said that the DAE had inherited a system where there were no limits to safety procedures. "We do not stop just because it does not look probable. As technology is improving, systems are improving. The whole philosophy is that we should try a little more." ■

This is the second article in a two-part series on issues of nuclear safety. The first part appeared in the previous issue.

For safeguards against bio-piracy

Governments of developing countries must recognise the urgency to protect their biological wealth and tackle the issue of a soft patent regime at the global review meeting of TRIPS at Seattle.

BIPLAB DASGUPTA

WEEK after week there are reports of the patenting of some Indian plant variety or the other by multinational agri-business companies. First, it was the patent on neem and its several uses, then came *haldi* (turmeric), followed by basmati, *karela* (bitter gourd), *kalajira* (black cumin seeds, brinjal... Most of these have been an integral part of traditional systems of medicine in India, evolved over centuries mainly by small village communities. The medicinal and other useful properties of most of these plants and their many varieties were widely known, although these were not properly documented in most cases. There was no bar on access to such traditional knowledge and no individual or company, far less a foreign one, thought of obtaining private rights on the use of these varieties.

The multinational companies (MNCs) began to scour poor countries in April 1994, when, following the signing of the Marrakesh Agreement, particularly the TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) component, countries which were a party to the agreement were asked to protect (read individualise) their plant varieties by means of patent legislation. Time-bound proprietary rights began to be bestowed on individuals or companies instead of on the communities with a traditional knowledge base. Since patent implies the exclusion of others from IPRs, only the patent-holder is legally authorised to produce or to regulate production by selling, leasing or mortgaging such rights. Anyone producing those products without the permission of the patent-holder, obtained in exchange of a fee or royalty, would be violating the holder's legal rights.

TOWARDS SEATTLE

Patent rights have been internationalised. This was one of the major features of the TRIPS agreement. Every member-country of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which was established in January 1995 in order to monitor the implementation of the Marrakesh Agreement, had to recast its patent law in line with the global patent regime as ordained in the agreement, within a given time-frame. The poor countries were given a deadline of end-1999 to modify their laws, while pharmaceutical and agro-chemical industries were given another five years. But that was no more than a formal concession devoid of substance. The time agreed upon was 2005, along with the 'transitory rules' regarding Exclusive Marketing Rights (EMRs). A precondition for WTO membership was agreeing to the EMRs of companies that had patented their products during the transitional period, the transitional period being the time

A basmati rice crop in Andhra Pradesh. A Texas-based company, which has patented a variety of the rice, now even has the right to exclude indigenous basmati from the Indian market unless it is patented as a product distinct from or produced through a different process from that of the company's product.



between obtaining WTO membership (1994 in the case of India) and overhauling the patent legislation in line with the global format (2000 in the case of India in general and 2005 in the case of pharmaceuticals). Such transitional rights were not to be questioned by national patent laws.

The *modus operandi* of the MNCs has been to collect the plant varieties and their germplasms from poor countries in order to cross-breed them with other varieties, and claim that they had invented something novel, non-obvious and of practical use (which are the requirements for acquiring patent rights), and then to patent them in their own countries or in any other country of their choice. Patenting a product in the United States or Burkino Faso or Burundi is as good as patenting it in Calcutta.

A typical example has been the patenting of basmati by Rictec, a Texas-based firm which, after collecting specimens from India and Pakistan and experimenting and cross-breeding them with other varieties, eventually patented them: first as Texmati, then as Kashmati, and finally as Basamati. Rictec is claiming novelty because its Basamati, although identical in taste to the sought-after rice variety produced in India and Pakistan, has been produced by following a different method and in a different terrain. And as such, with the passage of the EMR legislation early this year, the company is, legally and effectively, the owner of basamati. This ownership right has been instantly recognised by WTO members. They now have even the right to exclude indigenous basmati from the Indian market unless it is patented as a product distinct from the variety patented by the Texas-based company or as one that is identical but has been produced through a different process. Under the TRIPS agreement, the onus of providing this is now on the Indian or Pakistani basmati producer.

ONE way of combating the menace of bio-piracy is by challenging the patent claims by MNCs in the courts of the rich countries. On the turmeric patent, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) won a battle. But such legal battles are expensive and time-consuming, and not easy to fight in each and every case. The main difficulty, even assuming that the judicial system is neutral, is that courts in the developed countries rely mainly on documentary evidence. Such documents are hard to come by in India. Unlike in the case of China or the Arab countries, India is not known to have had a systematic method of documentation. Without documents a patent application cannot be challenged in a foreign court on the ground of "prior art".

Another method is to counter TRIPS with the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), which was signed by 170 countries in 1993, as against 150 signatories for TRIPS. The CBD recognises the collective rights of the village communities, and not those of individuals or companies. It further decrees that a rich country's demand for patent rights should not be at the cost of the overriding need for the conservation of plant diversity. It was possible for India to insist that both TRIPS and the CBD, one insisting on conformity and the other on diversity, cannot be right at the same time. Unfortunately, such arguments have not been fruitfully deployed by the Indian government in international negotiations to counter patentability, and as a result, individualisation of plant varieties.

This emphasis on the collective right of village communities can be taken a step further by arguing that the government, as the guardian of numerous village communities, should be permitted to exercise proprietary rights on their behalf. Such a step is legally feasible and defensible, and would have the additional advantage of protecting plant varieties. Once the sovereign right of a government over the biological wealth of a country is recognised, one can go even further and prepare an inventory of Indian flora, particularly the 8,000 medicinal plants targeted by the MNCs, and get those patented before the companies gain access to them. This is the commonsense approach to saving biological resources from lurking predators, rather than engaging in costly and risky legal battles in foreign courts.

No government in power in India appears to have been concerned enough about the urgency of protecting the biological wealth.... The rich countries, poor in biological resources, are keen to gain a time-bound monopoly on India's biological wealth.

PERHAPS there are better ways of preventing this poaching that has been going on for five years. But no government in power in India appears to have been concerned enough about the urgency of protecting the biological wealth. Something needs to be done now, and fast. The rich countries, poor in biological resources, are keen to gain a time-bound monopoly on India's biological wealth.

Article 27(3)(b) of TRIPS provides an option for patenting, that is, by way of *sui generis* or a combination of patent and *sui generis*. *Sui generis* is different from patenting but serves the same purpose of 'protecting' plant varieties. Generous though it appears at first glance, it is analogous to a patent in its essential features. The intent is the same as patenting, that is, privatising rights over plant varieties, but where the recording of rights would be simpler and less formal. *Sui generis* that India has in mind is UPOV (International Plant Breeders' Rights Convention), a soft patent regime that has its origins in an international convention in 1961 and was supported by 37 countries. UPOV has three versions: the original 1961 version and two more that were formulated in 1978 and 1991. Of these, only the 1991 version remains.

A major criticism of UPOV is that it is more concerned about protecting the interests of the plant breeder than the farmer. In its 1991 version the rights of village communities have been ignored, as also the right of re-use and exchange of seeds, while the breeder has been given the right to seize the harvest of the farmer should he fail to pay royalty for the use of seeds.

Further, given its insistence on stability and uniformity, an ordinary farmer would not be able to get the seeds developed by him registered, while the seed market would be dominated by MNCs engaged in agri-business, such as Monsanto (see separate story). The MNCs, it is feared, may use genetic information obtained from farmlands without paying any fee to the farmer to develop seeds and register them under UPOV, and then sell them at a high price back to farmers and those who had supplied the genetic information. This has revealed another serious dichotomy. The rich countries insist on the recognition of plants and their germplasms that are located mainly in the poor countries as the common heritage of mankind, access to which should be open and free. But at



At a gene bank in Brunswick, Germany.

the same time they have no qualms about selling at a high price plant varieties and products they produce (and patent) from those countries

Biodiversity legislation likely to be passed in India in a year gives MNCs easy access to biological resources for a fee to be paid to the community in the name of 'benefit-sharing' The idea of benefit-sharing makes no sense in an unequal world with the MNCs on the one side and the communities, not having the faintest idea of the economic price of their resources, on the other It is more than likely that by paying a negligible amount MNCs would seize the right of 'bio-prospecting', and arrogate to themselves the rights of these communities Non-governmental organisation activists such as Vandana Shiva fear that in the long run, this benefit-sharing would force India to pay out a great deal more in the form of royalties to buy those plant varieties now patented elsewhere than what the country would obtain from such paltry 'compensations' Although this legislation is purported to conform to the CBD, it does not explicitly recognise indigenous knowledge, nor does it recognise village communities. It only talks about 'persons' with whom benefits would have to be shared by the companies. This legislation is likely to come in conflict with the existing laws relating to traditional management practices in areas inhabited by the Scheduled Tribes and with the Constitution (73rd Amendment) relating to local bodies

Article 27(3)(b) of TRIPS, incorporating the provision for *sui generis*, will be one of the major items on the agenda at the global review of TRIPS at Seattle in November 1999 If the governments of the poor countries are united in their resolve, they can induce the rich countries to accept a wide definition of *sui generis* that recognises indigenous knowledge and community rights and moves away for the soft patent format of UPOV If they fail, it is more than likely that even this mild provision of *sui generis* would be taken away and all the plant varieties would be required to be patented

On the issue of patentability, India seems to have missed a major opportunity on May 11, 1998, the day a nuclear device was exploded at Pokhran Until that day, the European Parliament had no legislation on patenting of life forms Although since the Marrakesh Agreement, European governments were under pressure from biotechnology and genetic engineering firms to move towards a patent regime, the Green and Left parties and a large section of the Social Democrats in various countries took the view that life was not patentable During the first reading in the European Parliament of the draft bill on patent on biotechnology, an amendment was moved by these political forces against bio-piracy This bill required the applicant for patent rights to disclose fully the source of its genetic material, and also to declare that such material had been taken out of its country of origin Had this amendment been passed, it would have been possible for India to bring forward a corresponding legislation that would have effectively prevented the poaching of biological resources More important, Europe would have become a powerful ally of India on this issue and it would have been possible to bring pressure on the U S and Japan in Seattle to incorporate such provisions in their respective laws

WHEN this writer, along with Indira Jaisingh, Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court, went to Brussels at the invitation of some NGOs, and met several members of the European Parliament, their impression was that a strong intervention from the poor countries, led preferably jointly by India and Pakistan, could tilt the balance in favour of this amendment on bio-piracy, as the difference between the two sides was not big, it was a matter of just 30 votes The author arranged to send urgent fax messages to the Ministers concerned, with the help of the Indian Ambassador, urging immediate and strong intervention as time was running out When he returned to India on May 9, the Ministers concerned confirmed that they had received the messages and were in agreement with the author, but during the intervening 10 crucial days nothing concrete had taken place Action taken by the Ministries was too late to have any effect on the deliberations at the European Parliament on May 11, the day the biotechnology bill, without any safeguards against bio-piracy, was adopted. Rather than make common cause with Pakistan on basmati, the government's preoccupation at that time was with Pokhran-II ■

For an alternative patents regime

There is a strong case for the revision of the TRIPS agreement concerning the protection of plant varieties, drawing lessons from India with regard to the development of a *sui generis* system.

PHILIPPE CULLET

THE agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), one of the treaties administered by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has been a subject of controversy in India. Membership of the WTO and the ratification of TRIPS have significant implications for developing countries. Public awareness about the implications of TRIPS with regard to biopiracy heightened following the patenting in some countries of neem and its various properties and the application for a patent on some medicinal properties of *haldi* (turmeric) in the United States, which was turned down after a review.

The WTO ministerial conference slated for November 1999 in Seattle, whose member-states are to decide on the launch of a new round of trade negotiations, will raise the stakes once again. More significant is the fact that India has to prepare for the implementation of TRIPS and initiate a broad debate on the issue since any legislation to protect a plant variety should, theoretically, be adopted before the year-end. The issue of protection of plant varieties has received a fair degree of attention. And a fresh look at the provisions concerning plant varieties and the responses being proposed in India is in order.

TRIPS provides for the availability of patents for inventions, whether they are products or processes, in all fields of technology. Member-states can restrict patentability to some cases. For instance, they can exclude plants and animals from patentability. But TRIPS mandates the introduction of a form of legal protection on plant varieties. Member-countries have the liberty to "provide for the protection of plant varieties either by patents or by an effective *sui generis* system or by any combination thereof" (Article 27.3.b). This constitutes one of the few areas where countries are given some margin of appreciation in devising a protection system.

There has traditionally been no legal protection for plant varieties in India or at the international level. Seeds were, for instance, exchanged among farmers and countries on the basis of the principle that the means of enhancement of food security should not fall into the domain of commercial interests. This free sharing of knowledge has in no way hampered the development of new plant varieties or agricultural research. Indeed, the hybrid varieties of the Green Revolution, celebrated as the ultimate solution to the challenges of improving food availability per capita, were developed entirely on the basis of free access to and free sharing of knowledge pertaining to biological resources.

In Europe and in North America, the principle of free access to information has been progressively restricted following pressure from the private sector for the establishment of a system of private property rights. This has been concomitant with the decline of agriculture as a subsistence activity and the overall commercialisation of the primary sector. In India, socio-economic conditions differ dramatically from those obtaining in the countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The primary sector still constitutes more than a quarter of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs about two-thirds of the working population. Further, agriculture is still mainly a subsistence activity. The current Patents Act reflects both the traditional practices of free exchange and the socio-economic conditions of the country. It provides, for instance, that methods of agriculture or horticulture cannot be patented. Further, in the case of substances intended for use as food, it restricts patentability to the process and provides for a shorter duration of the rights.

The TRIPS agreement broadly reflects the current legal situation in the OECD countries. It thus imposes a significant burden of adaptation on countries such as India. In a few cases, it allows member-states the liberty to determine the form of protection (as in the case of plant variety) they want to adopt. In fields such as pharmaceuticals, patent protection is compulsory. If the new regime seems inappropriate to the local situation in India, the only remedy is to lobby for a change in the agreement or for India's withdrawal from the WTO.

Here the focus is on the current proposals at the governmental and non-governmental levels concerning the development of a *sui generis* system. All these proposals fall short of constituting appropriate alternatives for India. Efforts should be directed at the development of such an alternative. While fighting



patents and working towards a reform of the WTO agreements can be pursued in the long term, it is of utmost importance to use the scope provided in the treaties.

THE government has for the past several years been in the process of drafting a Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights Act, which is to constitute a direct response to the TRIPS agreement. The draft mainly focusses on the definition of formal plant breeders' rights and follows closely on the model of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV Convention). The UPOV Convention specifically seeks to develop plant breeders' rights. Patents and plant breeders' rights are conceptually similar Both seek to give the private sector incentives to enter the seed business. Plant breeders' rights are, however, less firm than patents and provide some exceptions to breeders' rights in favour of farmers.

The draft Act provides, as in the case of the UPOV Convention, that protection will be available only for varieties that conform to the criteria of novelty, distinctness, uniformity and stability. Further, the draft explicitly states that, in order to be protected, the 'new variety' must be clearly distinct by at least one essential characteristic from wild relatives and traditional cultivars. In this sense, it is geared to providing incentives to the private sector to engage in the seed business.

Although the title suggests that the Act also provides for farmers' rights, it focusses on plant breeders' rights, which are inherently incapable of recognising farmers as breeders. Farmers are seen as cultivators and managers of agro-biodiversity, whose varieties cannot be protected under the Act. At the most, farmers are granted the rights to save, use, exchange, share and sell the produce of a protected variety. These do not constitute novel rights but rather drastically restrict existing rights.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL activists have been active in the field of plant variety protection. Their efforts have focussed on both practical activities and policy development. Significant attention has been devoted to the setting up of biodiversity registers for benefit-sharing and in order to develop alternative legislative frameworks.

A cryo-preservation facility and biotechnology laboratory at the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute near Thiruvananthapuram.



C. RATHEESH KUMAR

Biodiversity registers

Biodiversity registers have been proposed partly to fight patent applications. The process has been promoted on a large scale by the Centre for Ecological Sciences in Bangalore but has also been undertaken independently, as in Pattuvam village in Kannur district of Kerala.

The idea is to document existing plant and animal species and knowledge relating to these resources. This can then be used to show that a given patent application uses information which is already part of the common body of knowledge in use in a given community or in the country in general. This is enough to defeat a patent application since the patents system is premised on rewarding 'inventions'.

Biodiversity registers are of great importance in fighting unwarranted patents However, they do not contribute to the development of an alternative to the patents system as they are conceived exclusively as a defensive strategy against patents. They serve to show that the knowledge already exists and thus cannot be patented, but do not provide any other form of protection for this existing knowledge.

Benefit-sharing

As a corollary to the setting up of biodiversity registers, the concept of benefit-sharing has been put forward. Its proponents include, for instance, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai Benefit-sharing is directly linked to the idea that the knowledge of farmers and local communities is not susceptible to fulfilling patenting criteria or even that it should not be included in the patent system. It thus seeks simply to provide a form of monetary compensation for the use of local people's knowledge. The concept of benefit-sharing has been enshrined in the proposed Biological Diversity Act, which provides that the national biodiversity fund shall be utilised, for instance, for "channelling benefits to the conservers of biological resources, creators and holders of knowledge". There is no hint that the creators and holders of knowledge may be the owners of these resources and should thus have the right to determine whether they

want to sell and at what price.

Overall, benefit-sharing constitutes a useful strategy to mitigate some of the undesirable impacts of patents on biological resources for current holders of biodiversity-related knowledge. Without benefit-sharing, such knowledge may be 'taken' from its current holders without any form of acknowledgement or compensation. However, benefit-sharing does not contribute to the definition of an alternative regime to patents. Indeed, while it seeks to limit the impact of the introduction of patents in the field of biological resources, it does not seek to provide any rights to current holders of knowledge. In this sense, it assumes that local people do not have intellectual property rights (IPRs) over their knowledge and that a monetary reward constitutes a sufficient compensation. Further, benefit-sharing is not necessarily a practical or desirable solution since there are many instances where the source of the materials used is very difficult to trace to a particular community, region or even country. This is because most people around the world depend to a large extent on plants which are originally from other areas for some of their staple food. Since centuries may have passed since the first transfers took place, it is hardly feasible to trace the variety to its original source even if this was deemed to be desirable.

The dangers of benefit-sharing are also illustrated by what is seen by some as a model benefit-sharing transaction. In the case of Aarogyappacha, the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute near Thiruvananthapuram decided unilaterally that the manufacturer of the drug award the Kani tribe, who shared their knowledge of the anti-fatigue properties of the plant, 50 per cent of the licence fee and royalty. If the percentage awarded to the Kanis is high, this transaction involves the transfer of the IPRs of the Kanis to the institute. While the monetary compensation is welcome, the rights should stay with the first holders of the knowledge.

Community IPRs

It has also been suggested that India should develop legislation which would extend the circle of potential holders of patents and make patents available to local communities. Proposals by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resources Policy, New Delhi, and by K. Abdul Latheef of Kozhikode have been circulated. Community intellectual property rights are premised on the idea that the current patents system only recognises the northern industrial model of innovation. The idea is therefore to foster intellectual property laws which recognise the more informal, communal system of innovation through which farmers and indigenous communities produce, select, improve and breed a diversity of crop and livestock varieties.

These proposals are significant insofar as they seek to give local holders of knowledge actual property rights. However, they do not constitute appropriate models for the development of an alternative to the patents system. This is due to the very nature of patents as monopoly rights, which cannot reward several actors. By granting local communities the right to seek patents, they are put on a par with any private company which is in this business. This implies that even if farmers manage to patent some of their innovations, they are bound to lose out in the long run since private companies will always be able to innovate faster than them.

All the proposals reviewed focus on fighting patents. However, the TRIPS agreement does allow for an alternative form of protection for plant varieties.

Towards an alternative system

Exclusion of patents in agriculture has traditionally been premised on elements of public morality, the need to foster innovations at all levels from the smallest farmer to multinational companies and the need to restrict the commercialisation of sectors dealing with the most basic needs of humankind, such as food and healthcare. While these characteristics are valid even today, TRIPS now requires the introduction of a form of plant variety protection.

The introduction of patents in agriculture should be avoided in the current socio-economic context characterised by the existence of a variety of actors involved in agricultural management and agricultural innovations. Patents are by definition incapable of apportioning benefits in a manner that fits this reality since the grant of a patent implies that the patentee derives all the benefits associated with the invention. Patents also have the undesirable side-effect of implying that all knowledge which is not patented is in the public domain and thus freely available. Any knowledge which cannot be protected by patents because it is not 'state-of-the-art' is thus deprived of legal protection. This is very unfortunate because it gives the impression that the work of the managers of biodiversity is devoid of value while the work carried out in laboratories is the only one which adds value to the final product. Finally, patent rights are not known to foster the conservation or sustainable use of biological diversity.

Current proposals clearly do not constitute a full alternative to patents. The plant variety legislation is closely modelled on the UPOV Convention and recognises plant breeders' rights which are, like patents, monopoly rights meant to foster the involvement of the private sector in the seed industry. Some of the other proposals are extremely interesting in the context of a patent regime but do not contribute to the development of an alternative. Clearly, India should develop an alternative system, not one modelled after UPOV. The UPOV system was developed by European countries at a time when subsistence agriculture had already mostly disappeared and when an overwhelming percentage of the population did not work in the primary sector anymore. These conditions do not obtain in India.

An alternative regime should have some of these characteristics: First, it should provide for the establishment of property rights for all actors involved in agricultural management and seed improvement. To this end, it should aim at protecting not only the interests of corporate biotechnology firms and seed companies, as is the case with patents and plant breeders' rights but also the interests of farmers, who are among the major seed producers in India. One solution would be to provide a two-pronged recognition of commercial breeders' rights and farmers' rights, a proposal made at the international level a decade ago but which is still being discussed. Concerning farmers, the aim should be to protect farmers' current techniques or varieties and to allow them to derive benefits from any improvements they will carry out.

Secondly, the system should provide for non-monopoly rights. This directly derives from the fact that various actors contribute to agricultural innovation and that each of them should be entitled to property rights over their inventions, whether they are state-of-the-art or not. This would, for instance, imply that while commercial breeders can have the right to market their varieties, farmer-breeders can at the same time have the right to use their own varieties, exchange them and sell them. In this framework, different property rights systems exist side by side. A non-monopoly system implies that no

single entity derives all the benefits associated with a given invention and that various inventors can have concurrent rights.

Thirdly, an alternative regime should recognise the fact that not all inventors seek to commercialise their knowledge. Indeed, one of the major shortcomings of the patent system is the assumption that the only incentive for innovation is the possibility of commercialising an invention and receiving monetary returns from it. Some farmers may try to take advantage of the possibility of commercialising their knowledge, while others may not. This fact should therefore be recognised in the proposed framework.

Fourthly, the TRIPS agreement requires that the alternative system should be 'effective'. This should not be understood as implying only the existence of legal enforcement procedures but should be understood in a broader context. While the WTO has assumed disproportionate importance in international relations partly because of the existence of a stringent dispute settlement system, plant variety protection is not regulated exclusively in TRIPS. Therefore, it is imperative that an alternative system be construed in the broader framework of India's international obligations which include, for instance, the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). Of particular relevance is Article 1 of the CBD which states that the aims of the Convention are the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The alternative system should thus contribute to the sustainable management of plant varieties.

Overall, the TRIPS agreement gives member-states the liberty to adopt plant variety protection regimes which are not based on patents. Given the current socio-economic conditions in India, this possibility should be fully utilised to strengthen the position of all innovators in the field of agricultural management. The current draft legislation, which is directly based on the UPOV Convention, should be abandoned because it provides for monopoly rights which will only benefit the private sector industry. A novel version should be drafted with a view to granting meaningful property rights to all relevant actors and foster the sustainable management of biological resources. ■

Dr. Philippe Cullet is research programme director at the International Environmental Law Research Centre in Geneva. This article draws largely from a longer paper prepared by the author that is published in the Journal of World Intellectual Property *(Volume 2, Page 617, 1999).*

■ INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Monsanto, again

Questions raised by the plasmids import controversy refuse to go away.

PARVATHI MENON
in Bangalore

THE seed and pesticide transnational, Monsanto, which in March set up what is believed to be one of the country's most advanced genetic engineering research laboratory at an estimated cost of $20 million in the premises of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, is again at the centre of a controversy. Monsanto ran into trouble with environmental groups last year over field trials it conducted on BT cotton (a genetically altered cotton variety that is resistant to bollworm attacks). Environmental activist groups, as also a significant section of the scientific community, expressed concern over the permission granted by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) for these trials, particularly in the context of Monsanto's acquisition of the patent for the 'terminator' gene technology. (A 'terminator' gene introduced in a seed will render it sterile. In traditional agricultural systems where seeds are saved from a harvest for the next crop, such technologies are seen as a major challenge and threat to community and national food security.)

The 'gene giant' (a term recently coined for the handful of transnational enterprises that control the global production/manufacture and marketing of seeds, pesticides, food and pharmaceuticals) recently applied to the DBT for permission to import 33 plasmids, or gene constructs, from its headquarters in the United States. These are to be used for genetic engineering of rice, sugarcane and some ornamental plants. "Researchers at



A specimen of Bollgard Bt, the genetically altered cotton variety from Monsanto. The multinational company ran into trouble with environmental groups first over field trial of this variety.

the Monsanto R and D Centre need to import these research materials to determine the suitability of these genes and the transformation procedure in crops like rice and sugarcane," a Monsanto press release said.

Although the DBT has not yet given Monsanto clearance for these imports ("The Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) is still examining their request," P K. Ghosh, Adviser, DBT, told *Frontline),* news that Monsanto is seeking entry into the segment of genetically altered food crops has alarmed sections of the scientific community. The imported gene sequences are likely to carry Monsanto's proprietary genes, and when used for the 'improvement' of Indian varieties will create patentable new varieties. Will the benefits of patentable research be shared?

In the absence of a national plant variety protection law, on what basis will research benefits be shared? If Monsanto, with its enormous economic clout (it has already, at an estimated cost of $4 billion, bought into leading Indian seed companies, such as Mahyco and Rallis, which it acquired when it took over the foreign interests of Cargill seeds) is allowed entry into the area of basic food crops, will Indian agriculture become dependent in the long run on its patented seeds? "It is not only the RCGM that examines and decides on clearance for all research proposals," Ghosh said. "There is also a legally set up Institutional bio-safety committee, which has a DBT representative on it and which too must give its clearance. My hand extends into Monsanto's laboratory." He said that the clearance by the RCGM was for imports alone, and that separate clearance would be needed for the introduction of these gene sequences into Indian varieties and for field trials.

ENVIRONMENTAL activist groups however do not find the DBT's assurances entirely convincing. That the imported gene constructs could contain the terminator technology is a theoretical possibility. Groups such as M.D. Nanjundaswamy's Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha have already alleged that the terminator gene is present even in BT cotton. "Monsanto will go ahead with this programme,". Nanjudaswamy said. "With the announcement of the second phase of reforms in India, the decanalisation of imports and port privatisation, Monsanto can bring in any kind of transgenic and dangerous varieties."

Any laboratory can identify the structure of the terminator gene ("Even a high school bio-chemistry student can do it," a senior scientist working at a government research institute said.) However, with the DBT having banned this technology and with a regulatory mechanism supposedly in place to vet all imports and research activities, what is of immediate concern is not the possibility of illegal import of the terminator technology, but the implications of allowing Monsanto, with its dubious international track record, into the area of genetically modified food crops.

THERE are other related issues that agitate plant geneticists. First, the lack of transparency in the way the DBT implements its bio-safety guidelines. "Why does not the DBT make public the scientific information on the 33 gene constructs imported by Monsanto," one scientist asked. "In all fairness, the DBT should form committees not just of their own people but from the public and private sector. This will help competition." The issue of intellectual property rights is another matter of concern. This geneticist said that the altered varieties generated by Monsanto with Indian germplasm should not become the company's property until India has plant variety protection laws in place.

After repeated attempts by *Frontline* to obtain Monsanto's response to some of these issues, the public relations department of the company in Mumbai responded (the director of the R and D Centre in Bangalore refused to meet or speak to *Frontline).* Some of the answers Monsanto gave on e-mail were to questions that had not in fact been asked. The company said that its application to the DBT was still under review.

To a question whether the gene constructs would have any of Monsanto's proprietary genes and how research benefits would then be shared, the terse response was that plasmids "are freely available in the public domain."

THE IISc's regulatory mechanisms function independently of and in addition to those of the DBT, according to the Institute's Director, Professor Goverdhan Mehta. "Our agreement with Monsanto has sufficient safeguards such that nothing will be done which will hurt the interests of the country," he said. Even those research projects for which Monsanto has got the DBT's clearance can be turned down by the scientific committee and bio-ethics committee of the institute that have been set up to vet all research projects proposed by Monsanto. "Any scientific activity in their R and D Centre conducted exclusively by Monsanto, or as a joint research project with the institute, or as research sponsored by Monsanto have to be cleared by the two committees," Mehta said.

On how patentable research benefits will be shared, he said that the agreement stipulated that while they would have the rights over the research that was exclusively theirs, the fruits of joint and sponsored research would be shared.

Several scientists and researchers *Frontline* spoke to felt that Monsanto appeared to be conducting its research activities under a veil of secrecy, something quite alien to the ethos of Indian science as it is practised in publicly funded research institutions. "We aren't even allowed in there," said a senior scientist from one of the departments of biological sciences. "Monsanto is not bringing in their advanced technology here," commented another scientist. "Apart from the benefits of funding what else does IISc get? Monsanto has access to IISc's pool of expertise in a large number of biological science departments, and from the liberal academic atmosphere of discussion and sharing of research. What do we get in return?"

Questions have been raised by environmental activists about the nature of the agreement between Monsanto and the IISc. These organisations have demanded that the terms of the contract be made public. Several scientists felt that there should have been some discussion about the merits or otherwise of entering into a research agreement with Monsanto.

In Mehta's view the agreement, as far as the institute is concerned, is already in the public domain."We have nothing to hide. As a publicly funded research institute, we are accountable to Parliament. The agreement was approved by the government, and I presume copies of the agreement are available with them and in Parliament. It is not for me to photocopy it and distribute it among the public."

As in some European countries and England, in India too Monsanto is up against popular movements that are closely following its every move. More than government and institutional regulatory mechanisms, it is public monitoring that may prove to be the most effective regulatory mechanism. ■

From the K-word to the T-word?

The government is promoting the bandwagon slogan of fighting "terrorism". This is a means to cover up its own failure in Kashmir, and to paint internal threats in external, communal, colours.

■ BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

POOR Rajeshwar Dayal, once called a father of the Indian Foreign Service(IFS), who died last month, must already be turning in his grave. He simply could not have believed that the service he had so carefully nurtured into a professionally competent and skilful diplomatic corps has so quickly become inept, tactless and disoriented. Witness the horrible mess the Foreign Office and the Indian embassy in France made of the Lalita Oraon case with their disgraceful handling of the issue of her mistreatment and probable physical abuse, and the French media's and public's outrage.

In the absence of an independent investigation into the facts of the case, we still do not know what happened to Oraon before September 6, when she was handed over to the French authorities in a state of extreme distress, knife in hand. But she was clearly the victim of a horrendously exploitative relationship with her masters. She was very nearly driven to suicide by their decision to sack her without notice or compensation. We also have it on the authority of one of France's most respected physicians, and the highly regarded Committee Against Modern Slavery (CCEM), that Oraon recently sustained serious injuries, even genital mutilation, which could "not have been self-inflicted".

Clearly, this was a case deserving the most serious and sober attention and inquiry on the part of the Indian mission, especially once the matter attracted the attention of the French legal system. After all, the very first duty of the mission is to protect the life and limb of Indian citizens. Instead, the embassy rushed, without ascertaining the facts, to blame the victim and defend her employer. Worse, it disingenuously tried to turn the tables on the CCEM by accusing it of having harmed Oraon and the French media of practising "defamation and disinformation".

Embarrassed, New Delhi tried to control the damage by announcing that it would send an Additional Secretary to inquire into the matter. This move was stalled and sabotaged.

Meanwhile, the Paris mission issued another aggressive statement, demanding that Oraon be handed over to it, citing the Vienna Convention on diplomatic privileges. It now turns out that it is Oraon, not the French Government, that resisted the handover. The French authorities were wrong to deny Indian journalists access to Oraon. But the Indian mission's role was far more blameworthy. It tried to deny, suppress, and then dismiss, the truth.

The Indian embassy's reprehensible conduct in the Oraon case is symptomatic of the attitudes of many Indian diplomats towards their servants. Most pay them a pittance (Oraon received less than a tenth of the legal minimum wage) while overworking them – an 18-hour day is normal – without a semblance of security or dignity. These "heaven-born" worthies should know that such attitudes are regarded as uncivilised in the societies where they are posted – in most cases, seek to be posted – for the comforts they offer.

Evidently, many in the IFS want these "Western" comforts and privileges, but will insist on reproducing the worst aspects of Indian caste oppression and social bondage abroad. They see this as "natural", something no Westerner should "interfere" with. A diplomat was in fact quoted as having said that since the West did not pay them their salaries, it had no right to specify how much their servants' salaries should be! These attitudes are hopelessly contradictory and duplicitous. They reek of the perversions of privilege. It is futile to defend them by citing diplomatic immunity and the Vienna Convention. For enlightened citizens in many Western countries, basic considerations of human rights and fairness, and the European convention on human rights, clearly prevail over the Vienna Convention.

Equally deplorable is South Block's tendency to see the Oraon issue through the prism of Indo-French relations. This is similar to the government's reaction to the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1994: Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao was much less bothered about the shameful disaster or its worrisome causes, than its likely impact on India's "image" as an investment destination. What is of vital importance in the present case is whether full justice is done to Oraon and whether her dignity as a woman and a worker is defended.

The mistreatment of Indians by other Indians abroad should occasion serious reflection on our society, rather than speculation in our media over whether France will now support India in scuppering the attempts of the G-8 to promote nuclear restraint, or transfer dual-use technology. India's "image" will not be enhanced through posturing about diplomatic immunity and sovereignty. It will be burnished only if India comes across as a nation seriously committed to values such as equality, dignity of labour, fairness and justice. For this to happen, our Lalitas have to get a fair deal.

There is something pathological about the attitudes and instincts in evidence in our Foreign Office. These are even more worrying than sheer ineptitude and tactlessness. They betray a myopic, inward-looking and self-obsessed calculus and a foundational confusion about the state of the world today, India's overall role in it, and what the promotion of the national interest really involves.

IT is indisputable that India's role in shaping and influencing global events and processes in the interests of its people – and a large majority in the world – has shrunk significantly over the years. New Delhi has had little influence in shaping the great events of the 1990s –

whether it is the post-Cold War resettlement of Europe or ethnic crises in the former Yugoslavia and Sub-Saharan Africa, or flashpoints such as Iraq, Bosnia or Kosovo. India has been a passive spectator to the further skewing of North-South imbalances, and the virtual takeover of policy-making in some 120 countries of the South by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) along lines which the Bank itself now admits were flawed: they failed to redress poverty, regional imbalances, and low industrial and agricultural capacities.

India's reaction to the aggressive reshaping of military blocs, especially the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), has been utterly passive, if not one of benign complicity. Indian policy-makers say that they want a multipolar world. But they have done precious little to bring it about by creating and strengthening countervailing forces to Washington. Compared to the progressive role India played until the 1970s, its recent part in global affairs has been marginal. Earlier, India was a strong advocate of decolonisation, national liberation, non-alignment, multilateralism, and peace and nuclear disarmament. These worthy causes received a boost owing to India's moral stature, not military might, which was always limited. India also represented an autonomous model of development, not just an imitation of what Nehru used to call "those Coca-Cola countries". India was heard with respect as a force of reason, not a source of fear.

India's global role has become increasingly conservative. It tacitly, if not explicitly, supports policies which erode democratic economic decision-making. On the environment, human rights, population, labour and gender, it has become *status quo*ist and pro-Western. Since the 1991 Gulf war, it has moved in a generally pro-U.S. direction. Its topmost post-Cold War priority is to find accommodation with the West, especially Washington. Rather than advocate multilateralism, it now favours an increasingly bilateral approach to the West. Between 1992 and 1995, for instance, India held four rounds of bilateral talks on nuclear weapons with the U.S., against its own proclaimed policy. Since Pokhran-II, there have been eight more.

From being an opponent of machtpolitik or power-based politics, India has become its unabashed practitioner. From being a campaigner for peace and disarmament, it has become one of the biggest obstacles to it. For five years, it demanded a special U.N. session on disarmament. Today, it opposes such a session tooth and nail. Barring No First Use – itself tokenist – India resists every serious proposal for nuclear arms restraint, reduction in conventional armament flows, ban on landmines – on grounds that are self-serving and do not even have a general, broad rationale.

New Delhi has become an obsessive defender of absolute national sovereignty – unfettered by human rights or other universal criteria. It failed to take a stand on the vital issue of human rights in Kosovo. It only opposed the NATO-led multilateral action as a violation of national sovereignty. But surely, in extreme, exceptional situations, for example apartheid or genocide, sovereignty must yield to other criteria.

Nuclear India is not at peace with the Great Powers, with its neighbours, not even with itself. Its horizons have shrunk even as its ambitions for a greater global role – largely through the short cut of military weapons – have vaulted.

On East Timor, India has not let out a squeak on the horrific repression unleashed by the Indonesian forces – one of the worst cases of near-genocidal terror anywhere, killing a third of the population. One reason is that Indonesia helped India get entry into the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum. However, perhaps a weightier reason is New Delhi's Kashmir and Pakistan preoccupations. It fears that supporting intervention in one region – however genuinely humanitarian, well-intentioned, multilateral and balanced it may be – would invite similar demands in Kashmir, opening a can of worms.

India's insecurities over Kashmir have intensified despite Pokhran-II. After all, nuclear weapons are utterly useless in the face of low-intensity warfare or insurgencies. Nuclear India is not at peace with the Great Powers, with its neighbours, not even with itself. Its horizons have shrunk even as its ambitions for a greater global role – largely through the short cut of military weapons – have vaulted. There is no coherent link between India's foreign policy and its pursuit of democratic domestic priorities. With the BJP's aggressive, bellicose, chauvinistic, nationalistic, these tendencies have got further accentuated.

New Delhi's notion of sovereignty is divorced from the people and the public interest. It is happy to surrender policy-making on industrial, agricultural, trade and investment policies to Western capital. It has done so through the 1990s in the name of "pragmatism". It affirms sovereignty only when it comes to human rights violations, threats to religious freedom, and the "right" to make weapons of mass destruction. Such sovereignty is irrelevant, even hostile, to the public interest.

FREED from a commitment to principle or universal doctrine, India's foreign policy establishment now takes whatever positions seem expedient. This is a highly subjective view, and can change arbitrarily. The latest shibboleth, fashion, or flavour of the month, is "counter-terrorism" and the "global" fight against (Islamic) fundamentalism. This has become a bandwagon slogan. In place of the K-word (Kashmir), which long spelt embarrassment, we are told, South Block has moved on to the T-word (Terrorism or Taliban), about which it can feel upbeat. The T-word gives India respectability, a feel-good proximity to, and a joint project with, the Great Powers, above all, the U.S., no less.

That is why Jaswant Singh in the U.N. General Assembly went all out to underline not just Pakistan's role in "terrorism" in Kashmir, but its links with Afghanistan and the "larger disorder" that makes it the main source of global terrorism. Jaswant Singh, A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani have been at pains to present the anti-terrorism platform as the principal plank of India's new foreign policy. It is not hard to see the real motive: to focus on "Islamic fundamentalism" as the root of contemporary "terrorism" in its most menacing form; and then make a come-hither gesture to the U.S. (and secondarily to Russia too, which faces the Dagestan and Chechnya crises) to campaign jointly with New Delhi.

South Block's fond hope here is that this will help it isolate Pakistan and build a strong strategic relationship with the U.S. under which Washington decisively distances itself from Islamabad. That is why it accorded high-level treatment to

U.S. counter-terrorism envoy Michael A. Sheehan. This whole "strategy", if it can be called that, is myopically, desperately, Pakistan-specific and -obsessed.

This Brave New Campaign against terrorism has an implicit, unstated, anti-islamic angle, building as it does on prejudices prevalent in the West, and the need for its right wing to find new enemies to perpetuate high levels of military-nuclear preparations. It confuses popular Islam, first with political Islam, and then the latter with fundamentalism. In reality, there is little in common between practised Islam and the fundamentalism associated with the Taliban, and so on.

The *azadi* movement in Kashmir can be hardly assimilated to Taliban fundamentalism. The Hurriyat has explicitly distanced itself from the Taliban. Omar Farooq has emphatically said: "Laden has no role in Kashmir... He has no *locus standi* in the Valley... his movement is aimed at spreading Islamic *jehad* which is not our objective."

It is also wrong to believe that foreign militants' or mercenaries' weight has increased in the current movement in Kashmir, especially after Kargil. Going by the Army's own figures, the proportion of foreign militants to the total number of those killed was 22 per cent over the past three years. It has fallen to 15 per cent in 1999. The militancy is primarily domestic and must not be falsely "externalised". We have to deal with it without creating scapegoats.

Another pitfall of the counter-terrorism shibboleth is that it wholly ignores state terrorism, which tends to be far more effective, widespread, institutionalised and vicious than sub-state terrorism, and which state-based systems like the U.N. do not question.

However, New Delhi has a detestably devious agenda behind all this apparent show of joint concern and Indo-U.S. agreement against *jehad*. According to *The Hindustan Times*, during the talks with Sheehan, it agreed to allow the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to open a "permanent office" in India as part of a plan to train Indian officers in anti-terrorist operations. It is difficult to comprehend the rationale for this, just as it is hard to understand the ends to which the FBI office might be used. But one thing is clear. The BJP is promoting a dangerous agenda through this collaboration. It is inviting shady agencies to influence and train Indian personnel, much in the way many Latin American Banana Republics did – to their own disgrace and peril. ■

■ COLUMN

Openness, deficits and lack of development

A report from UNCTAD highlights the role that greater trade openness may have played in worsening growth prospects in much of the developing world.

■ PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH ■

AT last, it's official. Although many economists and analysts in developing countries have been emphasising it for some time now, most multilateral economic agencies have tended to steer clear of noting the uncomfortable consequences that greater international economic integration has already implied for most developing countries. The latest Trade and Development Report (TDR) just released in Geneva by UNCTAD (the United Nations Commission for Trade and Development), however, finally does look closely at this issue.

In doing so, it has come to accept that both financial and trade liberalisation can have undesirable consequences not just for the balance of payments but also for domestic economic growth. The current received wisdom in the mainstream literature, especially from the World Bank, is rather different, and can be briefly summed up in the *mantra* "trade liberalisation good; financial liberalisation bad". But this is a simplistic view. More perceptive observers have noted that trade liberalisation can play a role in building up to crises like those in East Asia, or in causing recessions or declines in domestic manufacturing industry in several other developing countries, or even in limiting the possibilities of major shifts in the international division of labour.

Thus, the TDR '99 admits that "developing countries have striven hard, and often at considerable cost, to integrate more closely into the world economy. But in the face of deep-seated imbalances in economic power and systemic biases in the international trading and financial systems, their expectations of the gains from such integration in terms of faster growth, greater employment opportunities and reduced levels of poverty have been disappointed... the downside risks have proved far greater than was generally expected... the twentieth century is closing on a note of crisis and a growing sense of unease about the policy advice that was proffered in the past decade" (page V).

On the basis of a slightly longer look at the experience of growth and external imbalance in developing countries, the TDR points out that growth in developing countries as a group in the 1990s has been at an annual average of around 4.3 per cent. This does represent a recovery from the levels of the 1980s, but it is still well below the average of 5.7 per cent per annum of the 1970s. Moreover, this partial recovery in economic growth has been accompanied by a significant worsening of external deficits. Indeed, if China (whose performance was exceptional for a variety of specific reasons) is excluded, then it turns out that the average developing country trade deficit for the 1990s is higher than that for the 1970s by almost 3 percentage points of GDP, while the average growth rate is lower by 2 per cent per annum.

Of course, low oil prices in the 1990s (compared to high oil prices in the 1970s) have played some role in this average since a number of developing countries rely on oil exports. But the same pattern is evident, to almost the same degree, even for non-oil exporting developing countries, indicating that the basic problem lies elsewhere.

The pattern is also the same across

regions. In Latin America, growth has been lower while trade deficits as a share of GDP have been the same. In sub-Saharan Africa, growth has fallen but trade deficits have risen. Countries in Asia have on average run greater external deficits in the 1990s without achieving faster growth.

The general tendency among the majority of developing countries over the 1990s, therefore, is of widening external deficits combined with stagnant or falling growth rates. This is precisely the opposite of what had been promised by the proponents of liberalisation at the start of the decade.

Two forces were supposed to create a virtuous cycle of growth and (eventually) lower deficits for developing countries: the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was supposed to bring about a dramatic increase in market access for developing country exports; and the greater freedom accorded to international capital flows in the wake of financial liberalisation, which would allow developing countries to finance deficits easily and increase their domestic growth rates.

Obviously, neither of these forces has acted quite in the manner predicted by their votaries. What explains the more depressing reality? To its credit, the TDR eschews the simplistic explanations which have been all too readily advanced in the recent past, which tend to blame everything on "over-hasty financial liberalisation" or domestic problems like "crony capitalism".

Instead, it seeks to find some common features which apply to all or most developing countries, and which also reflect the general conditions of the world economy. It thus isolates two important factors behind the adverse combination of payments deficits and lower growth: terms of trade losses and rapid trade liberalisation.

Both of these stem directly from the attempts of developing countries – pushed by public international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as private ones like the World Economic Forum – to integrate more closely with the world economy in terms of both trade and finance, to make their economies more "open" and to rely more heavily on exporting activity as an engine of growth.

Thus, the terms of trade losses reflect the growing numbers of developing country exporters crowding into already saturated markets, pushing down prices further, and reducing the income gains from additional exports. Interestingly, the process of relative price decline occurred for both primary and non-primary goods exported by developing countries.

The decline in commodity prices (both oil and others) is well-known by now, reflecting both slow growth of aggregate demand in industrial countries as well as substitution away from the use of such commodities because of technological change. But standard adjustment policies continue to promote reliance on these traditional exports for most developing countries, further worsening the problem.

But even for manufactured exports by developing countries, relative prices fell. In fact, since the beginning of the 1980s, the terms of trade of developing countries relying mainly on manufactured exports have fallen by as much as 1 per cent per annum on average. This reflects the increased concentration of developing country interest on certain labour-intensive or natural-resource based manufactured products, including low-technology inputs to the electronics industry.

The TDR points to the concern that such manufactures may be acquiring the characteristics of primary commodities in world markets. The fear that several analysts had expressed earlier, that all countries cannot play the same game of aggressive export promotion in labour-intensive manufactures without affecting international prices, now appears to have been justified.

The problem has been aggravated by inadequate market access for developing country exports in developed markets. This has turned out to be one of the major false hopes raised by the Uruguay Round and the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The TDR is emphatic that increased market access for developing country exports should form the basis of negotiation in GATT, since it may turn out to be more important than capital inflows for development prospects.

While developed country markets have not become more open for developing exporters, the markets of developing countries have been significantly liberalised. Many developing countries opted for "big bang" forms of trade liberalisation which drastically changed the structure of domestic demand in favour of imports, but even the more gradual liberalisers have seen imports make big inroads into their markets and erode the viability of domestic manufacturers.

In the past, it used to be felt that trade liberalisation combined with currency devaluation would ensure that trade deficits would not get too large. Indeed, the inability to finance such deficits typically ensured that trade would eventually be brought into balance, even at the cost of domestic contraction. But the possibility of using private capital markets to finance such deficits, even if only for short periods, has meant that deficits now continue for slightly longer periods. More significantly, because trade liberalisation has often been accompanied by financial liberalisation, it has broken the link between the current account and exchange rate movements, which now get determined by the behaviour of capital flows at the margin. So the new scenario is one of exchange rate instability and currency "misalignment" driven by capital flows that further cause trade balances to deteriorate.

Often the imbalances can be sustained for some time because of continued capital inflow. But the story of the 1990s has been one of increasingly rapid reversal of such capital movements, leading to boom and bust cycles. The Asian crisis and the ongoing difficulties in Russia, Brazil and elsewhere, are evidence of this. In the process, there is also significant damage to domestic industry, in many cases leading to effective de-industrialisation because nascent manufacturers simply disappear in the face of severe and cheap external competition.

This is portrayed by some determined advocates of indiscriminate liberalisation as being bad for workers but good for consumers in the country. But it can only be good for consumers if domestic economic expansion is somehow sustained sufficiently to ensure that there is more purchasing power in the hands of consumers. The pattern of terms of trade movements along with effects on domestic economic activity and employment suggests that this has not been the case for most developing countries.

So the greater openness of developing countries in the 1990s has been associated not only with higher volatility and larger payments deficits, but even with inferior economic growth performance.

Clearly, it is time for those in developing countries to revise the now-hackneyed policy prescriptions which see liberalisation as the universal panacea, and take a more sophisticated and realistic view of the economic challenges ahead. To push for any real change in economic reality, ideas must change first. ■

A depreciating dollar

Will America stagnate if Asia recovers?

C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

AN unusual question haunts the world's financial analysts. Can the United States sustain its robust growth if the rest of the world is buoyant as well?

This question arises in a context in which many economies which were experiencing stagnation or contraction appear poised to return to a situation of growth. The Japanese government's repeated efforts to pump-prime the system with deficit-financed government expenditures finally appear to be yielding results. Real GDP grew by a pleasantly surprising 2 per cent in the first quarter of 1999, after five consecutive quarters of decline. There is evidence of expansion in Europe as well, after the period of contraction induced by the fiscal austerity adopted as a run-up to the euro. Finally, not only has the recession bottomed out across East Asia, but there is evidence of robust growth in South Korea during the first two quarters of this calendar year. Since the United States and the United Kingdom have already been experiencing strong expansion, the world seems poised to return to a bygone era of "synchronised growth" in all major economies or regions.

But, as even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) makes clear in its recently released *World Economic Outlook*, that prospect is still uncertain. This is because developments during the decade of globalisation seem to have rendered synchronised growth (or recession) across the world's economies an unlikely occurrence.

The world economy in the 1990s has been characterised by two much-noted features. First, slow growth in Japan and across much of the world. According to *World Economic Outlook*, the average rate of world economic growth during the 1990s was only 3 per cent, which is below the 3.5 per cent average of the 1980s and 4.5 per cent in the 1970s. The second feature has been remarkable instability. Not only have there been two phases of sharp slowdown in economic growth (in 1991-93 and 1998-99) over the decade, but it has been characterised by periodic crises in Mexico, countries of East Asia, Russia and Brazil.

Yet the 1990s represented one of the best decades for the U.S.. Not only was the U.S. recession of 1990-91 unusually mild, but the country went on to record almost continuous and, more recently, particularly robust growth. If this process is sustained through early next year, as some expect it to, then this would be the longest episode of continuous growth on record for the country.

Till recently, this unusually splendid growth record of the U.S. was attributed to specific features of its economy or economic policy. The U.S., it was initially argued, had more flexible labour markets than Europe, as did the U.K. which was also performing better. This helped companies downsize and restructure, and kept wages down, enhancing U.S. competitiveness and growth.

More recently, better growth has been ascribed to U.S. policy. To quote from *World Economic Outlook*: "The recent impressive performance of the U.S. economy is, in large part, testimony to laudable policies. These include the turnaround in the fiscal balance from deficit to surplus (a structural improvement equivalent to roughly 3.5 per cent of GDP since 1993); the agile management of monetary conditions by the Federal Reserve in achieving and maintaining low inflation, in helping to maintain stable growth and also in helping to calm global financial turbulence; and structural policies that have continued to foster the flexible working of markets."



KORJI SASAHARA/AP

Currency traders at a Tokyo brokerage on September 24.

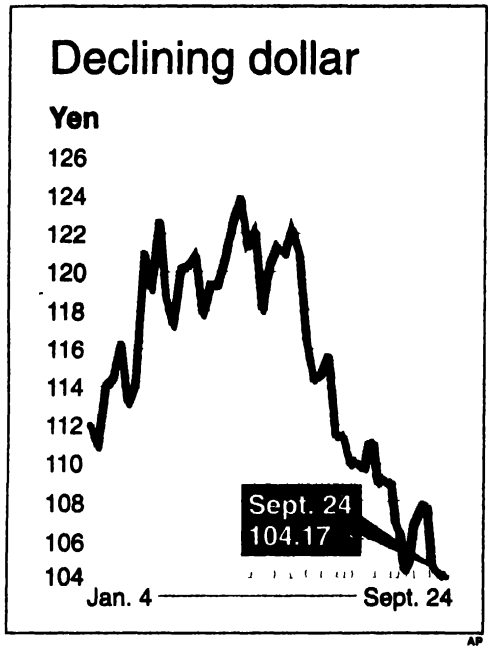
WHAT is left unexplored in that summary assessment is the role that 'external factors' played in reviving growth in the U.S.. Exports were clearly not a contributory factor. Export volumes grew at just 1.5 per cent in 1998 while import volumes grew by 10.5 per cent. As a result, the value of the current account deficit on the U.S. balance of payments has risen almost continuously from $43 billion in the first quarter of 1998 to almost

double that value in the second quarter of 1999. Despite this worsening current account deficit, the dollar remained strong and even gained in strength. This, as has been widely reported, was only because of large financial flows into the U.S. from abroad. Not only did money flow into U.S. equity, but outstanding amounts of international debt securities originating in the U.S. rose sharply from $552.8 billion at the end of 1997 to $946 billion at the end of the first quarter of 1999.

The willingness of foreign investors to hold dollar-denominated assets is thus the key to the rise of the dollar. And so also to robust growth in the U.S. Given the large direct and indirect (through pension funds, for example) investments of personal savings in equity in the U.S., the stock market boom enhanced the wealth of American citizens, reducing incentives to save. The net result has been a collapse of private savings in the U.S. Personal savings as a percentage of disposable personal income in the U.S. fell from 1.2 per cent in 1997 to 0.5 per cent in 1998, turned negative in the first quarter of 1999 and touched a remarkably high negative level of 1.3 per cent in the second quarter ending June 1999. The other side of the fall in savings was a rise in private consumption expenditure, which was crucial to sustaining growth in the U.S. economy.

Thus, growth in the U.S. was dependent on a consumption boom fuelled by the willingness of foreign investors to bet on the dollar, irrespective of the state of the U.S. balance of payments. That willingness stemmed from a range of sources, many of which were related to the dollar's still-unchallenged role as the world's reserve currency. Higher interest rates in the U.S. at a time when the Japanese economy was performing poorly is indeed one such factor. This triggered the infamous "yen-carry trades" in which investors borrowed yen funds, converted them into dollars and invested them in higher yielding dollar-denominated assets. When the occasion arose to unravel these trades, they gained not merely because of the differential in interest rates between Japan and the U.S. but also because of the depreciation of the yen in the interim period.

The other element contributing to investment in U.S. assets was the "flight to safety" from a stagnant Japan and an East Asia struck by crisis. In fact, till mid-1998 those flows virtually insulated the U.S. economy from the effects of that crisis. Finally, inflows into the U.S. fed upon themselves. To start with, investments in American financial assets helped sustain what was a completely unexpected boom in stock markets. High returns in the stock market obviously makes investment in American stocks an attractive proposition, drawing in more funds from the international economy.



In the circumstances, growth has been robust in 1997 and 1998 and remained at acceptable levels even in the first half of 1999. Overall, for much of the recent past, the U.S. economy has been characterised by a strong currency, a conservative budgetary stance, a buoyant stock market, a creditable rate of growth and low inflation. In the world of macroeconomic indicators, something must give to ensure this otherwise peculiarly favourable scenario from the American point of view. And that has been the deficit in the trade in goods and services. That deficit rose almost continuously and nearly doubled, from $33.3 billion in the first quarter of 1998 to $65 billion in the second quarter of 1999. This magnitude of increase in the trade deficit accounts for almost 85 per cent of the increase in the current account deficit in the U.S. balance of payments during this period.

What is worrying financial analysts is that as the recovery begins outside the U.S., this situation may change. The most telling sign of this has been the weakening of the dollar in recent times. Towards the middle of September the dollar touched a three-and-a-half year low of yen 103.3 to the dollar. Not only was the value of the U.S. currency that day at a new low, but underlying its day-to-day fluctuations was an acceleration of the depreciation of the currency from a value as high as yen 122 to the dollar just two months earlier. Even if we consider monthly average figures of the value of the yen *vis-a-vis* the dollar, the trend of a sharp appreciation of the dollar *vis-a-vis* the yen between August 1998 and January 1999, which was stalled thereafter, has revived from May this year. The weakness of the dollar has also resulted in a reversal of the "unexpected" appreciation in its value *vis-a-vis* the euro since its creation in January.

The current weakening of the dollar indicates that America's ability to borrow itself into growth when the rest of the world languishes seems to be under challenge. Observers are clear that the dollar sank sharply in mid-September because investors were no longer ready to bet on an overheated U.S. economy. The signs of reversal of capital flows into the U.S. have appeared despite the fact that the Federal Reserve Board has raised interest rates twice in recent months. The consequent widening of interest rate differentials between the U.S. and elsewhere is obviously proving inadequate to attract the foreign investor.

A number of factors could explain this tendency. The fall in the dollar occurred in the wake of the news of a record current account deficit in the second quarter and of a surge in retail sales of 1.2 per cent in August, which took its value to a level close to 11 per cent higher than in the corresponding month of the previous year. Clearly, private consumption was still buoyant and was still widening the gap between America's imports and exports. But now international investors have begun to pull out in the wake of these developments. All of a sudden what has been true all along – that U.S. fundamentals are indeed weak and that the economy is vulnerable – seems to matter to the investor.

This loss of confidence is related to a number of other developments. The incipient recovery in Japan and the rest of Asia is reversing the flight to safety into U.S. bonds and reducing the "autonomous" demand for dollar-denominated assets. Operators wanting to unwind positions financed through yen carry trades could be increasing their demand for the Japanese currency, resulting in a strengthening of the yen. Above

all, the possibility that as Japan recovers and the U.S. current account deficit widens, the yen would appreciate *vis-a-vis* the dollar, and more than neutralise any gains from investments in higher yielding U.S. bonds, would make investors turn dollar-shy and yen-friendly. And the more they turn away from the dollar and towards the yen, the more would their expectations of an appreciation of the yen be realised. All this is now happening with greater intensity because the biggest investors in U.S. Treasuries are Japanese investors, who are reportedly selling out in the U.S. and taking their money back to where it came from.

While this decision may be reasonable from the point of view of the individual Japanese investor, it is creating much discomfort among governments. A depreciating dollar is obviously bad news for the U.S. Underlying that depreciation must be a loss of confidence in U.S. equity, which could trigger an abrupt fall in U.S. equity prices. As the public information notification issued by the IMF after its executive board concluded the Article IV consultation with the U.S. noted: IMF directors believed that in the U.S. "the strength of demand, including corporate investment as well as household consumption, had been underpinned by the high level of stock prices – a level that was difficult to explain". This would mean that a sharp market decline could wipe out illusory wealth, lead to an abrupt adjustment in the household savings rate from its current historic low, and massively squeeze consumption demand. The era of high growth and large current account deficits appears to be near its end.

In the era of financial globalisation, synchronised growth in different parts of the world is impossible.

But the lessons from this episode go further. In the era of financial globalisation, it appears, synchronised growth in different parts of the world is impossible. The boom in America appears to depend on slow growth and crises elsewhere. And a recovery elsewhere appears to threaten America's economic health. Interestingly, *World Economic Outlook* does recognise this new conjuncture in the world economy. To quote the *Outlook:*

"Economic and financial linkages and policy transmission mechanisms across countries have become more complex in the 1990s, warranting a further reassessment of key relationships. Historically, the developing countries' economic cycle was mostly positively correlated with that of the industrial countries due to the impulses transmitted through trade and commodity prices. In the early 1990s, however, when the industrial countries went through successive episodes of cyclical weakness, growth actually accelerated in many emerging market economies, fuelled by the rapid growth of trade among them (especially in Asia) as well as by substantial capital inflows.

"More recently, in the wake of the Asian crisis, all industrial countries with significant trade links with Asia would have been expected to experience adverse effects on growth. In fact, however, while Japan and, to a lesser extent, Europe were negatively affected, the United States' economic expansion appears to have gained further momentum. A flight to dollar-denominated assets helped to sustain the U.S. expansion by boosting domestic demand through lower interest rates and the dampening effect on prices of an appreciating dollar, notwithstanding the negative impact on U.S. exports.

"In both examples, the integration of financial markets appears to have contributed to a tendency for global financial resources to move to whichever countries and regions are relatively dynamic at the time. In principle, such reallocations of financial resources are beneficial for the recipient countries and also for global growth and efficiency. However, as experience shows, large net capital flows into strongly expanding economies may exacerbate risks of overheating and asset market bubbles, while rapid reversals of such flows can severely strain weak financial systems and lead to destabilising currency movements."

Behind this elaborate reasoning is one striking judgment. In a globalised world dominated by financial as opposed to real flows, growth at one pole has come to depend on stagnation or contraction at the other. Whatever other virtue the IMF may find in market-driven globalisation, it has been forced to admit that its downside is that autonomous tendencies in the current conjuncture militate against the synchronised growth needed for a global consensus. ■

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IT'S MORE THAN A PAPER:
IT'S A HOMECOMING.

Arrogant nuclearism

What India needs is an urgent Strategic Defence Review to determine its security needs. Instead of this it now has a dangerous doctrine for nuclear weaponisation.

L. RAMDAS

However, in the last seven years, whilst much larger number of terrorists have infiltrated into the Kashmir Valley, inflicting tens of thousands of casualties on civilians, servicemen and police personnel, there is no suggestion that the Indian Army should follow the precedent of 1965. Here comes the nuclear factor. Since both India and Pakistan perceive each other as having nuclear weapons capability, the covert war waged by Pakistan has not escalated to a high intensity inter-state war because of the implied risk of a possible nuclear exchange. While Pakistan's nuclear capability has enabled it to launch a covert war against India, the perception of mutual deterrence has ensured that the situation does not escalate further. This has resulted in a no inter-state war situation between India and Pakistan for almost twenty-five years.

– K. Subrahmanyam in *World Affairs Journal*, October-December 1997.

YES, this is the same K. Subrahmanyam, the Convener of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), who in a 1997 article titled "Covert Operations pose new challenges for Indian Security" said that there was already a minimum nuclear deterrent working. The only change in the political and security firmament since then has been that a new coalition government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, came to office in March 1998 and went on full speed ahead to conduct the nuclear tests at Pokhran in May 1998. For its splendid contribution, the BJP-led government was rewarded with the limited war in Kargil, which accounted for the loss of nearly 500 precious lives. We must thank the "Good Shepherd" for his early warning. 'n our hi-tech post-nuclear profile this w is the reality of our command, control and communications readiness. We came very close to losing Ladakh and the northern parts of Kashmir. Without trying to sound too alarmist, there was a real possibility of this conflict escalating into an all-out war, including a nuclear exchange with all its disastrous consequences.

Just as the country was recovering from this traumatic experience came yet another bombshell from the caretaker government – the announcement of the draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine on August 17, 1999. Many observers have stated that the NSAB's draft had been with the government for nearly two months

(John Cherian in *Frontline*, September 10, 1999 and Achin Vanaik in *The Hindu*, September 4, 1999) but the government thought it fit to release it a fortnight before the first round of the general elections on September 5. Predictably, the Opposition parties were furious, and rightly so. A matter of such importance should not have been made public by a caretaker government. Having carefully stowed it away for two months, it could have waited until the next government took office after the elections. There is little doubt that the announcement was intended to influence voter opinion in the Government's favour. If ever there was a pre-emptive strike, this was it. There was no question of 'no first use' in this launch. Should a non-BJP government come to office, it may well have a different approach altogether.

Of late we are seeing a lot of this kind of unilateralism. Take the telecom dispensation, which resulted in a loss of over Rs. 50,000 crores to the exchequer, or the hurry with which certain appointments of senior civil servants and Governors were made quite arbitrarily. Or for that matter the utter disregard shown to the presidential advice on convening a Rajya Sabha session on the Kargil issue, which also demonstrated this arrogant and defiant attitude. The same government dismissed a Chief of the Naval Staff on the specious grounds of defiance when he was only trying to call its attention to the regulations that governed the Navy.

This government has specialised in putting the cart before the horse. It did s with the nuclear tests of May last year an now with the Nuclear Doctrine. At th time of the announcement of the latte NSAB Convener Subrahmanyam mer tioned three things, all of which not onl are worthy of mention but warrant som discussion. First: "The NSAB was work ing very hard at undertaking a Strategi Defence Review (SDR) and its repor would be finalised in the next fe months." Second: "No estimates on cost to maintain a minimum credible nuclea deterrent have been worked out." Third in response to a question from a media person whether the nuclear button woul be in a briefcase with the Prime Ministe he replied: "We are far more advance than those with the black box with th button." This remark exudes technica superiority.

The first thing that the NSAB shoul have undertaken was the SDR. Had thi been done before Pokhran-II, probabl there may have been no need for th nuclear tests at all. Likewise, there woul have been no need to evolve an elaborat nuclear doctrine to follow up the mistak of Pokhran-II. Finally, to support bot these decisions, we have to do an SDR The announcement has certainly not trig gered any great enthusiasm as expected No one even talks about the bomb or th doctrine. In an article in *The Times o India* dated September 6, Subrahmanyan laments "that the nuclear doctrine has no generated any worthwhile popular debat so far, but only criticism and endorse ments from a very limited number of com mentators. They reflect by and large th divide between those who consider a nuclear deterrent necessary for Indian security and those who oppose it. The rea debate has to be among different parties all of which had over the years sustained the nuclear weapon and missile pro grammes." If Subrahmanyam himself felt in 1997 that the "Existential Deterrence" was working, how can he fault these polit ical parties for not being fired by this great release? If anything, they have been angered by the release of this doctrine just



ANU PUSHKARNA

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee with R. Chidambaram, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser.

prior to the elections Presumably, by 'popular' Subrahmanyam means political parties and not the people People are more concerned with basic necessities such as water, food, health care, schools, sanitation and jobs If we see the print and electronic media, the complaint that comes through loud and clear is that people's issues are not being discussed at all Regrettably for the caretaker government, the release of the nuclear doctrine has, if anything, misfired.

STRATEGIC DEFENCE REVIEW

What should the SDR address? It should:

★ Identify national and strategic interests, clarify the bottom line for border management.

★ Assess the overall strategic environment in the short-, medium- and long-term perspectives.

★ Evaluate threats to "human security" and "national security" in the short-, medium- and long-term.

★ Evolve plans and strategies to combat these threats. These should include a broad assessment of the priorities for both human security and other needs and the allocation of resources.

★ Given the present capabilities, determine additional weapons/equipment that need to be inducted

★ Carry out scenario studies to identify force level and weapon requirements

★ Assess whether nuclear weapons are needed or whether the present level of nuclear capability will suffice (see note on Subrahmanyam's statement made in 1997)

★ Conduct a cost-benefit analysis, keeping in mind both "human and national security" needs

★ Evolve suitable foreign and defence policies to match the above requirements

★ Examine the existing structure of the Ministry of Defence and suggest a more responsive architecture

★ If the nuclear answer is for the weapon, announce the doctrine, which should be brief and concise Leave the strategic and tactical details to be evolved by appropriate agencies. The current doctrine is a three-in-one package It contains doctrine, strategy and even some tactics

As this strategic review had not been carried out before jumping into the deep end with Pokhran-II, there is an elaborate justification to achieve maximum credibility with the launching of a grandiose nuclear doctrine This is based on a 'triad' of air, land-based and sea-launched weapons The doctrine goes on to say in paragraph 2 4 *"The fundamental purpose of Indian nuclear weapons is to deter the use and the threat of use of nuclear weapons by any state or entity against India and its forces India will not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike, but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail"* This must be read in conjunction with paragraph 2 5, which states *"India will not resort to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against states which do not possess nuclear weapons or are not aligned with nuclear weapon powers"* We have suddenly become so powerful that we are going to take on not only the nuclear weapon powers but also virtually half this world! This smacks of irrational and xenophobic thinking Surely this is not the kind of credible minimum nuclear deterrent that was originally advocated This is bound to create the demand for a very large and varied nuclear arsenal that would give us such a capability The trouble is that the people are made to believe that we have it already – "but it is only in the head"

In view of the heavy commitment

already made through the two mega decisions, one to go overt as a nuclear weapon state and the other to publicise our nuclear doctrine, which in short is our nuclear wish list, one can foresee the SDR ending up with 'Situating the Appreciation' instead of 'Appreciating the Situation'. Many of us have the habit of taking decisions guided more by instinct, desire or some preconditioned thinking rather than by mature and careful analysis of the pros and cons of the situation. Here we have a classic example of the former approach, adopted by the BJP-led government. The NSAB on its part is busy doing gymnastics to justify these decisions, which were made by leaving the SDR to the very end. Needless to say, this end product will be tailored to be a perfect fit to make it look as "The Complete Plan".

When one reads paragraph 2.1 in conjunction with paragraph 4.1 of the doctrine, two things become clear.

* First, deterrence can fail, which is what most of us have been saying all along.
* Second, the level and weight of punitive retaliation must be such that it inflicts "destruction and punishment" that the aggressor will find unacceptable if nuclear weapons are used against India and its forces.

This concept amounts to a tacit acceptance of the failure of the "deterrent theory". The approach of no first use and punitive retaliatory strike gives one the justification to have a much larger arsenal of nuclear weapons. The number of weapons could go up even further to cater for "adequate retaliatory capabilities after enduring repetitive attrition attempts" (see paragraph 4.3). These, when viewed in the context of taking on the U.S. and half the world – the sky is the limit. This is a doctrine for maximum credible deterrence.

UNACCEPTABLE DAMAGE

A few words on "Unacceptable Damage". It is perhaps best illustrated by quoting Gen. Thomas S. Power, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Strategic Air Command (SAC), who stated in February 1960: "*The closest to one man who would know what the minimum deterrent is would be (Soviet leader Nikita) Khrushchev, and frankly I don't think he knows from one week to another. He might be able to absorb more punishment next week than he wants to absorb today. Therefore Deterrent is not a concrete or finite amount*" (*Atomic Audit*, edited by Stephen I. Schwartz and brought out by the



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Defence Minister George Fernandes.

Brookings Institute, page 22). *Nor for that matter is how much is acceptable or unacceptable damage.* If this be so, we can easily expect more and more demands to raise your inventory and therefore stockpile weapons to achieve these conjured-up desires of making the adversary think the way you do. This nuclear doctrine has shaped the course of an inescapable arms race and is therefore unacceptable. We have not come to the cost factor yet, which will say much more.

With a concept of multiple adversaries, we will certainly face a very serious problem identifying the source of the attack, especially if it comes from a submarine. Are we to understand that we will retaliate by attacking all nations which possess missile-carrying submarines? There seems to be no clarity as to how we propose to deal with ballistic-missile-carrying submarines of the nuclear weapon states. Is it our intention to have a large nuclear attack submarine fleet, to 'tag and tail' all ballistic-missile-carrying submarines operating in the Indian Ocean? Hopefully we are not visualising a replication of the "the hunt for Red/ Blue/ Green/ Pink October". We must get our sights trained properly and not get carried away by "it is only in the head" theory. It is extremely dangerous, silly and clearly beyond our reach financially for a long time to come. The U.S. Navy has recently commissioned the "Seawolf" class attack submarine to 'tag and tail' the Russian "Typhoons" and "Deltas". The cost of one Seawolf is $9 billion, or Rs.38,000 crores, equal almost to the entire defence budget of India for one year. Do we really want to join this league? We were well served by "Existential Deterrence" as stated by Subrahmanyam in 1997. Instead of this the BJP has gifted the nation the P3I system (*P*erennial *P*enury for the *P*eople of *I*ndia).

EARLY WARNING

The command, control, communication, information and intelligence (C4 I2) systems are going to be "robust". Presumably that means that the Command Post will be in a hardened site with back-up alternative locations elsewhere. The chain of command after the Prime Minister will also be designated. In the U.S. this is very clearly indicated. It is enacted by Congress and is a public document. Strange was the reaction of National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra when he was asked to specify the chain of command after the Prime Minister: "They have to be kept a secret and could not be revealed for security reasons" (*The Times of India*, August 18. 1999). For lending *credibility* to paragraph 4.3 (sub para 2) of the doctrine, "for the continuity of nuclear command and control, read in conjunction para 2.6 (e)," regarding the 'will' to employ nuclear forces, it is necessary to identify the chain of command, including all the successors as for the U.S. practice. The U.S. lists a total of 17 people after the President who shall exercise this command (*Atomic Audit*, Note 42, page 220). Secrecy in this regard is therefore a misplaced concept.

The 'robustness' also envisages excellent communications systems, which must survive a first strike by an adversary. The state of the national communications system today is pitiable. This is borne out by the fact that the Prime Minister remained unaware of the news of Pakistan's nuclear tests at Chagai even after the rest of the world had learned about it through the electronic media. The Prime Minister's embarrassment was writ all over his face as he came to learn about the event on the floor of Parliament. There ended the great strategic gulf which lasted for precisely 14 days. We do not have radio communications even to guide drivers of fast trains on the Indian Railways, in order to avert accidents. Many incidents which could have been avoided had such a facility been available, have not yet led to technology upgradation. We see many accidents on the roads; disasters are frequent – floods, quakes, gas leaks, the capsizing of boats, and much more. Each time the platitudes are repeated and inquiries conducted, more as a yardarm clearing exercise. The reason is simple – because the elites in India have

ceased to have a soul. All that the political leaderships is busy doing at the moment is to hurl cheap and vulgar epithets at one another; they do not care at all for the people's needs.

TRIAD CONCEPT

Rear-Admiral Raja Menon, in an article in *The Times of India* on August 26, states: "There is a serious dysfunction between minimum deterrence and a triservice arsenal. The two cannot go together, and is akin to yoking a horse and a camel together." Clearly, this is our problem. The entire doctrine, based on no first use and the acceptance of a significant first strike and punitive retaliation, is dependent on survivability capacity for retaliation.

Aircraft-delivered nuclear weapons and land-based missile systems suffer from high vulnerability and therefore poor survivability in the context of a no-first-use doctrine. The least vulnerable platform – both for detection and for destruction – is the missile-carrying submarine. General K. Sundarji, former Chief of the Army Staff, had proposed an arsenal of 40 atom bombs and a couple of submarines as being enough to meet India's requirements. Even missiles on surface ships have a much greater survivability factor than land-based systems. This form of vectoring need not be ruled out.

Let us examine the cost factor which has conveniently been overlooked by the NSAB.

THE COST FACTOR

The book *Atomic Audit* has many interesting features which are worth noting. Although it has carried out an audit of the U.S. nuclear programme, the parameters and concepts used apply equally to the Indian programme. The outgo has been listed and analysed under several headings. Only the proportion of costs under each heading is shown, as these are likely to remain the same for the Indian programme, notwithstanding the numbers of nuclear weapons involved. The breakdown is as follows:

★ Building the bomb – 7 per cent
★ Deploying the bomb – 55.7 per cent
★ Targeting and controlling the bomb – 14.3 per cent
★ Defending against the bomb – 16.1 per cent
★ Dismantling the bomb – 0.5 per cent
★ Nuclear waste management – 6.3 per cent
★ Victims of U.S. nuclear weapons – 0.04 per cent
★ Nuclear secrecy – 0.05 per cent
★ Congressional oversight – 0.02 per cent

C.Rammanohar Reddy, with his modest assumptions of the nuclear arsenal, worked out a figure Rs.50,000 crores over a 10-year period. In view of the rather ambitious plan outlined in the nuclear doctrine we can easily double that figure, in which case we shall end up with a demand for a sum of Rs.100,000 crores to be spent over the next 10 years exclusively for the nuclear deterrent. In other words, Rs.10,000 crores a year. This amounts to an addition of 25 per cent per annum to the already burgeoning defence expenditure. With Rs.1 crore we can have 10 primary schools, each for about 50 children, or 10 primary health centres, or water supply for at least 100 villages with five borewells per village – there are several other options. A sum of Rs.10,000 crores would help provide primary education to all children in the country.

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE

The Kargil experience has thrown up strange and irrational deductions and consequently avoidable demands. The situation requires a management of both diplomacy and defence. We need to look at these kinds of options as well.

★ Defence spending has been inadequate.
★ We need to raise another corps to defend Kargil.
★ The Air Force needs more aircraft.
★ The Navy needs more ships and submarines and aircraft carriers.

Had the government and the Army been alert and listened to the commanders at the scene of action, Pakistani forces would never have reached where they did and the entire activity would have been nipped in the bud. These hasty and ill-advised demands would never have arisen. We need to do the SDR fast and come up with a composite and integrated plan. We will otherwise end up making the same mistake of trying to please everybody and at some cost. We certainly need to be far more pragmatic and realistic than that. What about opportunity costs?

The allocation of resources to ensure deterrence and the associated infrastructure have a penalty in terms of opportunity costs, capital costs, resource consumption and so on.

ECONOMIC COSTS

The allocation of resources to ensure deterrence and the associated infrastructure have a penalty in terms of opportunity costs, efficiency versus effectiveness, capital costs, resource consumption and so on. Even in the U.S., the huge expenditure incurred in the nuclear weapons programme has staggered many Americans. General Lee Butler says: "*Atomic Audit* lays bare the staggering price exacted upon the most technologically proficient of the Cold War antagonists. More important, it begins to expose the policy, planning, and other operational flaws that undercut both the logic and implementation of deterrence as perceived by its American practitioners." Maybe there is a lesson here for the Indian nuclear hierarchy. If a correct appraisal is made of the requirements for human security needs in the SDR, we shall arrive at the correct balance to be maintained between that and other national security requirements.

A POTENTIALLY rich country like India, with nearly one billion people – 38 per cent of them are below the poverty line as per the government's own statistics, but other estimates put the number of poor people at 750 million – is poised to enter an era of arrogant nuclearism so well articulated by the Indian Nuclear Doctrine. The architects of this document in the NSAB have not even addressed the cost factor to study the economic impact of such far-reaching recommendations. Instead of starting with an SDR to determine what was required by way of both human and national security needs, we are now left with the Hobson's choice of evolving and supporting a nuclear weaponisation programme and its doctrine. Hopefully our countrymen will put some saner leadership in place to manage our strategic environment better. Even now it is not too late to disengage from this useless, costly and totally unnecessary 'evil'. Let us try and craft a whole new strategic initiative and evolve an India-China-Pakistan peace and security agreement for the next century. This *'Triad'* would be far more effective and much cheaper in the long run. We need to usher in the new millennium with a new *vision and mission* if we are not to go down in history as the failed generation. ■

Admiral L. Ramdas (retd) is a former Chief of the Naval Staff.

A martyrdom

I would like to bring to the attention of readers the story of the martyrdom of Major Sameer Katwal.

Katwal was killed on the morning of August 28 while attacking a camp of the newly formed Dima Halong Dowga (DHD) militant group in the North Kachar Hills district of Assam. He was not waylaid and killed while travelling in a vehicle, as reported by newspapers.

Sameer, born on July 25, 1974, was the son of K.P.S. Katwal, an officer of the Indian Forest Service posted in Tamil Nadu. He had his school education in Tiruchi and Chennai, got trained at the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy, and was commissioned into the 21st Battalion of the Kumaon Regiment on June 10, 1995. In the words of his Commanding Officer, Colonel J.J. Bajwa, Sameer was a very competent soldier with enthusiastic devotion to duty.

The night before he died, Sameer had led a group of 40 soldiers on foot for about 20 km across difficult terrain, to a DHD hideout. All the soldiers, including Sameer, had the protection of bullet-proof vests and steel helmets. The approach was so skilful that the militants, numbering about 15, did not notice the soldiers even whey were within 50 metres. The colonel had given clear instructions against any adventurism. Therefore several volleys were fired upon the camp before the final charge was made. Sameer was in the forefront. A fleeing militant turned around and emptied his AK-47 rifle, and one fatal bullet found its mark: it ripped through the right collar bone and neck of Sameer.

A.J.T. Johnsingh

Dehra Dun

Narmada Valley

A few weeks after the February 18 Supreme Court order permitting an increase in the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam, I observed 1,000 people of Nandurbar district meeting and asking the Collector where the land that the Maharashtra government had mentioned in its Supreme Court affidavit as being available was. They waited for three days (they slept outside the Collector's office) only to be told that there was no such land.

I came to Dhule and saw the resettlement site – the jail. This monsoon, whenever there was submergence people were taken to jail. When the waters receded, they returned to the valley.

In the United States, they are building more and more jails. Although they have stopped building big dams, they still jail the poor, the migrant workers, the black people, and all who come in the way of their own forms of destructive development. In America jails make a profit and are getting privatised. If that is development, then we shall also have to build more jails as we build more dams.

P. Aravinda

Camp: Dhule

BJP's unease

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) started with a bang, banking on the Kargil victory and the image of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee. But the euphoria vanished slowly. The staggered election schedule gave the Congress(I) an opportunity and the time to launch an aggressive campaign. Moreover, the anti-incumbency factor, infighting in States such as Uttar Pradesh, misunderstandings among alliance partners in States such as Karnataka, and local issues started causing problems for the BJP. So mid-way through the election the BJP lost the decisive edge ("Growing unease", October 8).

Still the NDA has hope. After V.P. Singh, Vajpayee has emerged as a national leader who can take on the "dynasty" and who is acceptable to the different regions of the country.

A. Jacob Sahayam

Vellore

Nuclear doctrine

This refers to "Questions about capabilities" by T. Jayaraman (September 29). It is tragic that a country like India has presented its nuclear policy in shameful haste, reducing the status of such a serious and strategically important document to that of a comedy full of ambiguities and errors. The most disheartening aspect is the way in which the vision, ideals and hopes that inspired the freedom of India are abandoned by the 'honest' and 'liberal' leaders. What they have done is against the spirit of the Constitution, which directs the state to strive for peace and security.

A country whose basic defence needs are met through imports, a country which does not possess even a modern artillery unit made by itself, a country which does not possess an indigenous fighter jet, claims to build a nuclear force based on the "triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles, and sea-based assets". Judging by the pace of the R&D efforts in the country it does not seem that India will have these assets in the near future? This very fact makes the nuclear doctrine a 'comedy of errors'.

There is a word emphasised in the doctrine – "credible". Is this so-called credibility going to be managed by sheep-grazers? The Kargil shock is too recent for us to be able to believe in such "credibility". Moreover in this country (as well as in the rest of the subcontinent), where policy is guided not by wisdom and vision but by hidden agendas and the desire for power, what is the guarantee that there will be safe and secure control of the nuclear devices? It seems that even the policy of 'no first use' has also been abandoned: note that the deterrence capability will be such that it will inflict unacceptable damage on "any potential aggressor".

It seems that the Government prepared the doctrine without doing any homework. It is nothing more than an addendum to the NDA's election manifesto.

Lokesh Pathak

Deoria, Uttar Pradesh

Attack on minorities

The brutal killing of a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Arul Doss, by armed assailants at Jamabani village in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa and the burning of a church on September 2 have once again shocked the peace-loving people of India.

Padiabeda village in the same district witnessed the gruesome murder of Sheikh Rehman, a Muslim trader, on August 26. The killing of Muslims and Christians in Orissa on the eve of the general elections is designed deliberately to intimidate the minorities and create divisions in society. This is in keeping with the hateful thesis of "one nation, one culture, one people and one language" propagated by Hindu fundamentalists. They neither advance the cause of the great Hindu religion nor help advance the secular ideal of the nation. Their sole aim is to gain political power and patronage. This conspiracy of hate, terror and division has posed a threat to the secular and pluralistic fabric of the nation.

We wish to highlight certain facts and raise some questions.

All the three killings witnessed in Mayurbhanj district took place close to Hindu festivals. Graham Stewart Staines and his two sons were burnt alive on the night before Saraswati Puja. Sheikh Rehman was killed on Raksha Bandhan day and Fr. Arul Doss was murdered on the night before Janmashtami. Is this a coincidence or the result of deliberate planning by communal forces?

Two gruesome murders took place in the same region within the span of one week after the Wadhwa Commission report on the Graham Staines incident was made public. Is this again a coincidence or has the clean chit given by the Wadhwa report to the communal organisations that are known to be involved in the Graham Staines incident emboldened them to go on a killing spree against the minorities?

When the Government's intelligence agencies could find out where Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi was going to contest the elections, they are unable to trace Dara Singh, the main accused in these crimes, and his associates. Is this a coincidence or a case of deliberate neglect of the security concerns of the minorities in India?

Ever since the BJP-led coalition government assumed power, the minorities, particularly Christians, have been victims of communally motivated mob attacks. Is this a coincidence or a manifestation of the overt and covert support given by the government to the Hindu communal organisations?

Hatred against the minorities, secular-minded groups and the weaker sections of society in general has been spreading like cancer throughout India owing to the unchecked activities of the Sangh Parivar. The carefully nurtured secular fabric of the nation is under threat.

We appeal to all people of goodwill to join our campaign to save our country from disintegration by deciding to oppose actively the anti-secular ideology of the Sangh Parivar; dissociate from anyone who sympathises with the RSS and its sister organisations; inform your neighbours about the gravity of this situation; write letters to the President, the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the Governor and the Chief Minister of Orissa expressing distress and anguish over the recent incidents; organise signature campaigns and mobilise support for our just demands such as immediate steps to apprehend Dara Singh and his associates who were involved in the killings, restore public confidence, ensure that there is no recurrence of such violence, and ban all communal organisations in the country.

Students of Vidyajyoti
Jesuit College of Theology
New Delhi

Kargil

In "An aborted deal?" (September 10), the author, while projecting the deficiencies of the decisions taken by the BJP government to deal with the Kargil crisis, should have also mentioned the achievements made. India has made a silent achievement without compromising its self-respect and honour.

Shailendra Singh

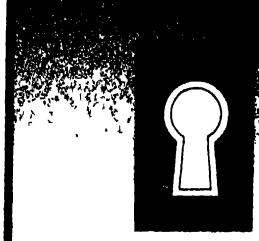
Wadhwa Commission

It is shocking that the Wadhwa Commission gave a clean chit to organisations such as the RSS and the Bajrang Dal ("An exercise in illogic," September 10). What is most amazing is the Commission's failure to take note of the various First Information Reports that point to Dara Singh's association with the Bajrang Dal. It is deplorable that the Commission overlooked the reports of the Divisional Commissioner, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG, Crime) and the DIG attached to the National Human Rights Commission. On May 31, counsel for the Commission submitted that there was *prima facie* evidence to show the link between Dara Singh and the Sangh Parivar.

The murder of Graham Staines and his two children was not the result of any personal enmity between the Australian missionary and Dara Singh. It was a planned, well-organised attack. Such a heinous crime could not have been committed without the backing of organisations that are influential in the area. It is well known that the murder was committed at a time when attacks against Christians and their institutions were on the increase in different parts of the country. The murder cannot be viewed as an isolated incident. The ideological motives behind it and the social context in which it took place have to be taken into account in any attempt to arrive at the truth.

Sanjai Kumar
Hazaribagh, Bihar

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Cauvery water tussles

Even as Karnataka refuses to release Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu as recommended by a committee of the Cauvery River Authority and the two governments trade charges, the situation in the delta areas remains grim, with the *kuruvai* crop and *samba* nurseries in risk of withering.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Chennai

TAMIL NADU Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi has reasons to rue at least one of the themes he repeatedly invoked during the recent election campaign: that the Cauvery river agreement of August 7, 1998 was one of the "greatest achievements" of the Vajpayee Government. Within days of the conclusion of elections to the Lok Sabha in Tamil Nadu on September 11, the Cauvery issue sprung back on Karunanidhi, with the Karnataka Government refusing to release to Tamil Nadu its seasonal share of water. At stake is the standing *kuruvai* crop on 80,000 hectares, and *samba* nurseries for transplanting on another 20,000 ha, in its Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts.

The Opposition, led by the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), quickly went on the offensive. General secretary of the AIADMK and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha said that her characterisation of the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) headed by the Prime Minister (it was established in order to enforce last year's agreement) as a "toothless wonder" had been proved right. She termed as "a mere propaganda spin" the euphoric claims by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Government in the State and the Bharatiya Janata Party that the long-standing Cauvery dispute had been resolved. She demanded the revival of the original draft scheme of May 1997, which empowered the Centre to take over the reservoirs in Karnataka if it refused to implement the Interim Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.

The Karnataka Government stood its ground and refused to release water despite Vajpayee speaking to Chief Minister J.H. Patel and the Monitoring Committee of the CRA directing the State Government to release to Tamil Nadu 3 tmc ft of water by September 30 and 6 tmc ft by October, in addition to the mandatory releases for these two and other months. Karnataka Chief Secretary B.K. Bhattacharya, a member of the Monitoring Committee, said: "We are not for immediate release." Major Irrigation Minister K.N. Nage Gowda alleged that the Committee's recommendation was "illegal" and "one-sided".

On September 21, Patel told Karunanidhi that he would consider releasing water after two or three weeks if the reservoirs received adequate rains. The next day Karunanidhi alleged that Karnataka had "violated" last year's agreement on the implementation of the Interim Order of the Tribunal, which mandated the release of 205 tmc ft to Tamil Nadu every water year from June to May. Karunanidhi said: "We are not prepared to believe that Karnataka does not have enough water... Karnataka has always violated agreements." He said that although Karnataka had 85 tmc ft besides the dead storage, it was yet to release 32.5 tmc ft which was due to Tamil Nadu. It was wrong, Karunanidhi said, to say that Tamil Nadu had 25 tmc ft at Mettur; all it had was 15 tmc ft. Of this, 3 tmc ft was mere slush, he added.

After Vajpayee spoke to Karunanidhi and Patel on September 26, he sent a three-member team headed by Union Water Resources Secretary Z. Hasan to assess the water level in the reser-



K. ANANTHAN

At the Mettur dam on September 29, Z. Hasan (centre), Union Water Resources Secretary who led a team of experts to assess the storage levels in the reservoirs in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and A. Mohanakrishnan (right), Chairman of the Cauvery Technical Cell, Tamil Nadu.

voirs in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The team, comprising Central Water Commission members, visited reservoirs in Karnataka and the Mettur reservoir in Tamil Nadu on September 27 and 28. The team was to report to the Prime Minister before a meeting of the CRA, which was convened for September 29, with the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Kerala participating. However, the CRA meeting was postponed after Patel, citing ill health, said he would be unable to attend. On September 28, even as Karunanidhi was presiding over a Cabinet meeting in Chennai, Patel phoned him up and conveyed his inability to attend the meeting.

The same day, the Central team visited the Mettur dam after visiting the reservoirs in Karnataka. Hasan told reporters in Mettur that "the situation is bad" in both the States because it had rained much less than last year. However, he said he would not like to describe it as "a distress situation". The team had got the actual figures and computed the two States' requirements. In response to a question, Hasan said that the Central team, working in two sub-groups, had visited the Karnataka reservoirs and physically assessed and verified the measurements, and computed the requirements.

In its report submitted to the Prime Minister's Office on September 29, the Central team confirmed the Monitoring Committee's recommendation to Karnataka to release 9 tmc ft to Tamil Nadu. The same evening, Hasan told a private television channel: "The Monitoring Committee has already recommended after considering all these things. We have confirmed this."

IN hundreds of villages in the delta region in Tamil Nadu, the *kuruvai* crop, almost ready for harvest, had started withering and water-starved paddy fields had become bone-dry. S.Ranganathan, secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association, said, "I have not seen such a bad situation in the past 40 years." In his opinion, "there is no possibility of revival" of the *kuruvai* crop and the *samba* nurseries unless Karnataka released water immediately. He said that unlike in 1987, when both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu faced a serious drought, there was a fairly good quantity of water in Karnataka now. "Their paddy harvest is over. They require water only for sugarcane and dry crops and for drinking purposes. They are in a position to clearly indicate how much they can spare."

On September 19, farmers in Tiruvarur district and at some places in Nagapattinam district blocked roads demanding water. At Melapidagai near Velankanni, they blocked the convoy of Public Works Minister Durai Murugan, who had claimed on September 17 that there was no water shortage in the delta and that neither the District Collectors nor the farmers had informed the Government that any crops had withered. He had further said that enough water had been released and that the *kuruvai* crop was being harvested in many places. The Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association and the Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association reacted sharply to this. Subsequently, however, Durai Murugan clarified that he had merely stated that the crops had not withered in Thanjavur district, but that they had wilted in Tiruvarur and Nagapatti-nam districts.

At the political level, on a lead given by the Dravidar Kazhagam, leaders of the AIADMK, the Congress(I), the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Janata Dal (Secular), the Indian National League, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and others organised demonstrations across the State on September 28 to protest against the "failure" of the Central, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments to protect the interests of farmers in Tamil Nadu. The DMK's allies – the BJP, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi(PMK) and the Tamilaga Rajiv Congress(TRC) – endorsed the steps taken by Karunanidhi to secure Tamil Nadu's share of water.

THE August 7, 1998 agreement, signed by the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Kerala in the presence of Prime Minister Vajpayee, was projected as a mechanism that would resolve the dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The agreement envisaged a scheme to implement the Interim Order of the Tribunal, issued on June 25, 1991, under which Karnataka should ensure that 205 tmc ft of water was available in the Mettur reservoir in a year from June to May, according to a fixed weekly and monthly schedule of releases. If there was any shortfall in a given week, it was to be made good in the subsequent week. The agreement provided for the setting up of the CRA and a Monitoring Committee headed by the Union Water Resources Secretary with Chief Secretaries of the three States and the Union Territory as members. (The Tribunal is yet to give its final order.)



V. SUDERSHAN

At the meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Cauvery River Authority in New Delhi on September 24.

After the agreement was signed, Karunanidhi was confident that Karnataka would not contravene the scheme. If there was any violation, an appeal could be made to the CRA, he said. J.H. Patel said: "Both sides have won." But the AIADMK (then a member of the BJP-led coalition), and the MDMK, the PMK and the Janata Party, which were Jayalalitha's allies then, "totally rejected" the agreement, stating that the Authority's powers were not clearly defined and that it would be unable to take decisions by a majority vote.

The row over the sharing of Cauvery water, which has become something of an annual affair, erupted this year on September 15, a bit later than it usually does, although supplies to Mettur from Karnataka had almost stopped from the beginning of August. Tamil Nadu went to the polls on September 5 and 11, and the political parties were in the thick of the campaign. Farmers in the delta were perhaps lulled into believing that rain in August and September would prompt Karnataka to release water.

However, asked if the State Government had been indifferent to the problem, Karunanidhi said that his Government had first written, on July 13, to the Central and Karnataka governments pointing out that water had not been received at Mettur; the most recent letter, he said, was sent on September 13.

On September 15, when Karunanidhi met top officials, it was revealed that the water available in the Mettur reservoir would meet irrigation needs for only 15 days. Karunanidhi directed Collectors and other officials to tour the affected areas and report to him; he also deputed Agriculture Minister Veerapandi S. Arumugam and Durai Murugan to visit the areas alongwith Local Administration Minister Ko. Si. Mani. A turn-system for supply of water to the tail-end areas was introduced.

According to Ranganathan, the *kuruvai* crop was raised on 80,000 ha after water was received from the Mettur dam from July 1. No more wetting was required for the 90-day-old crop on 16,000 ha and it could be harvested now. The 70-day-old crop on 64,000 ha required more wetting. There was no water even "to puddle the nurseries" on 20,000 ha for the *samba* crop.

Ranganathan said: "An on-the-spot study will reveal the facts and prevent further bickerings between the two States. The Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary should have invited his Karnataka counterpart to look at our water and crop position so that the two sides could avoid making accusations against each other."



S THANTHONI

Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi.

According to him, 22 lakh people – 12 lakh marginal and small farmers and 10 lakh agricultural labourers – in the affected areas were jobless today.

After the Prime Minister spoke to the two Chief Ministers, Karunanidhi said that Patel had told him on September 21 that he would release water in two weeks. Karunanidhi further said that he had pointed out to Patel that if water did not come within a week, the standing crop would wither.

Karunanidhi reacted sharply to Nage Gowda's claim that Patel had given no such assurance and that Patel had told Karunanidhi that Tamil Nadu should first utilise the 25 tmc ft stored in the Mettur dam before making any request to Karnataka. Karunanidhi said: "Let Mr. Patel say that what the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister says is not right." He said that it was wrong to say that there was dearth of water in Karnataka. The catchment areas of the Cauvery in Karnataka usually received 2,650 mm of rain from the south-west monsoon; this year it had received 2,350 mm. "The deficit is only 11 per cent... We are not prepared to believe that Karnataka received deficit rainfall..."

Karunanidhi said that during the September 28 tele-conversation with Patel, he had pointed to the postponement of the CRA meeting and had asked Patel to release as much as water as possible in the interregnum to provide relief to Tamil Nadu farmers. He also said that he had told the Prime Minister that the Centre too should, "without reluctance", help delta farmers in Tamil Nadu to receive water. Ministers Veerapandi Arumugam, Durai Murugan and Aladi Aruna met Vajpayee on September 24 and requested him to ensure that Karnataka released water to Tamil Nadu.

Asked about Jayalalitha's demand that he should resign because he did not handle the Cauvery issue properly, Karunanidhi replied sharply: "If Patel says that he will release water to Tamil Nadu only if Karunanidhi resigns, I will resign immediately. Who is Jayalalitha to say (that I should resign)?"

The Tamil Nadu Government accused Nage Gowda of making "false statements" to the press – a reference to his claim that the Interim Order had only mentioned that Karnataka should ensure water at the Mettur reservoir and that nowhere had the word "release" been used. The Interim Order said: "We direct the State of Karnataka to release water from its reservoirs in Karnataka so as to ensure that 205 tmc ft of water is available in Tamil Nadu's Mettur reservoir in a year from June to May..."

IF the Monitoring Committee's recommendations raised hopes in Tamil Nadu, they were rather short-lived. Following Karnataka's rejection of the recommendation, the Tamil Nadu Government went on the offensive. It alleged that in "total disregard to the Tribunal's orders, Karnataka has not released water despite comfortable storage in its reservoirs..." The Monitoring Committee, which met on September 24, did not accept Karnataka's claim that there was difficulty in releasing water immediately. After taking into account the availability of water in Karnataka's reservoirs, the likely minimum inflows in the coming months and the requirement for irrigation, the Monitoring Committee recommended that Karnataka release a total of 10 tmc ft in September and 36.17 tmc ft in October.

A temporary respite to the problem was provided by very heavy rains (14 cm on September 27 and 13 cm the previous day) over Palacode in Dharmapuri district, which resulted in increased inflow into the Mettur dam from 2,024 cusecs to 10,592 cusecs, and a spell of rain in Tiruvarur district on September 28. Tiruvarur District Collector C. Uma Sankar said the rains would help save the *kuruvai* crop in his district and protect the *samba* nurseries. However, an official in the Cauvery Basin said on September 28 that 17 tmc ft of water was required over the next fortnight to save the standing *kuruvai* crops, and that the total requirement for cultivation in the delta until January 2000 would be 150 tmc ft. ■

Unresolved issues

Karnataka's refusal to abide by the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee of the Cauvery River Authority shows up the limitations of the agreement reached last year.

PARVATHI MENON
in Bangalore

KARNATAKA'S categorical refusal to implement the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee of the Cauvery River Authority to release 3 tmc ft of water to Tamil Nadu immediately and an additional 6 tmc ft in October is a pointer to the limitations of the agreement on water-sharing that was reached by the Cauvery basin States amidst much fanfare on August 7, 1998. It took just one season of deficient rainfall for the Cauvery Water Scheme to come apart.

What the latest crisis points to is the fact that the "historic" agreement, which the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre claimed credit for, did not in fact address, let alone resolve, many of the substantive issues relating to the dispute. It merely put in place an administrative mechanism – the Cauvery River Authority (CRA), along with the Monitoring and Regulating Committees – that would oversee distribution of water between the two States as set out by the June 1991 Interim Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. Karnataka had deep reservations about this mechanism. The fundamental questions of how distress is to be measured and how water is to be shared in a distress year were not addressed in the agreement; as the current crisis indicates, that issue remains essentially unresolved.

The latest crisis has a familiar ring to it. Tamil Nadu's demand for water on an urgent footing to save the standing kuruvai crops in the Cauvery delta was turned down by Karnataka on the grounds that the water stored in Karnataka's reservoirs was insufficient to meet its own irrigation and drinking water needs.

Karnataka's Minister for Major Irrigation K.N. Nage Gowda stated on September 20 that Tamil Nadu had enough water to last an additional three weeks. Karnataka, he said, had released 106 tmc ft until September 14, as against 121.4 tmc ft it should have released as per the June 1991 Interim Order. The deficit, he claimed, was only 15.2 tmc ft. "When we have not received rains, how can we spare water for Tamil Nadu?" he asked. He stated that the storage in the four reservoirs in Karnataka was only 73.56 tmc ft, as against the State's requirement of 102.33 tmc ft. According to him, crops in Mandya, Mysore and Hassan districts were "withering away" owing to poor rains.

Political interests have added another dimension to the problem. Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee urged his alliance partners Chief Minister J.H. Patel and Union Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde to see that water was released to Tamil Nadu. Patel expressed his inability to accede to a request from the Prime Minister's Office; he spoke to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and asked him to wait for two to three weeks during which time Tamil Nadu could utilise the 25 tmc ft that is available in the Mettur dam.

Karnataka's refusal to heed the recommendations of the Monitoring Committee citing low storage levels in its reservoirs prompted the Centre to send an official team to assess water levels in the Karnataka reservoirs and in Mettur. Nage Gowda's outburst against the team for not having assessed what the Government claims are drought conditions in some districts was misplaced as the brief of the team was clear: it was asked to assess water storage levels in the four reservoirs – in Krishnaraja Sagar, Kabini, Harangi and Hemavati – in Karnataka.

Rains in the catchment areas of the Cauvery and in Tamil Nadu provided the opportunity for the Centre to postpone the meeting of the CRA which was to held on September 29. In any case, Patel had decided not to attend it on the grounds of ill health. Although he has been indisposed and has been under treatment, his illness could not have been better timed. According to a clause in the agreement, the CRA cannot meet unless all Chief Ministers are present. Patel has said that he will not be able to attend the meeting before October 10. By then a new government would in all probability have been sworn in. Handling the Cauvery crisis will be the first item on its agenda.

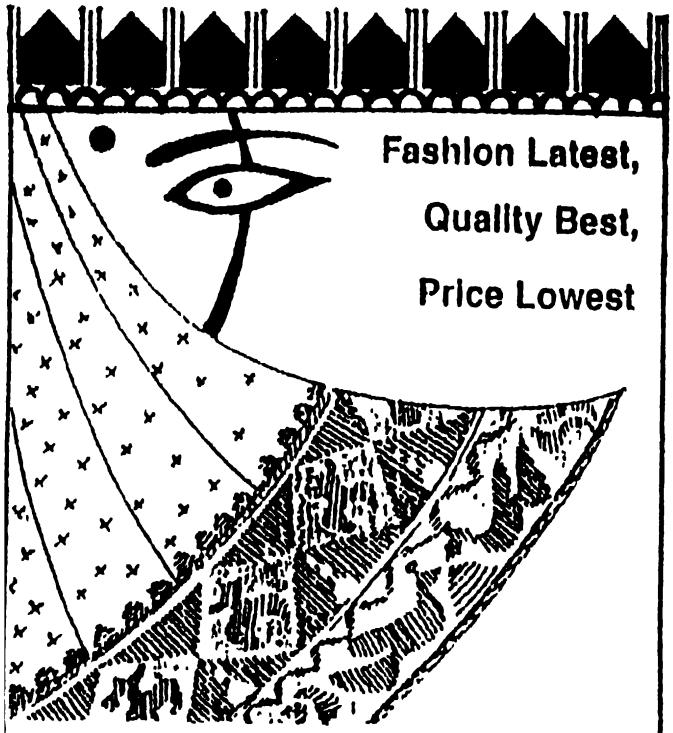
The sharing of Cauvery waters is a highly politicised issue in Karnataka, and any perceived softening of the State government from a firm stance that no water will be released will be seen as neglect of the State's interests. This is especially so in a rain-scarce year.

Nage Gowda accused the Tamil Nadu Government of exerting political pressure on the Prime Minister and said that Karnataka would abide by the decision of the Monitoring Committee. The meeting



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

C.D. Kochi, Member-Secretary, Central Water Commission, and Vashishta, Chief Engineer, CWC, Bangalore, surveying the storage position at the Harangi reservoir in Karnataka's Kodagu district on September 27.

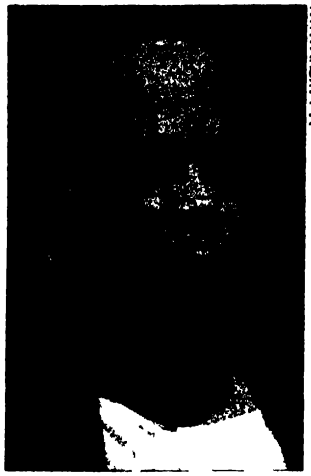


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M. LAKSHMANAN

Chief Minister S.H. Patel.

of the committee in Delhi on September 24 was chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, and attended by the Chief Secretaries of the three riparian States – Karnataka Tamil Nadu and Kerala – and the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Karnataka, however, rejected the committee's recommendation that the State make good a deficit of 20 tmc ft by December, in addition to the mandatory releases to Tamil Nadu.

The Monitoring Committee's recommendations have led to a hardening of postures in Karnataka against releasing water to Tamil Nadu; they have also reinforced the perception that there is a pro-Tamil Nadu bias working against Karnataka both in the Prime Minister's Office and in the CRA."Tamil Nadu's demand at this time is like Shylock asking for his pound of flesh," former Chief Minister M. Veerappa Moily told *Frontline*. "There is acute drought in the Cauvery basin and we need to look to our needs first. We have told Tamil Nadu to wait for 15 days. Can't they do that?" Moily accused the BJP-led government of "playing politics in the CRA". If the crisis is to be resolved, the distress formula contained in the Interim Order, which prescribes that shortages be shared proportionately, must be brought into force, he said.

Meanwhile, popular anger against the release of water has been building up in the State. A rally organised in Mysore by the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), a farmer's organisation, warned of dire consequences if water was released to Tamil Nadu. The Mysore District Cauvery Action Committee threatened to disrupt water supply to Bangalore city if the interests of Mandya and Mysore farmers were not safeguarded. Its activists locked the office of the Chief Engineer (Irrigation South) in Mysore and resolved that the members would lie down in front of the crest gates of the Kabini dam in protest against any move to release water from the reservoir.

Accusing the Government of "playing politics", M.D. Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS told *Frontline* that the riparian States should follow the distress formula laid down in the Interim Order. "It does appear as if the Monitoring Committee is favouring Tamil Nadu as there really is no water available for us to give," he said. Nanjundaswamy, who was part of a civilian initiative to find a solution to the Cauvery dispute in the early 1990s, said that he planned to send a delegation of KRRS farmers to Tamil Nadu to assess the "real position" there and present a report on water availability and the state of the crops.

Congress(I) spokesperson B.K. Chandrashekhar, who has been part of the non-official initative to resolve the dispute, told *Frontline:* "Getting experts and engineers of the Centre and the State jointly to inspect reservoirs and determine the actual quantum of water against immediate requirement is the right thing to do in a crisis like the one we have just been through... Subject to the fact-finding committee's findings and given rain in the catchment, Karnataka would do well to consider if water can be released immediately." He was also of the view that the CRA should utilise the "peace-time" (that is, when there is enough water in the reservoirs) to work out a range of options of sharing water during scarcity. ■

Payback time

Harshad Mehta, along with three others, is convicted in the case relating to the misappropriation of funds belonging to Maruti Udyog Limited, in the first of the cases from the securities scam portfolio.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Mumbai

THE stocks and securities fraud of 1991 is perhaps the most vivid signpost of Indian politics in this decade. An unregulated and ill-conceived economic liberalisation process, high-level corruption, and the impunity of the rich and the powerful from the law were all unveiled in its wake.

The impunity, at least, seems to be coming to an end. On September 28, the most visible icon of the scandal, Mumbai stock broker Harshad Shantilal Mehta, was sentenced by the Special Court of Justice M.S. Rane to five years' rigorous imprisonment for his part in a criminal conspiracy to misappropriate funds from the public sector Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL). Three others were also convicted and sentenced for their role in the fraud as well as on a welter of secondary charges for which the sentences will run concurrently. If Mehta's conviction withstands an appeal in the Supreme Court, he could find himself keeping company in jail with his bear-cartel counterpart, Hiten Dalal, convicted on similar charges in March 1999 and in August 1998.

Mehta's MUL-related fraud involved little ingenuity; it was just a case of plain and simple corruption. Between November 1990 and May 1991, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) which investigated the securities scandal found that MUL had had transactions worth some Rs.126 crores with Mehta and his firm. In essence, the car major, like most major public sector undertakings, sought the highest possible returns for its surplus cash. The brokers desperately needed cash to play the market. But there was a small problem. Public funds could only be invested in government securities, Treasury bills and similar instruments. Brokers like Mehta found ways to bypass these restrictions by influencing MUL officials and bankers.

At the end of its romance with Mehta, MUL found itself short of Rs.38.97 crores. The methods used to bring this about were simple. Much of the story before Justice Rane emerged from the testimony of Mohan Khandelwal, the manager of Mehta's New Delhi operations, who turned approver. Khandelwal had been at the centre of unsubstantiated claims by Mehta that he paid bribes to former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Pramodkumar Mehta, a deputy manager with MUL in charge of finance, played a key role in the enterprise, along with an assistant manager at the Hamam Street branch of UCO Bank in Mumbai, Vinayak Deosthali. Another bank employee in New Delhi, ANZ Grindlays' Ram Narayan Popli, was the fourth player in the quartet.

One element in the MUL fraud was unsophisticated misappropriation. On January 23, 1991, for example, Manocha handed over 35 lakh Unit Trust of India (UTI) units, then valued at Rs.4.99 crores, to Khandelwal, in violation of specific orders of the MUL board of directors. The same day Deosthali forged a letter authorising the transfer of funds from Mehta through Bank of America to MUL, covering Manocha's tracks for the moment. Khandelwal continued to hold on to the UTI units, leaving Mehta free to use them to raise more money. In effect, Deosthali had enabled Mehta to help himself to the bank's money. As long as share prices continued to boom, and Mehta met his repayment obligations, no one seemed to object to a little criminal wrong-doing along the way.

Popli was the last cog in the wheel, set up to ensure that the funds Manocha and Deosthali generated actually made their way to Mehta. On one occasion in February 1991, he diverted a Canara Bank banker's cheque worth Rs.5.05 crores favouring Grindlays Bank to Mehta's account. He pulled off the same trick on March 18 and April 24 that year, this time with banker's cheques worth Rs.10.84 crores and Rs.7.62 crores respectively. Thus MUL was not the only victim of the Mehta quartet. Both UCO Bank and ANZ Grindlays suffered separately. That the bank employees could so easily siphon off their banks' cash says not a little about the state of their supervisory apparatus. Indeed, banks may have played along with the fraud, hoping for profits. In December 1998, the Special Court of Justice S.N.



SHERWIN CRASTO/AP

Harshad Mehta, left, with his lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani after the Special Court in Mumbai convicted him on September 27.

Variava slammed Standard Chartered Bank for playing "fast and loose" with banking regulations because of its "greed for profits".

By the spring of 1991, the MUL fraud had acquired a regular pattern. On March 13, Manocha handed over MUL's cash to Mehta. This time, an MUL banker's cheque worth Rs.10.12 crores, drawn on Canara Bank's Sansad Marg branch in New Delhi, made its way to one of Mehta's employees, Anuj Kalia. Kalia, later acquitted for want of evidence that he was actually involved in the fraud, sent the cheque to Mumbai. There Deosthali promptly got to work, this time forging a letter, Banker's Receipt (B.R.) 1121, designed to convince MUL that UCO Bank's Hamam Street Branch was holding UTI units which it would shortly deliver. Of course, no physical delivery ever took place. Mehta had a further Rs.10 crores with which to push up share prices on the market to ever-higher heights, fuelling an upward spiral which would collapse calamitously.

Manocha succeeded in pulling off the same trick again on May 2, 1991. This time he told MUL that UCO Bank wanted the car manufacturer to give it Rs.10 crores for five days at 21 per cent interest. Attracted by this high rate of return, MUL made over a banker's cheque, number 836260, for Rs.10.34 lakhs. This cheque too was handed over to Kalia and then recycled by Mehta. All that MUL received was a succession of fake UCO Bank banker's receipts, all forged by Deosthali. Forged B.Rs were a favoured instrument of the brokers involved in the securities scandal. Since few organisations ever bothered to monitor physical delivery of the securities listed in the B.Rs, funds could endlessly be raised against non-existent securities.

Indeed, Hiten Dalal's conviction in March showed that he had taken control of two defunct banks, the Metropolitan Cooperative Bank and the Bank of Karad, for this purpose. Dalal's conviction emerged from three transactions in government securities by Canara Bank Financial Services (Canfina), a wholly owned subsidiary of the public sector Canara Bank. Canfina was a key player in the securities scandal, trading in securities worth over Rs.85,000 crores in 1991-1992 although it had a capital of just Rs.33 crores in 1992. In this case Canfina purchased government securities worth Rs.494 crores from the obscure Bank of Karad. In return, it received worthless B.Rs. Banks need to acquire large volumes of government securities from time to time to meet statutory requirements.

No one in Canfina, as in UCO Bank, appeared to have asked any questions. And questions, in Dalal's case too, there were several. For one, the Bank of Karad, which was by then a virtually captive front organisation for Dalal and other brokers, had no securities to back its B.Rs. The B.Rs were in effect worthless pieces of paper. Then, the funds that Bank of Karad received from Canfina were promptly paid into Narottam's account. The broker in turn used this cash to play the market, paying banks for securities he purchased from them on the same day.

IT seems clear that the end of the MUL case is just the beginning of Harshad Mehta's problems. Mehta, the JPC had found, had transactions with 17 public sector undertakings other than MUL, notably the Discount and Finance House of India, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (now Corporation) and the Indian Oil Corporation. Compared to their volume of business with the broker, MUL's involvement was minimal. In 411 transactions, the ONGC put up over Rs.5,146 crores, while the Discount and Finance House of India, in 779 transactions, made available Rs.4,905 crores. On paper it all looked above board, but once the scandal broke the organisations discovered that the funds they had received from Mehta amounted to only worthless pieces of paper. Several separate prosecutions are pending against Mehta and other brokers, which could take years to decide.

The conviction of Mehta and his trio of backers has been suspended until November 2, giving them time to go in appeal. While Mehta's principal charge is conspiracy, Deosthali and Manocha, both employees of public sector units, will have to contest their convictions under the Prevention of Corruption Act. Legal sources told *Frontline* that one central theme of their appeal is likely to be the testimony of Khandelwal and alleged political bias in the Central Bureau of Investigation's handling of the case. In general, the testimony of approvers is treated with caution by courts. Hiten Dalal's earlier conviction has already been admitted in the Supreme Court. Time has been given until October 28 to deposit the fines, which in some cases are heavy. Deosthali, for example, will have to pay a total of Rs.2.30 lakhs.

Whatever the fate of the appeals, it is a tribute to the work of the Special Court that the decade is ending with both the key architects of the securities scandal being convicted for their crimes. The securities scandal not only robbed the Indian public of thousands of crores of rupees of their tax money but saw hundreds of thousands of small investors, lured by the prospect of an evidently endless boom on the stock markets, robbed of their lifetime savings.

Harshad Mehta's conviction was greeted by sharp declines in several scrips on the Bombay Stock Exchange, a sign that impunity continues to be a valued commodity for Indian capitalists. Those committed to honesty and transparency in business can only hope that the legal system continues to ensure that economic crime is punished, for the real lessons of the securities scandal have clearly yet to be learned by India's rich. ■

Transactions of PSUs with Harshad Mehta
From March 1987 to April 1992

PSU	Receipts (in rupees)	Payments (in rupees)
Bharat Petroleum	30,000,000.00	30,000,000.00
CIFCO	6,000,000.00	6,000,000.00
DDA slum wing	84,000,000.00	42,000,000.00
Discount and Finance House of India	47,370,947,418.85	48,000,000,844.72
Engineering Export Promotion Council	992,613,000.70	992,304,404.53
General Insurance Corporation of India	707,000.00	841,625.00
HDFC	92,428,570.00	91,000,304.00
IFFCO	122,000,315.00	80,916,532.00
Indian Oil Corporation	3,044,000,104.27	3,078,541,005.00
Industrial Finance Corporation	53,037,340.05	53,000,303.05
Investment Corporation of India	n.a.	101.50
Life Insurance Corporation of India	9,400,700.50	301,000,237.40
Maruti Udyog Limited	1,264,000,342.40	1,263,004,502.40
National Organic Chemical Industries	203,530,120.34	202,200,575.34
National Thermal Power Corporation	1,525,100,000.00	1,212,102,970.00
NPCIL	501,202,005.20	200,010,444.13
Oil and Natural Gas Commission	53,101,000,700.01	51,405,002,001.03
ONGC Videsh	543,573,130.00	504,274,000.57
Oriental Insurance	1,207,004.00	1,002,211.50
Power Finance Corporation	17,000,200,000.17	15,417,010,074.40
Unit Trust of India	400,001,400.02	1,100,774,400.00
United India Insurance	3,741,300.50	3,000,400.50
Total	127,283,000,823.73	124,902,145,123.29

Source Appendix XLII, page 108, Vol II of the Report of the JPC

Are you financially strong enough to meet future needs?

By a panel of experts

Financial planning helps you to take control of your financial life in the present and to provide for the future. Proper planning begins with three basic questions:

1) Where are you today? (i.e. What is your net worth?)
2) Where do you want to go tomorrow? (What are your financial objectives?)
3) How will you get there? (What is your plan of action?)

Let us deal with the first question of your net worth.

Your networth is, quite simply, the difference between what you own (your assets) and what you owe. (your liabilities). Your net assets are indicative of how much income they can generate for you. Your net liabilities are indicative of the cost of your obligations.

You can easily prepare your Net Worth Statement by taking inventory of your assets and liabilities, as shown below. Your net worth tells you your financial standing and provides a basis for finding out how much income you will require to support your chosen standard of living.

Prepare two Net Worth Statement: one for your position as it is today and the other as you estimate it to be at your retirement.

[redacted]

(1) Assets : (What income producing assets you own)

Rs. ..... Cash & Bank Balances
Rs. ..... Fixed Deposits & Bonds
Shares/Units (Face Value)
Rs. ..... Life Insurance on your life
Rs. ..... Provident Fund (accumulated till today)
Rs. ..... Gratuity (expected now)
Rs. ..... P.P.F.; N.S.C.; N.S.S. etc.
Rs. ..... Business/ Investments
Rs. ..... Other Income producing Assets

Total Assets (A)

[redacted]

Rs. ..... Education expenses
Rs. ..... Thread Ceremony expenses
Rs. ..... Marriage Expenses
Rs. ..... Start-In-Life expenses for children
Rs. ..... Mortgage or Loan repayments
Rs. ..... Last Illness expenses
Rs. ..... Other Liabilities (Taxes. Bill. etc)

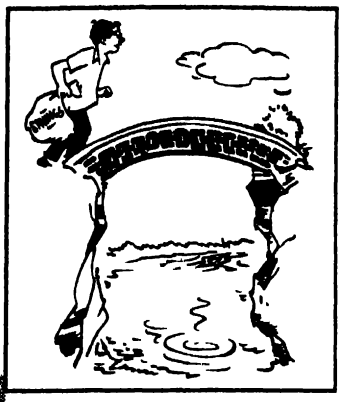
Total Liabilities (L)

(3) Net Worth : (Asset Less Liabilities)

e.g. Total Assets (A) Rs. 10 Lacs
Less Total Liabilities (L) Rs. - 3 Lacs
Net Worth i.e. Capital Net Worth i.e. Capital available for income (N) Rs 7 Lacs

[redacted]

Taking 12% p.a. (after tax) as the earnings on this capital, Rs. 7 lac fetch an annual income of Rs. 84,000. Now, when you know that your annual living



expenses are say Rs. 96,000, you will see that this exceeds income by Rs. 12,000 (i.e. Rs. 96,000 less Rs. 84,000). So Rs. 12,000 is the Income Deficit : (D) or gap that you have to bridge in order to meet your living expenses.

[redacted]

To bridge this gap you will have to generate an income of Rs. 12,000. The capital required for this (again taking 12% p.a.), is Rs. 1 lacs. So, you will need to create additional capital worth Rs. 1 lac to make up for the deficit and meet your living expenses in full.

[redacted]

The best way of reducing the income deficit is the creation of capital e.g. by taking a Insurance Policy on your life. While other saving plans give you what you have been able to save, life insurance guarantees your family what you hoped to save, in the event of your departure before completion of your plan.

[redacted]

1. Save more about 30% of your Income.
2. With safety uppermost, revise you investment portfolio so as to maximise returns.
3. Invest wisely, not speculatively, and in shares of reputed companies. In the long run, equity shares are the best hedge against inflation.
4. Cut your taxes by getting the full benefits of tax-free income under Section 80-1 from bank deposits, N.S.C., units, mutual funds etc. and rebates under Section 88 by investing in approved schemes like P.P.F., infrastructure bonds, N.S.C. etc.
5) Split capital and income, bearing in mind the provisions of 'Clubbing of Income' in the hands of the donor. Passing on capital and the consequent income to the members of your family will reduce your taxes.
6) Invest in collectibles (stamps, antiques, art etc.) after proper study.
7) Pay proper attention to your health so as to minimise your medical expenses.
8) Cover your family with Mediclaim because hospitalization expenses can reduce your networth drastically.
9) Encourage your wife to translate her talents into income.
10) Plan for a second career after retirement.

Do remember to take into account the impact of taxes and inflation when calculating your income.

ICICI
Banking • Bonds • Car Loans • Home Loans
O&M Financial/Frontline

Partition plans?

The contents of a newly available document, together with other evidence, point to some kind of a disquieting enterprise by the BJP-led government to partition Jammu and Kashmir, which is being discussed under U.S. patronage.

PRAVEEN SWAMI

HAS the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in New Delhi been engaged in a covert dialogue on plans to partition Jammu and Kashmir and create a new quasi-independent state?

Frontline has obtained a confidential document issued by the New York-based Kashmir Study Group (KSG), which was circulated recently among a select group of top officials in the United States, Pakistan and India. The document, the second of a series called "Kashmir: A Way Forward", details proposals for the creation of a new Kashmiri state or states. These plans, the KSG asserts, came into being after tentative proposals authored in December 1998 were handed over "to government officials in India and Pakistan, and to diverse leadership in Kashmir, and many opinion makers in India, Pakistan and Kashmir". For more than one reason, the claim appears plausible.

The KSG is run by an affluent U.S.-based businessman of Srinagar origin, Farooq Kathwari. Kathwari owns Ethan Allen, an upmarket furniture concern whose clients include the White House. Several figures of the Indian establishment, including former Foreign Secretary N.K. Singh and Vice-Admiral (retired) S.K. Nair, participated in deliberations that preceded the release of the first "Kashmir: A Way Forward". Although all the Indians concerned denied having endorsed the report, Kathwari was subsequently granted a visa to visit India. His journey did not just consist of visits to his relatives in Srinagar, for the businessman met what one official source describes as a "who's who of the BJP establishment".

"Kashmir: A Way Forward" outlines five proposals for either one or two new states, which it describes somewhat mysteriously as a "sovereign entity but one without an international personality". "The new entity," the KSG document says, "would have its own secular, democratic constitution, as well as its own citizenship, flag and a legislature which would legislate on all matters other than defence and foreign affairs." The document adds: "India and Pakistan would be responsible for the defence of the Kashmiri entity, which would itself maintain police and gendarme forces for internal law and order purposes. India and Pakistan would be expected to work out financial arrangements for the Kashmiri entity, which could include a currency of its own."

IN essence, the KSG suggests five possible forms of a new Kashmiri state. The first two proposals envisage the creation of either two separate Eastern and Western Kashmiri entities on either side of the existing Line of Control (LoC), or a single state straddling it. The fourth and fifth options explore how these states would look like if an agreement came about on significant territorial exchanges along the LoC, with the whole of Rajouri and much of Poonch going to Pakistan in return for large but thinly populated Balti-speaking territory. "Kashmir: A Way Forward" argues that the exchanges would safeguard the Mangla dam watershed in Pakistan, while providing strategic depth to the Uri hydroelectric project in India and securing the Srinagar-Kargil highway from attacks.

But the third and most significant version that "Kashmir: A Way Forward" envisages is a single Kashmiri state on the Indian side of the LoC; this proposal is based on the assumption that Pakistan would for some reason be unwilling to accept the creation of a new entity on its side. Interestingly, the possibility that India would not be willing to accept the creation of some form of new state is not discussed in the paper. The KSG's concept is built on the assumption of a tehsil-level referendum leading to all of the districts of the Kashmir Valley, and the district of Doda opting to be part of the new entity. The entity could also include the district of Kargil, three northern tehsils from Rajouri and the tehsil of Udhampur.

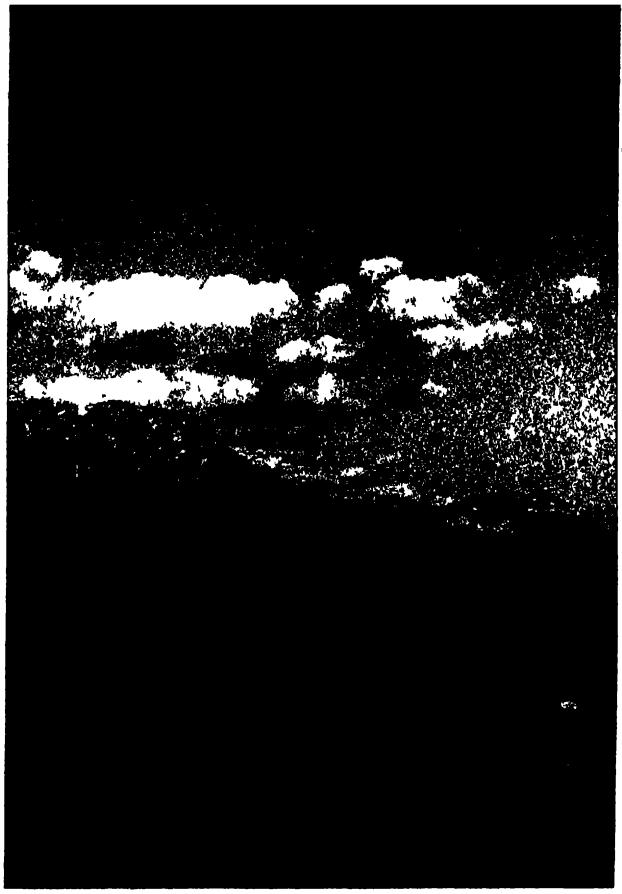
PERHAPS more interesting than the geographical outlines of the KSG's Kashmir are the stated reasons for its creation. Enormous leaps of reason are used to avoid the assertion that these tehsils incorporate all the principal Muslim-majority areas of Jammu and Kashmir as it exists, or that a communal sundering is being contemplated. "All these areas," the document asserts, "are imbued with Kashmiriyat, the cultural traditions of the Vale of Kashmir, and/or interact extensively with Kashmiri-speaking people." The document says: "In all but five of tehsils so designated, Kashmiri is the language of a clear majority of the population, while in three of these five problematic tehsils, Kashmiri is the single leading language."

At least two problematic elements exist in this discourse. For one, the implicit proposition that some areas in Jammu and Kashmir do not "interact extensively with Kashmiri-speaking people" is mystifying. State employees shuttle between Jammu and Kashmir's two provinces twice a year, and trade between the regions is vibrant. Then, while Doda's relationship with Kashmir is indeed an organic one, so are its ties south of the Chenab with Jammu. Indeed, the district has often agitated against the perceived hegemony of the Kashmir Valley elites. Finally, if language and culture are arguments for a sundering of the existing State, it is unclear why the KSG even considers the prospect of a single entity. Punjabi, not Kashmiri, is spoken across the LoC, and cultural traditions there have little to do with those of the valley.

The specifics of the KSG's problem give some insight into just how ill-founded its linguistic claims are. The three northern tehsils of Rajouri – Thana Mandi, Buddhal and Rajouri – themselves share language, culture and trade ties with the three southern tehsils – Kalakote,

Sunderbani and Mahore. Kashmiri is nowhere the dominant language here. Yet the KSG document argues that this "Sunni Muslim tract has had close links with Kashmir over many centuries and would likely opt for inclusion in a Kashmiri state if given the choice." Clearly, the KSG worldview is founded on the privileging of religious identity over culture and language. Nowhere in "Kashmir: A Way Forward" do its authors even explore the possibility that the relationship of Rajouri's Muslims with their Hindu neighbours could be more profound than those to the north in the Kashmir Valley.

Similarly, in the 1981 Census just 3.2 per cent of the residents of Karnah and 31.3 per cent of the residents of Uri recorded their first language as Kashmiri. These tehsils, along with Gurez, recorded the highest turnout levels in the recent Lok Sabha elections in the Baramulla constituency despite calls by secessionist groups for a boycott of the exercise. Nonetheless, the KSG-conceived state is based on the assumption, clearly driven by communal premises, "that they would opt to join our hypothetical Kashmiri state". In both Ramban and Bhaderwah tehsils in Doda, as the KSG acknowledges, Kashmiri is not the principal language. Nonetheless, here too the KSG assumes that its residents would vote to join the new entity. This is again a communally driven supposition – one that terrorist massacres through these areas have done not a little to give body to.



S. SUBRAMANIUM

A 'full moon day' in Rajouri.

Similar premises drive the inclusion of what the KSG describes as the Gool-Gulabgarh tehsil in Udhampur, its sole Muslim-majority area. But there is no such tehsil, for both Gool and Gulabgarh were until recently parts of Mahore tehsil. Gool subsequently became a separate tehsil. Interestingly, the case for merging Mahore with Doda was first made in April 1999 by the controversial Regional Autonomy Committee of the Jammu and Kashmir Government (*Frontline*, July 30, 1999). The committee had recommended the sundering of the State into several new provinces, with the Mahore tehsil, along with Doda, becoming part of a new Chenab province. Informed sources told *Frontline* that the State Government was pushing ahead with these plans, with Riyaz Punjabi, an academic, presiding over their implementation.

Indeed, the dots on the page are starting to join together into a disturbing picture. Michael Krepon, head of the influential U.S. think tank, the Stimson Centre, gave more than a little indication of official thinking in that country on the future of Kashmir. "India's Kashmir policy," he told *The Indian Express* on November 28, "has been predicated on the passage of time theory and limited to counter-insurgency operations." He added: "The question that needs to be asked is whether or not this is working in India's favour because as time passes, Pakistan is becoming weaker." One senior Western diplomat explained to *Frontline* what this might mean in practice. "India as the stronger state needs to make concessions," the diplomat said. "It needs to agree to a one-eighth of the way house, if not a half-way house." The diplomat added: "That could mean soft borders in Kashmir, people-to-people contact, and free trade."

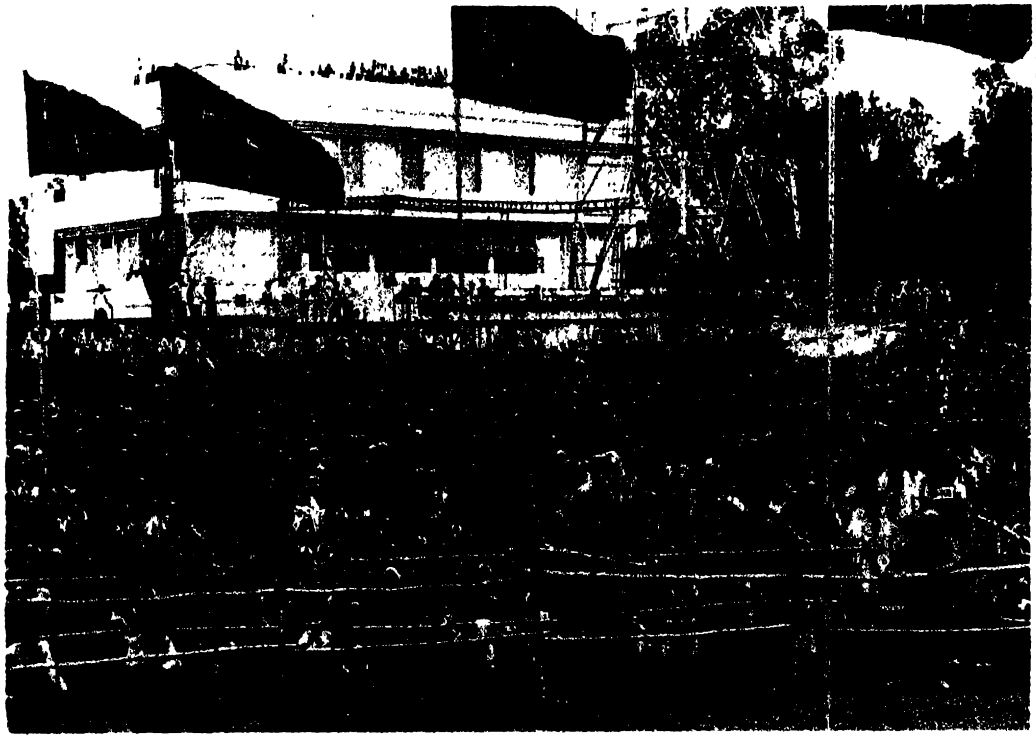
But the problem with a "one-eighth of the way house", as anyone familiar with South Asian cities will attest, is that they tend to get built eventually. Pakistani journalist Talat Hussain recently reported in *The Nation* that the back-channel negotiators during the Kargil War, Niaz Naik and R.K. Mishra, had discussed what was described as the "Chenab Plan" for Kashmir. The Chenab Plan, which according to Hussain's report was documented in a Pakistani proposal, an Indian response, and a second Pakistani proposal, suggested a recognition of the LoC as the border, followed by the grant of autonomy to the Kashmir Valley. The demands made by Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah for a restoration of the 1953 status of Jammu and Kashmir are also not distant from the KSG conception of a quasi-independent state.

Despite persistent U.S. denials that it wishes to mediate on the future of Jammu and Kashmir, the fact remains that it has emerged as a central player. The KSG proposals, read in the context of the Regional Autonomy Report, Krepon's argument and the Niaz Naik papers, suggest that some kind of disquieting enterprise to partition Jammu and Kashmir is being discussed under U.S. patronage. That the Government of India is even willing to engage in such dialogue, premised as it is on a sundering of Hindu from Muslim, says not a little about the lack of honesty with which the BJP's Kashmir policy has been conducted. Neither the participants in this dialogue nor its content is visible other than as shadows, and India's people, it seems probable, will be the last to be told what emerges from it.

It is unclear if the BJP will agree to plans for a new partition, howsoever it is packaged, or if it will succeed in selling it to India's people. Should such a sundering come about, however, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh vision of a Hindu India will be one step closer to being realised. In 1951, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had argued that the accession of Kashmir to India would help defeat the project of turning India "into a religious state wherein the interests of Muslims would be threatened". Just over 50 years later, at least some people would evidently like that small geographical obstacle, made up of just four Lok Sabha seats, removed. ■

■ ELECTION'99

AS INDIA VOTED

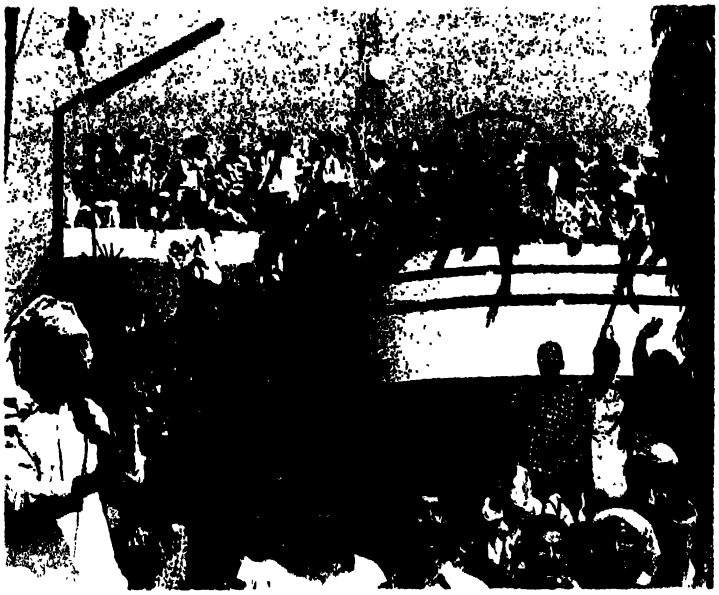


SUBIR ROY



K.R. DEEPAK

A Bahujan Samaj Party rally in Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh.
(Facing page) At a Telugu Desam election meeting at Anakapalle.



RAJEEV BHATT



AJITH KUMAR

At BJP rallies at Fatehbad in Haryana and (right) at Baghpat in U.P.
(Far right) Children atop a campaign vehicle of the Nationalist Congress Party in Kharkutta near Tura, Meghalaya.



RITU RAJ KONWAR





RITU RAJ KONWAR



AMIT BHARGAVA/AP



RAJEEV BHATT

In interior Assam, an unconventional patrol to keep the peace in Kamrup district. (Below) Dealing with electoral malpractice in Barh, Bihar. (Below left) To the booth, at Alwar in Rajasthan, in a seemingly sponsored vehicle.



AIJAZ RAHI/AP

Residents of Suchitgarh near the India-Pakistan border on their way to the polling station, braving cross-border fire.



C. RATHEESH KUMAR

E.M.S. Namboodiripad's widow Arya Antharjanam casts her vote in Thiruvananthapuram.

(Below) In Lucknow, a cycle rally by Congress(I) workers. (Below right) An elderly supporter of the BJP at work.



AP



SHERWIN CRASTO/AP

In Mumbai, a policeman guides a voter to the booth.

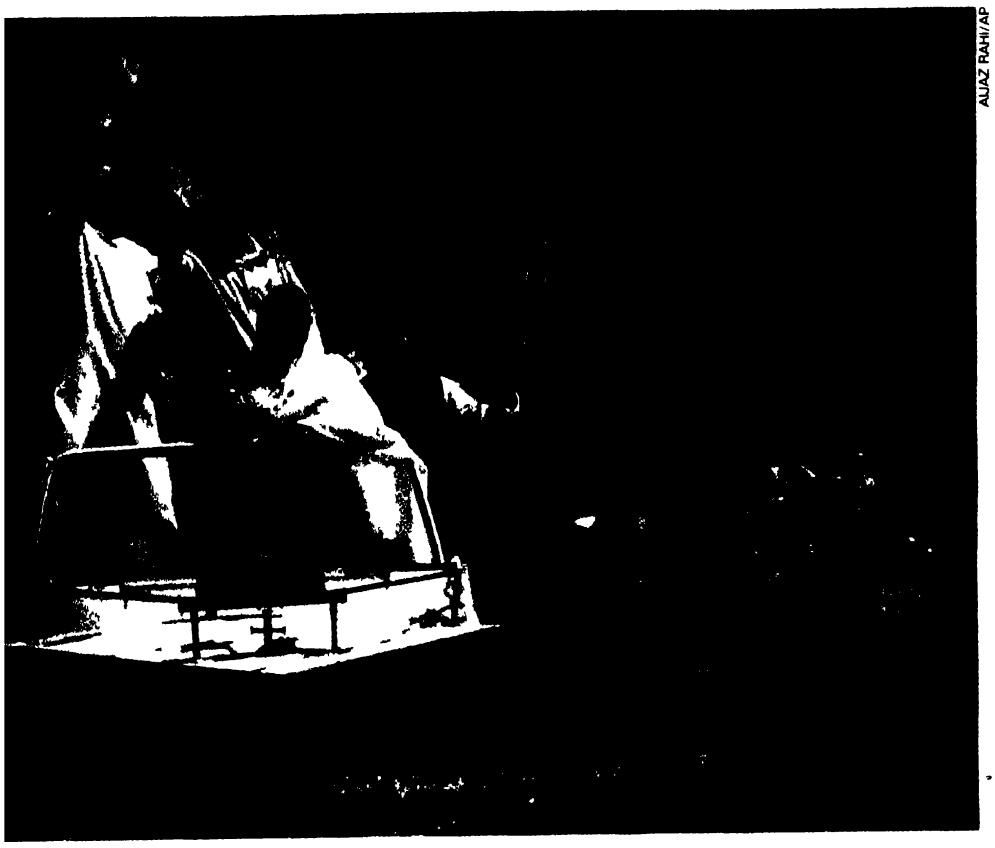


SHERWIN CRASTO/AP

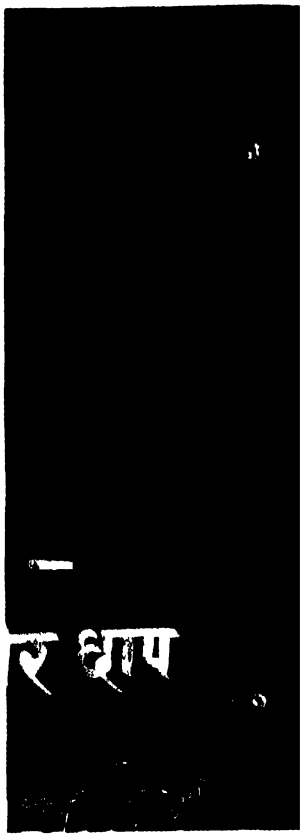
A Khasi mother casts her vote in Shillong.



RITU RAJ KONWAR



AIJAZ RAHI/AP



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah campaigning for son Omar on the Dal lake.
(Right) Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha reaches out to voters in Hazaribagh.



SANJAY KUMAR



SANJAY KUMAR

Janata Dal (United) leader Ram Vilas Paswan in his special campaign vehicle.



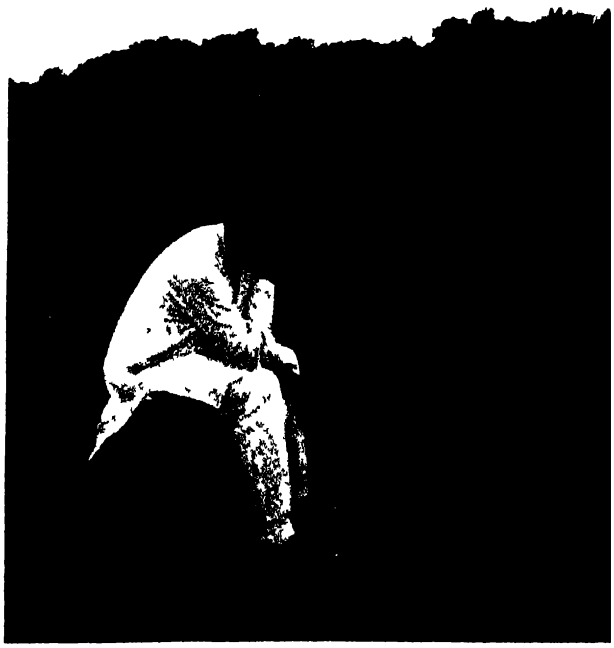
RITU RAJ KONWAR

NCP leader P.A. Sangma.

RITU RAJ KONWAR







(Left, above) RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav campaigns from a boat in the Kosi river in the Madhepura constituency, where he seeks re-election. (Left, below) Jagdish Tytler, the Congress(I) candidate from Delhi's Sadar constituency, being weighed against silver bricks. (Above) Union Minister Pramod Mahajan waiting for transport after a campaign tour of Bihar.



VIKRAM KUMAR AP

Star campaigners lend their voices and faces. Rahul Gandhi overcomes a barrier while campaigning in Farukkabad. (Below) Veteran actor Dilip Kumar campaigns for the Congress(I) in Patna; Former Navy chief Admiral Vishnu Bhagawat in Nalanda, to give a helping hand to the Congress(I) candidate against Defence Minister George Fernandes.







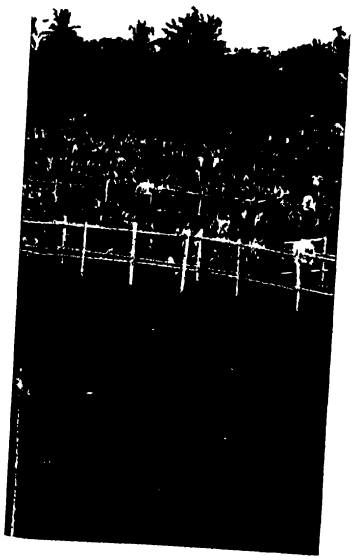
CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet at a rally in Tripura.



ASHISH K. BHOWMIK



RITU RAJ KONW





JOHN MACONNICO AP

The BJP's stars. Chunky Pandey for Vijay Goel in New Delhi and (top) Shatrughan Sinha in Guwahati.

On quantitative restrictions

THE World Trade Organisation (WTO) endorsed on September 23 the ruling delivered a month earlier by the Appellate Body asking India to dismantle certain kinds of quantitative import restrictions imposed in the interests of balance of payments (BoP) stability. The Appellate Body had only upheld the finding of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) that the quantitative restrictions (QRs) maintained by India were inconsistent with the basic charter of the organisation and were not justified by the enabling provisions under Article XVIII.

These successive rulings emanated from a complaint filed by the United States in 1997. Following an adverse ruling by the DSB on India's regime of QRs, a series of bilateral negotiations had been undertaken with the complainants. A seven-year schedule for phasing out the QRs was mutually agreed with a number of countries, notably the European Union, Australia, Switzerland, Canada and Japan. The U.S. was, however, not appeased by the commitment to phase out all QRs by March 31, 2003, and it requested a fresh hearing in the DSB.

India told the DSB and the Appellate Body that the 'immediate removal of all restrictions' was bound to reduce (its foreign exchange) reserves below levels considered adequate by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The argument was that the removal of all restrictions would have a destabilising effect unless it was replaced by 'macroeconomic policy instruments complemented by structural adjustment policies'. India submitted that this entire package of measures needed a reasonable time frame for successful implementation.

In taking up these matters, the DSB and the Appellate Body went by the IMF finding that India's external payments situation could be 'managed by using macroeconomic policy instruments alone". It concluded from this evaluation that "structural measures' which involved a change in "development policy' were not necessary 'for the preservation of India's external financial position".

India and the U.S. will now enter into a bilateral dialogue to work out a revised schedule for the removal of QRs. Meanwhile, official spokesmen of the Commerce Ministry argued that the WTO rulings still provided a reasonable period of time to phase out import restrictions.

India will now have to make a statement before the DSB at its next sitting on October 27 outlining an action plan on the implementation of its rulings. In a period of two months from the adoption of the report, both India and the U.S. would have to evolve a mutually agreeable schedule for the removal of QRs. Failing this, the matter will once again go for arbitration in the WTO. ■

Sukumar Muralidharan

IGNCA questions

THE Delhi High Court granted on September 23 clearance to the Union Government to proceed against the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), run by a trust headed by Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. A Division Bench of the court, comprising Justice S.N. Variava and Justice S.K. Mahajan, did this while admitting a public interest petition filed by Naresh Pandey, an advocate. Additional Solicitor-General Kirit Rawal earlier told the Bench that the government was prepared to take appropriate action against the trust but that the pendency of such a petition in the court should not come in its way.

The petition challenged the May 1995 amendments to certain clauses contained in the original trust deed converting the trust into a private one, besides making Sonia Gandhi its life-president and all 21 trustees its life-trustees.

The trust was created in 1987 under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as an autonomous body with appropriate government control in order to promote activities in the field of art and culture. Sonia Gandhi was made its president after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991. It is located in the Central Vista in New Delhi, on 8.5 hectares of prime land allotted by the Union Government. The government sanctioned it a corpus of Rs.50 crores, of which Rs.25 crores was released in 1987 and the balance between 1992 and 1995. The government had agreed to grant an additional Rs.100 crores for a building complex.

The Human Resource Development Ministry had in an affidavit (*Frontline*, July 30, 1999) questioned the validity of the amended deed. Pointing out that prior written approval had not been sought from the government for the changes, it held that the government would take necessary steps to protect its interests with respect to movable and immovable properties it had made available to the IGNCA. The affidavit, filed in response to the petition filed by Naresh Pandey, alleged that amendments to Clauses 7 and 8 (on the appointment of life trustees and a life time president), 9 (appointment of a member-secretary), 24 (power to amend the trust deed without reference to government) and 25 (denying the President of India the right to appoint a review panel on its functioning) were made without the government's approval.

The original deed had stipulated that any amendment to it would require the approval of the Union Government. It also had a provision which stated that the President of India, who officiates as Visitor to the IGNCA, would have the right to appoint a committee to review the centre's activities and that its recommendations as accepted by the government would be binding on the centre.

The Bench, which took note of the fact that the government had given the entity some Rs.133 crores and 23 acres of prime land in the New Delhi area, observed: "If it is a trust over which the government has no control, why should largesse be given to it? Why should the money not be taken back?" The Bench said: "Merely because some eminent people are involved does not mean that the trust should be given largesse."

The Bench also expressed its displeasure over Sonia Gandhi being made president of the trust. It asked "how being the widow of a former Prime Minister conferred (on her) any qualification of being an expert on art and culture and entitled her to be president of the trust without authority from the government." Responding to the IGNCA counsel's argument that five ex-officio members, including the Union Minister for Human Resource Development and the Minister for External Affairs, were authorised to check the functioning of the trust, the court observed that the Ministers could be overruled by the other members, who constituted a majority.

It appears that the IGNCA is not ready to enter into a confrontation. Counsel for IGNCA suggested that the trust was ready for a dialogue with the government. ■

T.K. Rajalakshmi

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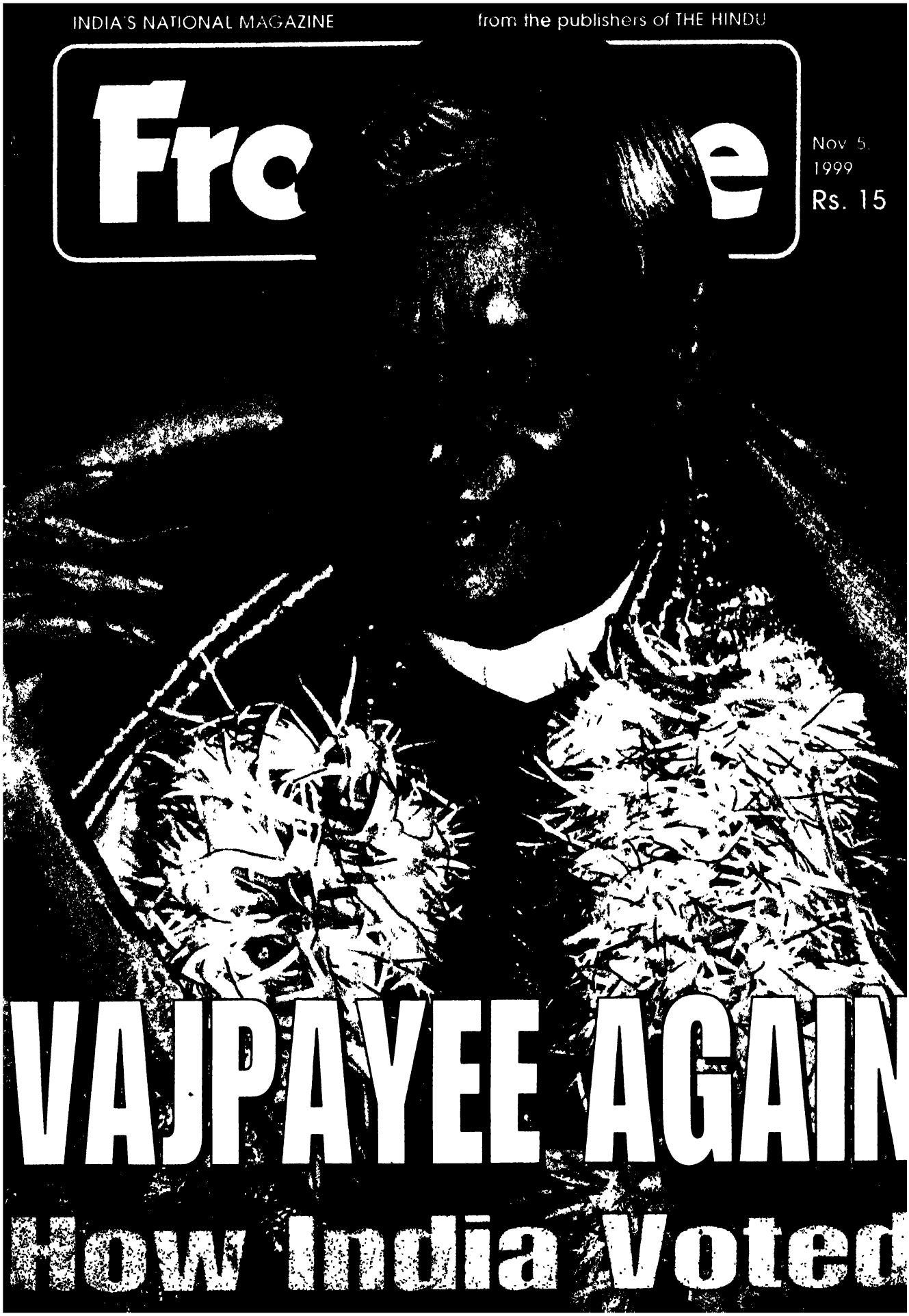
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Frontline

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VAJPAYEE AGAIN

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Frontline



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VAJPAYEE AGAIN

The Bharatiya Janata Party gets power in New Delhi again, this time along with almost two dozen allies. And there is not a cloud of instability in sight – not at least for now.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

THE Bharatiya Janata Party and its 23 allies got off to a brisk start as the counting of votes for the general elections to the 13th Lok Sabha got under way on October 6. By midday it was clear that the BJP had completed an unprecedented sweep of all seven seats in the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Observers looking for precedents went back to 1984, when the Congress(I) won all seven seats in Delhi as part of a nation-wide sweep. Other instances were the 1977 Janata Party triumph, which was again part of a political wave that brought it an unambiguous majority in the Lok Sabha.

By evening, though, it seemed more likely that far from sweeping the Lok Sabha polls, the BJP and its allies would only be gaining a slender parliamentary majority. Early results coming from the pivotal State of Uttar Pradesh bore clear evidence of a far more serious erosion of the BJP's position than had been predicted. From the point of view of the BJP, the day must have closed with grim forebodings of another phase of chronic political instability. It seemed the most likely outcome of general elections 1999 that the third Vajpayee Ministry would be no more secure than the first two.

Yet by dawn the next day, the situation had once again been transformed, pointing unequivocally towards a robust parliamentary majority for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). What it had lost in U.P., the BJP was more than making good in Bihar and other parts of the Hindi belt. Till the evening of October 6, the Congress(I) had held the belief that it would retain the position it had taken in the November 1998 Assembly elections in various northern States, and make a breakthrough in Uttar Pradesh. The latter half of the wish-list was fulfilled, though on a manifestly partial basis. The first assumption, though, proved thoroughly misdirected.



V. SUDERSHAN



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with leaders of parties that are constituents of the National Democratic Alliance in New Delhi on October 8. (Left) L.K. Advani, George Fernandes and Rangarajan Kumaramangalam greet the newly elected leader of the NDA in the Central Hall of Parliament on October 10. There are few signals that Vajpayee's second tenure as Prime Minister will be any less turbulent or uneasy than his first, although the prospect of instability has been rendered somewhat remote by the arithmetic of the 13th Lok Sabha. (Right) Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi. The party's poor performance has given an impetus to younger elements who are unconvinced about the credibility of the top leadership.

Apart from its gains in Delhi, the BJP gained ground in Rajasthan and gave little away in Madhya Pradesh. It lost





AJITH KUMAR AP

Punjab but swept Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. By the early hours of October 7, the writing on the wall was clear as far as the Congress(I) was concerned – far from emerging as the single largest party, it was headed for its worst-ever performance in elections to the Lok Sabha.

VERY much more remains to be analysed in the stunning reverses the Congress(I) suffered in the three States it swept as recently as November 1998. Contingent political factors, such as the disgruntlement of the Jats in Rajasthan – a traditional political constituency of the Congress(I) – explain some part of the outcome, though not all of it. Organisational failures and a lack of cohesion among the factions in the party have also been responsible for this to some extent, particularly in Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. But ultimately, the outcome in these three States can only be interpreted as a verdict on the direct contest between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi for the prime ministerial post. Between the hoary BJP veteran with close to half a century in public life and the claims of the political novice seeking to invoke public sympathy for the sacrifices her family had made in the past, the electorate seemed quite definitively to favour the former.

There had been an intriguing possibility held out towards the end of the election campaign – that the BJP by itself would end with a lower tally and in consequence become more dependent upon its allies for sustenance. The dramatic results turned in from Andhra Pradesh initially suggested that the possibility was being realised, not to mention the strong showing of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the NDA's senior partner in Tamil Nadu.

These in themselves would not have caused serious concern for the BJP, since the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the DMK are not prone to whimsical political conduct that could endanger the stability of the prospective ruling coalition. The newly unified 'socialist bloc' under



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY



ANIL KUMAR AP

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi drapes a silken shawl, a traditional rite of honour in Tamil Nadu, around Vajpayee; Telugu Desam Party president N. Chandrababu Naidu. Among the constituents of the NDA, the DMK and the TDP are not prone to whimsical political conduct, but Vajpayee may have to be on guard in respect of a few other alliance partners.

the leadership of George Fernandes was however, quite a different proposition The emergence of a new entente between the estranged sections of the Janata Dal had, first, seriously upset the BJP's election preparations in Karnataka Quite apart from this, there was also the prospect that once the Lok Sabha was constituted the so-called Janata Dal (United) would be an enduring hazard to governmental stability These apprehensions were only strengthened by reports that certain senior leaders of the Janata Dal (United) had conducted secret parleys with elements of the Third Force, to explore means of turning the prospect of an indecisive outcome to mutual advantage

THE Janata Dal(United) was also the most top-heavy party in the NDA in terms of leaders with ministerial ambitions An accretion to its strength would have brought forth a number of demands on the indulgence of its alliance partners That the NDA turned in a rather dismal performance in Karnataka, with the incumbency disadvantage of the J H Patel Ministry being transferred to it in full measure, could in a long-term framework be counted as an asset

Less certain are the consequences of the rather substantial Janata Dal(United) contingent from Bihar. The senior leaders who have arrived in the BJP camp after voting against the Vajpayee government last April – such as Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan – may have to set aside their ministerial ambitions for the moment Accommodating them within the Ministry might engender serious misgivings among the BJP's older partners, it would also involve giving the Janata Dal(United) more berths than would be warranted by its parliamentary strength Nitish Kumar, though a BJP ally of longer standing, may also want to focus his attentions exclusively on the coming Assembly elections in Bihar His chief ministerial ambitions have been no secret, but while assigning berths in his Cabinet Vajpayee would have to acknowledge that the BJP would honour its tacit agreement to reserve the post for him Bihar has been in part responsible for the NDA's comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha But it is also the arena where the NDA is an alliance of equals, where disputes over who should enjoy primacy in a state-level contest are likely to be the most intense

The Janata Dal(United) remains the most likely source of instability for the new government under Vajpayee Other partners like Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress pose a different set of problems Although MamataBanerjee too has her ultimate focus on the State Assembly elections in West Bengal, her regional ambitions are far more remote in terms of their realisation than those of the Janata Dal(United) Her intention to join the Ministry and secure portfolios of specific interest to West Bengal – such as Railways or Coal – could be accommodated, given some degree of indulgence from other partners in the NDA But her uncompromising political disposition and reputation for impetuous conduct mean that Vajpayee will continually have to be on guard for the slightest hint of restiveness in that quarter

MANY of the BJP's allies see themselves as staunch advocates of various kinds of sectional interests Om Prakash Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), for instance, is instinctively averse to any measure that could impinge on the fortunes of the farm sector He has been upset by the recent hike in high speed diesel prices – taken in line with a policy decision to maintain parity between domestic and global price levels in the case of petroleum products He is unlikely at this stage to press his opposition too far, both because a new government goes through a customary period of heightened public goodwill and because he is dependent on the BJP for his sustenance as Haryana Chief Minister. But the "tough decisions" that Vajpayee warned of immediately after his election as leader of the NDA parliamentary contingent

could cause some strains with INLD

The DMK and the TDP are both led by pragmatic individuals who are unlikely to dispute seriously the decisions that seem necessary on technical and administrative grounds Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Murasoli Maran of the DMK would both want to reinforce their image as politicians who are deeply responsive to the philosophy of economic liberalisation But Chandrababu Naidu, for one, is hamstrung by serious fiscal imbalances in his State's finances His anxiety to see C Rangarajan, the economist who occupies the Raj Bhavan in Hyderabad, in the Finance Ministry was partly occasioned by this fact Failing to win generalised assent for his demand, Chandrababu Naidu then decided not to participate in the Vajpayee government The decision was arrived at after the careful deliberations and consultations that have become part of the TDP's style The party is likely, to ensure nevertheless, that its nominee continues as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha

The prospect of instability is further rendered remote by the arithmetical incoherence in the Opposition ranks Confounding early expectations, this Lok Sabha will have a rather substantial bloc of unaligned parties The Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Nationalist Congress Party together account for 47 seats And the Left parties, despite suffering a marginal decline in representation, still number 41 in the Lok Sabha

Defections from the ranks of the NDA are likely to be deterred by the paltry numbers of the Congress(I) and its allies And even if any party should make bold to part company with the BJP and team up with the Congress(I), there is little likelihood of the unaligned parties joining the effort in order to form an alternative government

THE Left, for its part, is known to be seriously evaluating the options it has, after acknowledging very early on the sheer irrelevance of any effort to form a non BJP government The Communist Party of India(Marxist) went into a meeting of its Polit Bureau shortly after the results were declared, following which the Central Committee was called into session In retaining its strength, the CPI(M) has increased its relative influence within the slightly diminished ranks of the Left

The Communist Party of India, which has been a big loser this time, is known to favour a reassessment of the tactical line that the Left parties overall have adopted since March 1998, when with the exception of the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party they tilted towards the Congress(I) in an effort to keep the BJP out of power The CPI also believes that the Left parties erred in April 1999 in endorsing All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Jayalalitha's misconceived effort to pull down the Vajpayee government and put an alternative formation in its place All these matters are likely to provide the Left parties food for thought, particularly since the politics of the 'third force' has been somewhat resuscitated by the performance of Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party in U P (see separate story)

THE Congress(I) seemed, in the immediate aftermath of the election results to be too deeply shocked to respond in a sensible manner Party morale had suffered a perceptible dent on Day One of counting, as the reality of Manmohan Singh's defeat in South Delhi began to sink in In the scheme of political revival that had been crafted by Congress(I) strategists, the former Finance Minister played the role of standard bearer His unique appeal as a competent, enlightened and totally untainted politician was expected to give him an easy passage to the Lok Sabha, and subsequently a crucial role in the refurbishment of the Congress(I)'s identity

Former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh's defeat according to a senior spokesman of the Congress(I), reflected poorly both on the party's organisational readiness and its level of factional cohesion At customary meetings with the media the party's official spokesman, Kapil Sibal, affirmed that appraisals of its entire election strategy would be carried out particularly with respect to the alliances it concluded in Tamil Nadu and Bihar

It has been a mortifying experience for the Congress(I) to see three members of its top executive body, the Congress Working Committee, being defeated in Delhi Manmohan Singh, R K Dhawan and Meira Kumar are all considered close in their own ways to party president Sonia Gandhi K Vijayabhaskara Reddy, another member of the CWC and head of the party's disciplinary committee, was defeated at Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh

Expectedly, the performance of the Congress(I) has given a new impetus to younger elements who have never been convinced of the credibility of the party's top leadership Expectedly again, there is an effort to protect the party president from any form of public interrogation The Congress(I)'s triumph in the Assembly elections in the northern region last year was unequivocally hailed as Sonia Gandhi's Defeat, though, has no parents



Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar. Contrary to early expectations, the 13th Lok Sabha will have a rather substantial bloc of unaligned parties.

EDITORIAL

A stronger mandate to govern

THE thirteenth general election – the third election in three years – has yielded a rather decisive mandate to the political party of the Hindu Right, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and its 23 regional allies of varied character and background, to govern India from the Centre. The close to 300 seats that the coalition headed by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has won represents a striking reversal of the political trends that were witnessed for much of the period after the BJP assumed the reins, in April 1998, as head of a smaller coalition that included some of the more volatile elements in India's regional politics. No single big factor, or even a few factors, can help explain the 1999 outcome.

If there was a Kargil effect that unexpectedly boosted the stock of Vajpayee and the BJP across much of the country, this was clearly no Kargil election, as the results in the battleground States of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab underlined. Further, the Kargil effect was in visible decline during the latter part of a voting exercise spread over a whole month. If it was the 'able' Prime Minister's winning image that scored generally, then that image took a beating in a few States (Karnataka, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh) and elsewhere seemed less important than alliance arithmetic (Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Maharashtra) or the independent electoral clout of senior regional partners (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal). If there was a strong anti-incumbency factor at work at the State level (Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and also Maharashtra), Andhra Pradesh seemed to witness the opposite, a pro-incumbency wave, the reversal of 1998 for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu seemed to reward incumbency, and no overriding anti-incumbency mood could be noticed among the voters in the Left-ruled States of West Bengal and Kerala.

An analysis by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) of how India voted in 1999, which is being carried in two parts by *Frontline*, calls attention to "the vagaries of our electoral system" that account for much of "what looks like a coherent majority". If in recent times political India has been hostage to instability, the vote for 'stability' this time is hardly robust. There has been no swing either towards the BJP (its vote share declined by 1.8 percentage point from 1998, although it must be noted that it contested 50 fewer seats this time) or towards the BJP and its current allies (their combined vote share declined by 1.5 percentage points from what they won in the twelfth general election). In fact, in 1999 the Congress(I) contested 20 fewer seats than in 1998, but improved its vote share by 2.7 percentage points. The triumph of the BJP-led alliance implies neither a polarisation of the votes in its favour nor the emergence of a bipolar national electoral process. In fact, the electoral space occupied by non-BJP, non-Congress(I) 'third force' parties has remained more or less intact. Further, in an election that saw some 360 million out of 605 million eligible voters cast their ballots, no correlation could be detected between the level of voter turnout and the success of any major party or grouping. Mid-term elections tend to produce a lower-than-average turnout of voters, but the 1999 voter turnout, while being nearly three percentage points lower than the turnout in 1998, was higher than in seven of the earlier general elections. Only the vagaries of the Indian electoral system (as Yogendra Yadav points out in his lead analysis of how India voted in 1999) combining with the self-inflicted split in the Congress vote in Maharashtra provided the BJP-led coalition its comfortable victory margin.

HOWEVER, there are two striking qualitative factors behind the thirteenth general election outcome. The first is the rather remarkable fact that the Vajpayee government proved more resourceful and popular in the *caretaker* mode than when it ruled for a year with the backing of a working majority in the Lok Sabha; this change in fortunes can be explained largely by Kargil and the response to it, coming on top of the sympathy that was generated by the fall of the government. And this change in fortunes is linked to the second factor: the BJP's main opponent at the national level, the Congress(I) led by Sonia Gandhi, can be said to have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

In November 1998, the Congress(I) won impressive victories in the Assembly elections in three battleground States, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi. In December 1998, an ORG-MARG public opinion survey published by *India Today* (December 28) predicted that if elections were to be held at that point, the Congress(I) and its few minor allies would win 45 per cent of the votes and 305 Lok Sabha seats compared with 26 per cent of the votes and 135 seats for the BJP and its numerous allies, and that potential voters favoured Sonia Gandhi over Vajpayee, by a four percentage point margin, for Prime Minister. From that point, it was downhill all the way for the main Opposition party.

The 1999 election is as much about Congress ineptitude under the helmswomanship of Sonia Gandhi as it is about the BJP's Kargil-assisted rally against the odds. The strategic miscalculation that came straight out of the September 1998 Pachmarhi session of the Congress(I) was based on an almost dogmatic belief that under Sonia Gandhi's leadership, the Congress(I) had managed to reverse its long-term decline, had no need of new allies or coalition partners, and was completely capable of powering its way back into the Central government at any time it chose. This belief was contradicted by various objective indicators and had an underlying arrogance to it; its sole virtue, it seemed, was the relative absence of opportunism compared with the BJP's re-emphasised willingness to accommodate all and sundry, major and minor regional allies, in the hunt for power. The strategic miscalculation led to implementing a game plan for the fall of the Vajpayee government without thinking through the nature of an interim secular and democratic alternative that could hold the reins until such time

as fresh elections could be forced. The Congress (I) 'high command' seems simply to have assumed that when the party chose to take charge, all secular and democratic parties in the system would fall in line, or be swept aside as irrelevant by inexorable historical forces.

In her first post-election statement, Sonia Gandhi acknowledged the major setback suffered by her party and called for "introspection, frank assessment and determined action". But the humiliation suffered by the Congress(I) in the thirteenth general election will serve some purpose only if an honest, objective and non-sycophantic assessment is made that begins with the high command's primary accountability for the debacle. The main opposition party must enter into serious discussion and consultation with potential cooperators and fellow-travellers on a broad and principled agenda of rolling back the advances made by the Hindu Right and its extraordinary assemblage of opportunist allies.

MEANWHILE, no illusions need be entertained about what the Hindu Right stands for and what its policies and practical actions are likely to be. Communalism as a political mobilisation strategy has made disturbing progress in the last decade and the forces of the Sangh Parivar are going to be enthused, not reined in, by the 1999 triumph of the BJP. The belief that the Prime Minister is a consummate moderate, and that the composition of the National Democratic Alliance will be an effective check on the hardline Hindu Right, could lead to serious political miscalculations among those committed to the core values of secular democracy. Prime Minister Vajpayee's government did not at all do well last time when it came to defending secularism and the interests of minorities against concerted attacks by RSS-controlled fanatical organisations. Will it be any different this time?

The second immediate area of concern is national security and nuclear policy. With nuclear weaponisation ushered in by the Hindu Right, the risks and hazards for the region have increased considerably. The draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine, which has been analysed in detail in the columns of *Frontline*, indicates the dangerous and economically burdensome path that the pro-bomb lobby wishes the government to take. In the hands of the BJP and the RSS, the idea that much more needs to be spent on national security and modernising the military machine is indistinguishable from militarism and the chauvinist logic of a subcontinental arms race. Handling troubled relations with Pakistan in this risky climate will pose a tough challenge to the new government.

The third area of challenge is the economy. There are three strikes against the economic liberalisation and globalisation policies as they have been developed by successive regimes since 1991. The first is that they erode and weaken economic sovereignty, India's pursuit of its own economic path and policies without external tutelage. The second objection is that the economic policies are anti-people, that is they hit the livelihood and basic conditions of the working people of India and increase mass poverty. The third is that they are retrogressive in terms of economics. Prime Minister Vajpayee has asserted, somewhat enigmatically, that the economic policies of the past have become hurdles to faster growth and need to be changed; he has also referred to a tremendous popular demand round the country for a faster and more equitable development. What this implies for the economic policy of the government will be watched closely.

Finally, a major challenge for the BJP will be to manage the tensions and contradictions within the 24-headed NDA. Many of the regional parties in the alliance, such as the Telugu Desam Party and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, have their distinctive regional identities and aspirations. Conflicts, minor as well as major, could arise on agendas and interests within the coalition. Can the BJP, a party with a unitary and centralising vision, get used to the imperatives of, and demands made by, federalism in both the constitutional and political sense. How long can it manage the contradictions, both the contradictions between the hard-core Hindu Right and some of the major allies, and the internal contradictions within the Sangh Parivar? On the answer to this question essentially will depend the stability and longevity of the new Vajpayee government. ■

As long as Sonia Gandhi seemed capable of delivering the goods, there was little enforcement of accountability on the coterie that surrounds her and counsels her on every important political matter. Defeat today has changed all that, though the coterie is fighting a desperate rearguard by orchestrating a sequence of resignations by all the top office-bearers who were involved with planning for these elections.

The spectacle at the Congress(I) headquarters must seem altogether more unseemly since the party's relevance in Indian politics has perhaps received an



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet. In retaining its parliamentary strength, the party has increased its relative influence within the ranks of the Left in general.

impetus of an entirely new kind in these elections. Victories in the Assembly elections in Karnataka and Arunachal Pradesh, and the prospect of regaining governmental authority in Maharashtra if it follows a course of sensible pragmatism, means that the Congress(I)'s influence in State-level politics is rapidly growing. Together with its three State governments in the northern region – which were elected to five-year terms only last year – the Congress(I) has a much more substantive position in State-level politics than the BJP can aspire to in the near future. This is a prospect that is further underlined by the waning fortunes of the BJP govern-

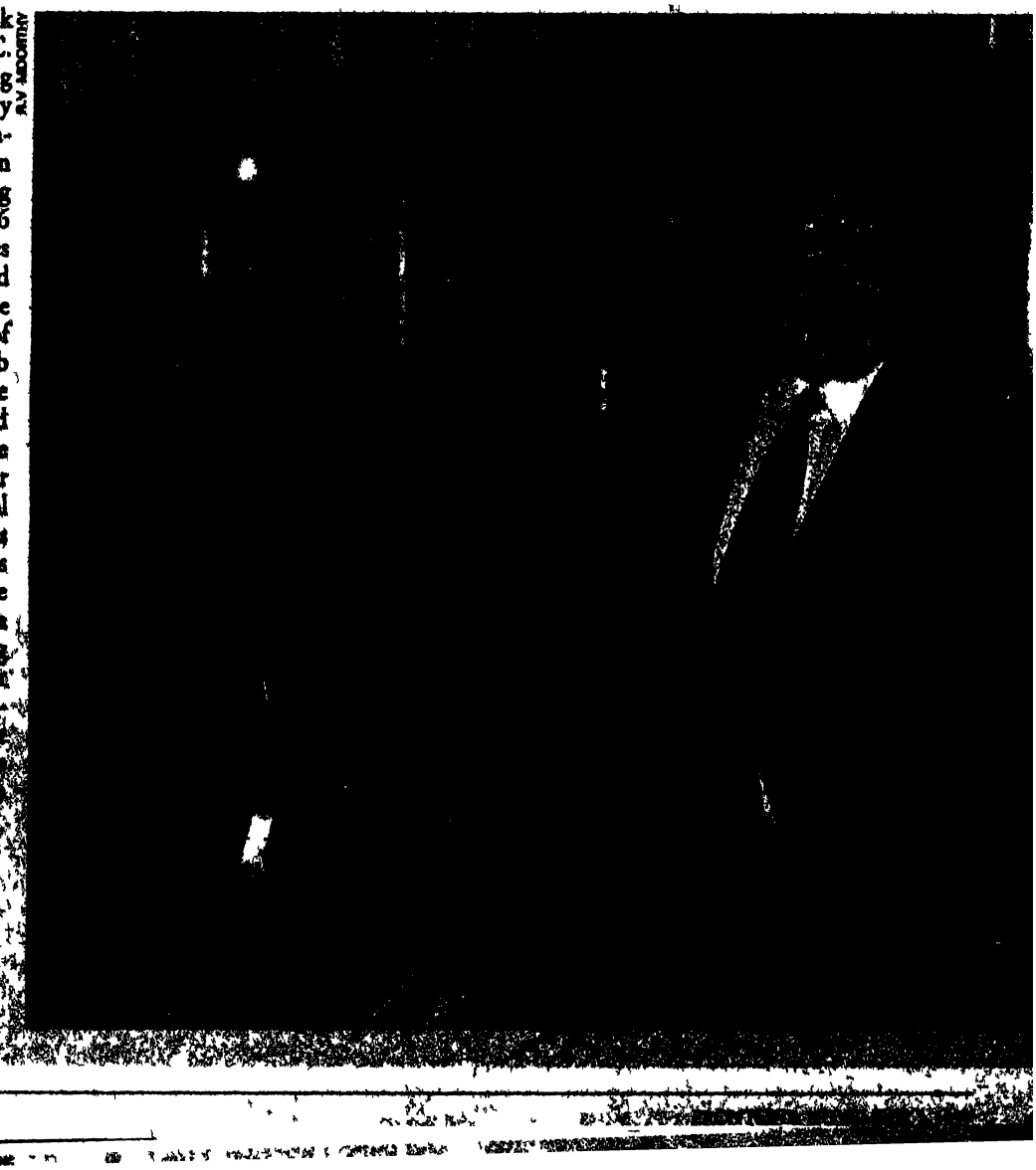
A challenging assignment

V. VENKATESAN

THE elections to the 13th Lok Sabha witnessed a massive exercise in mobilising human and material resources and were a stern test of the efficiency and fairness of the Election Commission (E.C.).

The E.C. had the responsibility of completing the election schedule and constituting the new Lok Sabha in time so that it met before October 21. (Under the Constitution, a new House should be constituted no more than six months after the last sitting of the previous Lok Sabha.) Simultaneously, the E.C. held elections to the State Assemblies in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim and byelections for a few seats in some other States.

It was a challenging task in many ways, but the E.C. did succeed in conducting the process in a reasonably fair, free and efficient manner. Be it the introduction of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in 46 Lok Sabha constituencies spread over 17 States and Union Territories or the speedy dissemination of detailed results on its Web site and the Nicnet, the E.C. showed that it could put to good use appropriate high tech facilities in order to make the electoral process smooth. The results from the constituencies where EVMs were deployed were declared a few hours after counting began at 8 a.m. on October 6. Given the excellent communications network that had been put in place, the lead positions in the various



Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill hands over to President K.R. Narayanan a list of the newly elected members of the Lok Sabha.

constituencies were known across the country by the afternoon of October 6 through television and radio.

The E.C. had on more than one occasion to reckon with the limits placed on its authority by the courts. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court forced the E.C. to withdraw its ban on the publication of the results of opinion polls and exit polls during a specified time-frame during the election process. In another instance, the Patna High Court restrained it from declaring the result of the Lok Sabha election in Madhepura, where Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Laloo Prasad Yadav faced Janata Dal (United) leader Sharad Yadav. The JD(U) had gone to court claiming that polling in the constituency had not been free and fair and seeking a direction to the E.C. to countermand the elections and order a repoll. The court refused to intervene in the election process but asked the E.C. to hear the JD(U)'s complaint before declaring the result. As there was no bar on counting, the E.C. permitted the counting to proceed.

Sharad Yadav complained that the RJD had resorted to large-scale rigging and that paramilitary forces had not been deployed in adequate strength. He went on an "indefinite fast" in Patna in protest against the E.C's refusal to order a repoll. However, Sharad Yadav changed tack when he learnt that he was leading by a comfortable margin. He presented his case before the E.C. on October 7, but did not ask for a repoll. Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill and Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh permitted the Returning Officer to declare the results.

The E.C. faced another embarrassment when the Kerala High Court directed on October 4 the E.C. and the Chief

Electoral Officer of the State to conduct booth-wise counting of votes in the State. The E.C. had decided that where EVMs were not used, votes would be counted by mixing the ballot papers of the Assembly segments to prevent any intimidation and victimisation of voters by the losing candidates. This procedure was followed in the 1996 and 1998 general elections. The E.C. challenged the High Court's order in the Supreme Court and obtained a stay on October 5.

It was a challenging task in many ways, but the E.C. did succeed in conducting the process in a reasonably fair, free and efficient manner.

THIS was the first time that polling for Lok Sabha elections was held in five phases, spread over a month. The candidates and voters who figured in the earlier phases had a long wait until October 6 for the result in certain pockets. This dampened popular enthusiasm.

The E.C. opted for a long-drawn election process in order to give sufficient time for the paramilitary forces to move from one State to another. The demand for larger contingents of paramilitary forces came from the State governments; the E.C., in consultation with the Union Home Ministry, evolved a plan to meet the demand. Gill told a television channel that the E.C. could hold the next Lok Sabha elections on a single day if the political parties reposed confidence in the ability of the State police forces to ensure security on polling day.

There was violence on polling day in some States, including Bihar and north-eastern States, such as Tripura and Assam, during the last three phases. According to this, the E.C's critics said [illegible] objective of phasing out the elections [illegible] been achieved. Gill's [illegible] militant insurgency [illegible] the State's response [illegible] in Madhya Pradesh [illegible] to be the [illegible] and [illegible] 110 [illegible] eral places in Bihar; in most cases, the charges were directed at the ruling RJD. Repoll was ordered in booths from where serious complaints were received. The BJP-Janata Dal(U) combine, which made most of the complaints against the RJD, found, when the results favoured them, that their protest had been an exaggerated response.

The long-drawn election schedule perhaps had an unintended effect on voters who went to the polls in the later phases. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh said that the exit poll results may have influenced the "floating voters" among them in favour of the BJP in his State. In some contexts, however, the poll schedule appears to have had little direct impact on the parties' prospects. For instance, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh went to the polls during the last phases but threw up vastly different results.

Did the E.C. meet its stated objective for scheduling the elections in September-October rather than immediately after the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, as preferred by the BJP and its allies? The E.C. gave the reason that it wanted to complete the revision of electoral rolls. However, it cannot claim that the electoral rolls were fully updated and that all eligible voters were duly enrolled. There were many instances of voters, including VVIPs, finding their names missing from the lists. In a few constituencies in Tamil Nadu, caste Hindus reportedly prevented Dalits from voting.

By hindsight, however, it is clear that the country could not have gone to the polls until July as Kargil war was on. Once the war was over, the E.C. announced the schedule, keeping in [illegible] needed to make administrative arrangements.

[illegible] did disrupt campaign [illegible] arrangements in some areas; [illegible] in constituencies [illegible] affected by floods – four in [illegible] one each in Assam and [illegible]

[illegible] the E.C. may [illegible] passed the test, putting [illegible] performance. ■

ment in Uttar Pradesh.

It is a new situation for the Congress(I) to enjoy growing authority in the States even as its influence in the Centre fades. It compels a reappraisal of the centralising tendency that has always been a powerful force in the Congress(I). In the process, it would seem that the authority of the Central leadership – which inevitably means the influence of the coterie that surrounds the party president - must yield to a principle of collective or federated leadership

ON the afternoon of October 11, Atal Behari Vajpayee called on President K R Narayanan and secured an invitation to form a new government. After a 13-day venture in 1996 and a 13-month venture beginning March 1998, Vajpayee seems to have developed a partiality for the number of supposed ill-fortune His swearing-in as Prime Minister for the third time was scheduled for October 13. He had two days to sort out a multitude of prickly matters involving the disparate parties and individuals in his coalition Soon afterwards he would have to get down to the substantive issues of policy formulation and governance

The possibility of a new round of negotiations under the World Trade Organisation, the appropriate attitude to adopt towards the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the resumption of dialogue with Pakistan – the number of areas awaiting consensual and purposive action is limitless Overarching above all this is the reality of an economy that is badly out of joint and needs some novel ideas to retrieve it from a headlong plunge towards insolvency.

At the same time, the extremist fringe that the BJP cultivated and nurtured through the years of its ascent to power are unlikely to sit quiet The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has already begun stoking the flames of religious extremism in Gujarat. Its leader Giriraj Kishore has virtually laid out a charter of demands that the Roman Catholic pontiff, John Paul II, would have to meet before he is allowed to visit India in November. Clearly, there are few signals yet that Vajpayee's second tenure as a Prime Minister who has secured the confidence of Parliament will be any less turbulent or uneasy than his first. ■

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PATTERNS AND POINTERS

A State-wise round-up of Verdict '99.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

ONE clear loser; three winners. That is the story of the elections to the 85 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. The loser was the BJP-led alliance. Slumping from its 1998 best of 60 seats with 57 for the BJP alone, the alliance ended up with 32 seats, of which the BJP accounted for 29. Two seats went to the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC) while the alliance backed-independent Maneka Gandhi retained the Pilibhit seat.

In contrast, the parties who covered themselves with glory were the Congress(I), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (S.P.). It is difficult to rate which triumph was the most spectacular although in arithmetical terms it was the Congress(I) that reaped the maximum gains by improving its position from zero to 10 seats. The Congress(I)'s alliance partner, Ajit Singh-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), bagged two seats – Baghpat and Kairan – from western Uttar Pradesh.

The BSP increased its tally from four to 14 and the S.P. added six more seats to its previous score of 20. Apart from this, the S.P. helped former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar of the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) retain Ballia. The performance of both the parties was creditable, especially in the background of the poll projections that favoured the Congress(I).

In fact, the success of the S.P. and the BSP was in many ways much superior to that of the Congress(I). The Congress(I)'s improved performance was confined to a few seats in western U.P. and the Amethi-Rae Bareli-Pratapgarh belt, considered to be a stronghold of the Nehru-Gandhi family. The S.P. and the BSP, on the other hand, showed that they have a significant following in almost all parts of the State barring the four seats in the hill districts. The S.P.'s gains were significant also in the context of the series of political jolts it had suffered in the early stages of its campaign, when 12 MLAs including five belonging to the minority community resigned from the party and some them joined t Congress(I).

UTTAR PRADESH

Total seats	85
BJP	29
UPLC	2
Congress (I)	10
BSP	14
SP	26
RLD	2
SJP	1
Independent	1

Statistics illustrate t Congress(I)'s lack of pol ical reach and penetratio It came fourth in 49 sea while it held the seco position in eight seats a the third in 10. In cor parison, the S.P. was se ond in 21 seats and thi in 16. The BSP came se ond in 15 seats, third in and fourth in 15. The BJP came secor in 34 constituencies and third in 12.

In constituencies such as Sultanp and Pratapgarh in the Amethi-Rae Bar belt, the Congress(I)'s performance w below par. In Sultanpur, its candida Deepa Kaul was placed fourth wi 82,385 votes. The BSP won the se defeating the S.P candidate. The BJ which supported an independent since i official candidate's nomination was rejec ed, was placed third. In Pratapgarh, t party's winner scraped through by a ma gin of 4,000-odd votes.

The extent of the BJP's loss is evide even from the constituencies managed to retain. Many leade had their margins slashed by ha or more. In Lucknow, Vajpaye defeated Congress(I)'s Kara Singh by 1.23 lakhs; a far cry fro his last election's majority of 2.1 lakh votes. Ramesh Chand Toma who in 1998 won the Hapur se with a margin of approximately 1. lakh votes, could just scrape pa his nearest Congress (I) rival wit 11,958 votes. At Gorakhpu Mahant Adityanath, one of th prominent religio-political leade of the BJP, held on to his seat wit a majority of 7,200 votes.

In contrast, the S.P. won mos of its seats with comfortable mar gins of above 25,000. The bigge victory margin was achieved b Congress(I) president Soni Gandhi, who trounced the BJP

SUBIR ROY



BJP workers celebrating the victory of A.B. Vajpayee in Lucknow.

sitting MP Sanjay Singh by 3 lakh votes.

Five major factors contributed to the BJP's defeat: The strong anti-incumbency mood against the Kalyan Singh-led BJP coalition government; the shift in upper caste votes, particularly that of Brahmins and Jats, from the BJP to the Congress(I) and its alliance partner, the RLD; the anti-BJP, pro-S.P. campaign by former BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj, who was denied the ticket, and its impact on large sections of the Lodh Rajput backward caste community, who were BJP supporters; the vote arithmetic factor that is bound to give an edge to the party coming second in the previous elections; and the tactical voting of Muslims, who more or less successfully identified the secular party capable of defeating the BJP in each constituency.

While the benefit of the anti-incumbency mood was shared by the Congress(I), the SP and the BSP, the gains from the second factor went exclusively to the Congress(I). While, the shift of Brahmin votes towards the Congress(I) was evident in Kanpur, Shajahanpur, Rampur and Rae Bareilly, the shift of Jat votes came into play at Meerut, Muzzaffar Nagar, Baghpat and Kairana. All the seats were won by the Congress(I) alliance

In western U.P., the consolidation of Jat and Gujjar votes behind the Congress(I) alliance propelled Muslims to desert the S.P This is evident from the votes polled by the S.P. in Meerut, where its candidate Jagbir Singh ended up with 13,050 votes. In 1998 he had polled 2,70,363 votes.

This trend was not visible in other areas. Phulpur, Bhadohi, Mohanlalganj, Balrampur and even Sultanpur proved that when there was no shift of upper caste or other votes to the Congress(I), the minorities voted for the S.P.

The strong backward caste base and its growing influence among Thakurs and Banias stood the S.P. in good stead with the minorities. This is exactly why the party was perceived as capable of defeating the BJP. The augmentation of S.P.'s backward caste base through Sakshi Maharaj's campaign sent positive signals to the minorities. There was apprehension among sections of the S.P. leadership that Sakshi Maharaj's involvement in the Ayodhya Ram Mandir agitation would alienate the minorities. However, the results in Etawah, Etah, Agra, Ferozabad and Farrukhabad, proved this incorrect.

The tactical voting of Muslims and the second factor, which essentially came into play in seats where the S.P. and the BSP took the second position against the BJP in 1998 with a margin of less than 50,000 votes, and the third party (either the S.P. or the BSP) had more than one lakh votes, helped the BSP the most. The BSP's success in Amroha, Ghosi, Sitapur and Shahbad are attributed to this factor. The S.P. was helped by this factor in Aonla, Unnao and Maharajganj.

Over and above this, the alleged secret understanding between Kalyan Singh and S.P. president Mulayam Singh Yadav appears to have reflected in the BJP's gain in Faizabad, where Kalyan Singh's protege Vinay Katiyar won, and in Unnao, where the S.P.'s Deepak Kumar gained at the expense of the BJP's Devi Bux Singh who finished third. Notwithstanding denials from both the leaders, the backward caste politics is bound to extend beyond the elections in the State. ■

BIHAR

Total seats	**54**
Elections held	**50**
BJP	**23**
Janata Dal (U)	**17**
Congress (I)	**3**
RJD	**7**

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE landslide victory of the BJP-Janata Dal (United) alliance in Bihar shows that it has succeeded in eroding former Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav's vote base among the backward Yadav community and Muslims. The jolt suffered by the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) could have an impact on the March 2000 Assembly elections.

The RJD suffered its worst disaster in its backyard, north Bihar, where all the five Yadav candidates fielded by the BJP and its ally, the JD(U), defeated their Yadav rivals from the RJD – including Laloo Prasad. Laloo Prasad lost the Madhepura seat by 40,000 votes to Sharad Yadav of the JD(U). The Election Commission (E.C.) withheld the result until the winner withdrew his demand for a re-election. The result suggests that Yadav voters, disenchanted with the "Raja of Bihar", finally found an alternative. Laloo Prasad told mediapersons that the floods in north Bihar were one factor behind his defeat.

The results took the wind out of the sail of Laloo Prasad's much-vaunted Muslim-Yadav support. Among the RJD candidates who were elected, there was only one Yadav and one Muslim. The RJD lost ground to the JD(U) and the BJP in central Bihar and in his own bastion to the north of the Ganga where the Muslim-Yadav factor was considered invincible until recently While the anti-incumbency factor appeared to have affected his fortunes, his failure to strike the right alliance might well have been his undoing.

Of the 50 seats for which elections were held, the BJP and allies bagged 23 and 17 seats respectively. In 1998 the BJP won 20, while its ally, the Samata Party, before its merger with the JD(U), won 10. The RJD got seven, against a tally of 17 in 1998. The tally of the Congress(I), an ally of the RJD, has been reduced to three from five in 1998. In four constituencies – Purnea, Rajmahal, Bhagalpur and Khagaria – elections could not be held because of floods.

The RJD lost Chapra, which Laloo Prasad represented three times , as well as Darbhanga, Sitamarhi, Saharsa,



RANJEET KUMAR

Janata Dal (U) leader Sharad Yadav and Samata Party leader Nitish Kumar.



RANJEET KUMAR

Laloo Prasad Yadav. The RJD chief lost the Madhepura seat.



Ram Vilas Paswan at a victory rally.

Jhanjharpur, Ballia, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur and Rosera. This suggests that the BJP's decision to tie-up with the JD(U) was a masterstroke.

Apart from Sharad Yadav's morale-boosting win in Madhepura, Dinesh Chandra Yadav wrested the Yadav-dominated Saharsa seat from the RJD. The JD(U)'s Nawal Kishore Rai and Devendra Yadav snatched Sitamarhi and Jhanjharpur, both dominated by Yadavs, from the RJD and the BJP's Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav wrested Muslim-Yadav dominated Madhubani from the Congress(I).

Ram Vilas Paswan pulled his weight, bringing a sizable Dalit vote to the BJP-led alliance in north Bihar. In central Bihar – where the RJD won Vikramganj, Arrah and Chatra – Paswan was less successful because of the violent feud between the naxalites, who represent Dalits, and upper-caste landlords. In south Bihar, the BJP expectedly repeated its tally of 12 out of 14 seats. The RJD had left most south Bihar seats to the Congress(I). But the Congress(I) was handicapped by the alliance with the RJD, which is perceived as "anti-Jharkhand" because of Laloo Prasad's repeated announcements that a Jharkhand state would be formed "over my dead body".

The Lok Sabha result could be a threat to the RJD government. It is widely believed that a large number of RJD MLAs would now cross over to the BJP-JD(U) camp. JD(U) leaders Nitish Kumar and George Fernandes said on record that "dozens" of RJD MLAs are in touch with them. Fernandes was re-elected from Nalanda and Nitish Kumar retained his Barh [illegible]

"The Lok Sabha election was a semi-final. The Assembly election will be the final battle against Laloo Prasad Yadav," Ram Vilas Paswan announced soon after his fifth straight victory from Hajipur.

Laloo Prasad owned responsibility for the defeat of the RJD, but accused the BJP-JD(U) of "tricking" electors into voting against him.

The CPI deserted Laloo Prasad because he was not willing to give it more than three seats. With the CPI by his side, he might have pulled off victories in at least half a dozen constituencies. The CPI contested nine seats on its own but failed to win any. An electoral partner of the RJD, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) contested two seats and lost both.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha of the Shibu Soren group drew a blank even in the Jharkhand region of south Bihar. The JD(U) was the major gainer in this region along with the BJP. ■

GUJARAT

Total seats	**26**
BJP	**20**
Congress (I)	**6**

V.VENKATESAN

BY winning 20 of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, the BJP has puzzled poll experts. When Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel claimed even at the start of the campaign that the BJP would win all the 26 seats, no one took him seriously. It was because the mood of the people distinctly appeared to be against the ruling party. Even the BJP's ardent supporters expressed the view that the party might lose a few of the 19 seats it won in 1998. The Congress(I) which secured seven seats last year managed to win only six.



M. LAKSHMANAN

Kashiram Rana who retained the Surat seat.

The BJP conceded four seats it won in 1998 — Patan, Kapadwanj, Mehsana and Surendranagar – to the Congress(I). But it wrested five seats – Anand, Chhota Udaipur (reserved for Scheduled Tribes), Mandvi (ST), Dohad (ST), and Godhra - from the Congress(I). The party bagged all the three seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes, traditionally won by the Congress(I).

Interestingly, while the Congress(I) won the six seats with huge margins, the successful BJP candidates' margin was narrow in almost all the constituencies. In Patan (ST) Kanodia Maheshkumar Mithabhai, who defeated his nearest Rashtriya Janata Party rival by a huge margin in 1998, lost to Rashtrapal Pravinchandra Somabhai of the Congress(I) by 17,127 votes. The merger of the RJP led by the BJP rebel Shankarsinh Vaghela with the Congress(I) certainly helped the latter.

The victory of Vaghela in Kapadwanj was a foregone conclusion because the total number of votes polled by the RJP and the Congress(I) in 1998 exceeded the the BJP winner's by 20 per cent. Vaghela defeated Chauhan Jaysinghji Manshingji(BJP) by a margin of 1,65,381 votes.

For the BJP, its loss of Mehsana was a big setback. Its candidate, former Union Minister A.K. Patel, had held the seat for five consecutive terms. Although he had a 45.3 per cent vote share in 1998, the votes secured by the Congress(I) and the RJP added up to nearly 50 per cent of the votes polled. This time A.K. Patel was defeated by Congress(I)'s Atmaram Patel, who was a Minister in the Vaghela Government, by 55,740 votes. Spokesperson of the BJP, Bharat Pandya, attributed A.K. Patel's defeat to voters' quest for change. Party insiders, however, say that A.K. Patel had a clean image and Keshubhai Patel saw in him a potential rival; sabotage by a section of the party workers cannot, therefore, be ruled out. Keshubhai Patel's another major rival, Kashiram Rana, also a Union Minister, managed to retain Surat in South Gujarat, though with a reduced margin. Rana's popularity in the predominantly tribal region is so large that he and the other BJP candidates won with ease, despite the reluctance of a section of party workers to work for them.

The BJP's defeat in Surendranagar in

Saurashtra was only expected in view of the acute water shortage in the region. Here, Bhavnaben Dave (BJP) lost to Congress(I)'s Savshibhai Makwana, a new face, by 25,905 votes. The Congress(I)'s victory is significant in that it came in spite of dissension caused by denial of the ticket to party veteran Sanat Mehta, who contested unsuccessfully last year. The BJP, however, managed to retain the neighbouring Rajkot seat, which is also reeling under a severe water crisis. Bharat Pandya attributed the victory to the people's "appreciation" of the Government's steps to lay a long pipeline "within a short time".

While the Congress(I) lost Anand, Chhota Udaipur, Dhandhuka, and Kutch by a margin of only about 5,000 votes or even less, the BJP lost six seats by margins of over 14,000 votes. Union Home Minister L.K. Advani (Gandhinagar) and Haren Pathak (Ahmedabad) won by reduced margins. In 1998 Advani had established a lead of 2,76,701 votes, but this time defeated Congress(I)'s T.N. Seshan, former Chief Election Commissioner, by only 1,88,927 votes. There is also a substantial fall in Haren Pathak's victory margin in Ahmedabad. Vaghela told *Frontline* that this indicates the erosion of the BJP's support base.

Vaghela said that the Congress(I) lacked an efficient campaign machinery and its polling agents were not experienced enough. Personality problems and corruption were other factors that deprived the Congress(I) of victory in a few seats, he said. Vaghela, however, blamed the party's debacle mainly on the BJP's misuse of official machinery.

State Congress(I) president C.D. Patel said that the BJP won by overplaying the issues such as the need for a stable government and the Kargil war. He indicated that the Congress(I) and former RJP workers could not work together in many constituencies.

The Congress(I) debacle has raised questions about the relevance of the party's endeavour to revive its traditional KHAM (Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim) constituency, once successfully mobilised by the former Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki. Solanki's father-in-law Ishwarbhai Chawda lost the Anand seat to Dipakbhai Patel (BJP) by 3,661 votes. Solanki sought to revive KHAM by backing the merger of the RJP, led by Vaghela, who also held similar views, with the Congress(I). The rise of the Hindutva forces in the late 1980s and 1990s made KHAM somewhat irrelevant.

TAMIL NADU

Total seats	39
DMK	11
PMK	5
BJP	4
MDMK	4
MGR-ADMK	1
MGR-Kazhagam	1
AIADMK	10
Congress (I)	2
CPI (M)	1

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

WHILE the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led alliance in Tamil Nadu has reason to rejoice over its performance in the Lok Sabha elections, the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) has no cause to despair either. The DMK's performance has been creditable in comparative terms: it has won 11 seats, against six in 1998. The parties in the DMK alliance, the BJP, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) and the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) each won one seat more than in 1998: the BJP and the MDMK have won four each, and the PMK has won five. Two other allies, the MGR-ADMK and the MGR Kazhagam, got one seat each.

Although the AIADMK's tally has gone down to 10 from 18 last time, the party and its allies have together won in 14 constituencies including Pondicherry.



K. ANANTHAN

C.P. Radhakrishnan, the BJP winner from Coimbatore.

(In 1998 the alliance won 30). Also, in the two byelections to the Assembly, AIADMK candidate R. Viswanathan and Communist Party of India (Marxist) candidate J. Hemachandran wrested the Natham and Tiruvattar Assembly seats from the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) and the DMK respectively.

The "alternative front" headed by the TMC and its allies, the Puthiya Tamilagam (P.T.) and the Dalit Panthers, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Indian Union Muslim League, drew a blank, although they had contested all the 40 seats. Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram (TMC) was defeated in Sivaganga by Congress(I) candidate M. Sudarsana Nachiappan.

In a major upset, Tamilaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) leader Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthi was defeated in Salem; the TRC is part of the DMK-led alliance. Former AIADMK Minister T.M. Selvaganapathy defeated the former Union Petroleum Minister by 25,411 votes. In a hard-fought battle, T.T.V. Dinakaran (AIADMK), nephew of Jayalalitha's friend Sasikala, defeated P. Selvendan (DMK) at Periakulam, by a margin of 45,806 votes.

In 1998, the AIADMK and its then allies, the BJP, the MDMK, the PMK, the TRC and the Janata Party of Subramanian Swamy had won 30 seats. The break-up was: the AIADMK 18, the PMK four, the BJP and the MDMK three each, and the TRC and the Janata Party one each. The DMK-led alliance took the remaining 10 seats, with the DMK getting six, the TMC three and the Communist Party of India (CPI) one. This time, the BJP, the MDMK, the PMK and the TRC hived themselves off from the AIADMK and aligned with the DMK. The TMC pulled out of the DMK-led alliance and formed its own front.

After the DMK aligned itself with the BJP, it was worried about losing its traditional Muslim-Christian vote bank. In his campaign, DMK president and Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi took pains to convince these communities that his party would not compromise their interests and would shield them from all harm. Karunanidhi said the election results "proved that the minorities remain with the DMK." He attributed the victory of the DMK-led alliance to projection of A.B. Vajpayee as the man who could provide a stable government, and to the Kargil victory.

Jayalalitha described her party's performance as "neither a setback nor a defeat

for us".

THE defeat of Chidambaram did not come quite as a surprise; what was surprising was the victory of Sudarsana Nachiappan over him. The fight had been seen as one essentially between Chidambaram and BJP candidate H. Raja. As it turned out, Raja took the second place and Chidambaram the third.

The TMC's rout stems from its refusal to align with either the DMK or the AIADMK, the two major Dravidian parties. Its exit from the DMK-front proved costly not only for itself but for the DMK. The TMC made it a triangular fight in the process depriving itself and the DMK of many seats, as the voting figures show.

TMC general secretary Peter Alphonse said Sivaganga's large Muslim and Christian population voted for the Congress(I) candidate in order to defeat the BJP contestant. He said the TMC considered the Lok Sabha elections as a "stepping stone" to success in the 2001 elections to the State Assembly. Peter Alphonse said that the TMC formed an alternative front because it was opposed to both the "communalism" of the BJP-led front and the "corruption" represented by the AIADMK-led front.

As in 1998, the results again showed the consolidation of the Dalit votes in favour of the P.T. led by Dr. K. Krishnaswamy in the southern districts and Dalit Panthers led by R. Tirumavalavan in the northern belt. Their candidates polled more than one lakh votes in several constituencies. Among the P.T. candidates, Dr. Krishnaswamy polled 1,86,220 votes at Tenkasi; P.V. Bakthavatchalam got 1,12,941 at Tirunelveli; Nazira Parveen received 96,334 at Ramanathapuram and Mansur Ali Khan 87,429 at Periakulam. At Chidambaram (reserved), Tirumavalavan polled 2,25,768 votes, while the winner A. Ponnusamy of the PMK, got 3,45,331.

The AIADMK's string of successes in southern Tamil Nadu in the contiguous constituencies of Periakulam, Dindigul, Tirunelveli and Tenkasi reflected the consolidation of the Mukkulathor community's votes in favour of the AIADMK.

Vazhapadi Ramamurthi's defeat at the hands of Selvaganapathy (an accused in a case of corruption in the construction of cremation sheds) is attributed to his being denied the DMK votes in the Veerapandi Assembly segment (represented by Agriculture Minister Veerapandi S. Arumugam) and the PMK votes in the Gangavalli Assembly segment. He lost the plantation workers' votes in the Yercaud Assembly segment too. Besides, Jayalalitha campaigned for Selvaganapathy for three days in Salem.

Another surprise was the defeat of CPI candidate V. Selvaraj at the hands of A.K.S. Vijayan of the DMK at Nagapattinam (reserved).

At Madurai, P. Mohan of the CPI(M) defeated Pon. Muthuramalingam of the DMK; Karunanidhi's son M.K. Alagiri, based in Madurai, was in charge of Muthuramalingam's campaign. A.G.S. Rambabu of the TMC came third. Subramanian Swamy, the incumbent, came fourth and lost his deposit. ■

KARNATAKA

Lok Sabha

Total seats	**28**
BJP	**6**
Janata Dal (United)	**3**
Congress (I)	**19**

PARVATHI MENON

IN an election verdict strikingly at variance with the all-India trend, the Congress(I) won 19 of the 28 seats in Karnataka. The BJP won six and its electoral ally the Janata Dal (United) three.

This is a dramatic comeback for the Congress(I). In 1998 it won nine seats, while the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance won 16 and the Janata Dal three. The Congress(I) has re-established its presence in all the major regions of the State. In the north, it won from Gulbarga, Raichur, Koppal and Bellary. In south-central Karnataka, it won in Mysore, Mandya, Chickaballapur, Kolar, Kanakapura, Tumkur and Bangalore North. It has made major inroads into the BJP's traditional strongholds, winning the coastal constituencies of Udipi and Kanara and doing extremely well in Mangalore. Its candidate has been returned in Shimoga. It has won in Dharwad South, Bagalkot and Belgaum, and done well in Dharwad North. Some of its prominent winners include Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi from Bellary, C.K. Jaffar Sharief from Bangalore North, R.L. Jalappa from Chickaballapur, former Chief Minister S. Bangarappa from Shimoga, Margaret Alva from Kanara and G. Puttaswamy Gowda, who defeated former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda in Hassan.

The nature of the Lok Sabha verdict appears to have been dictated by voters' preferences in the Assembly elections where popular disenchantment with the performance of the Janata Dal government, combined with a rejection of the BJP, seems to have been the motivating factors.



H.D. Deve Gowda, the loser in Hassan.

Congress(I) spokesperson B.K. Chandrashekhar told *Frontline*: "I think the electorate decided a year or two ago to get rid of the J.H. Patel government. The mess made of the alliance with the BJP by George Fernandes and Ramakrishna Hegde reinforced their decision." Even though the Congress(I) campaign was Bellary-focussed with candidates elsewhere left to their own devices, the public was given the impression of Congress(I) unity.

"Despite their claims, the BJP in rural areas is still an idea rather than a well-knit organisation with traditional structures," Chandrashekhar said. It was evident that the BJP's project of using the Kargil and Vajpayee symbols had not made the desired impact on the voter.

The BJP has been quick to put the blame for its defeat on the alliance with the JD(U). But the sheer scale of the anti-BJP sweep, the losses for the party in its support areas, and the defeat of some of its stalwarts, suggest that the verdict should also be seen as a rejection of the divisive ideas of the party.

Margaret Alva, who won the Kanara seat in a tough fight, told *Frontline*: "Neither Kargil nor any other so called 'national' issue was of any consequence. The people want a candidate who they think will work for them, and they want peace". Alva lost the elections in 1996 and 1998, both times to Ananth Kumar Hegde of the BJP, an activist of one of the Sangh Parivar organisations, who flaunts his participation in the Ayodhya and Idgah Maidan campaigns like a badge of honour. ■

ANDHRA PRADESH

Lok Sabha

Total seats	42
TDP	29
BJP	7
Congress (I)	5
AIMIM	1

S. NAGESH KUMAR

THE Telugu Desam Party (TDP) hauled 29 of the 32 seats it contested in Andhra Pradesh to become the biggest party, next to the BJP, in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The BJP won seven out of eight seats it contested. The BJP's Badam Balreddy lost in Hyderabad to four-time winner Salahuddin Owaisi of the All-India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen

The Congress(I) suffered a drubbing. It won five seats, one less than its 1984 tally when the party was overwhelmed by the sympathy wave generated for N.T. Rama Rao after his ouster as Chief Minister. The TDP and its allies won 35 seats then.

The TDP owes its sweep to the last-minute pact with the BJP to avoid the splitting of the anti-Congress(I) vote. The pact helped the combine win the confidence of about 49 per cent of the electorate while the Congress(I)'s support base remained static around 39 per cent.

The Left parties drew a blank and fared badly even in constituencies such as Nalgonda where the CPI State secretary S. Sudhakar Reddy lost to the TDP.

The combine's candidates were elected from all the urban seats – Secunderabad, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Tirupati and Guntur. Hyderabad was the only exception, but voting on communal lines has been the tradition in this constituency.

The Congress(I) victors are N. Janardhan Reddy (Narasaraopet) B. Satyanarayana (Bobbili), Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy (Cuddapah), and two last-minute entrants to the party, S. Jaipal Reddy (Miryalguda) and Renuka Chowdhury (Khammam). Party stalwarts such as K. Vijayabhaskara Reddy (Kurnool), P. Shiv Shankar (Tenali), P. Upendra (Vijaya-wada), N. Bhaskara Rao (Secunderabad), T. Subbarami Reddy (Visakhapatnam), G. Venkataswamy (Peddapally) and M. Baga Reddy (Medak) fell by the wayside.

S.M. Lal Basha, TDP general secretary, was defeated in Narasaraopet. All other prominent leaders of the alliance, including Lok Sabha Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi (Amalapuram), K. Yerram Naidu (Srikakulam), Bandaru Dattatreya (Secunderabad) and Ch. Vidyasagar Rao (Karimnagar), won. The TDP had fielded new faces and they succeeded: K. Srinivasulu, a journalist, was pitted against three-time winner Ananta Venkat Reddy in Anantapur; D.M. Vijaya Kumari in Bhadrachalam, Y.V. Rao, a tobacco baron, in Guntur and D. Rama Naidu, film producer, in Bapatla. ■

ORISSA

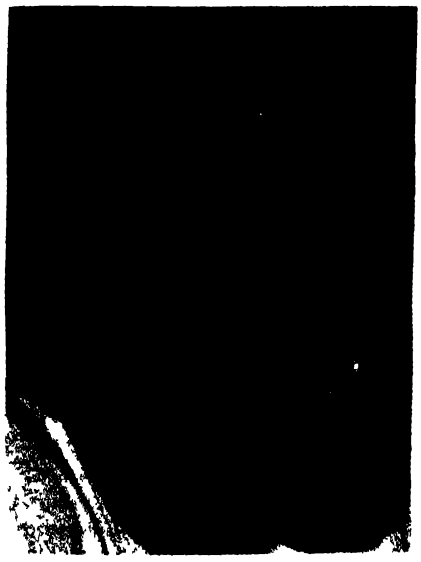
Lok Sabha

Total seats	21
BJD	10
BJP	9
Congress (I)	2

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE virtual decimation of the ruling Congress(I) and the emergence of the Biju Janata Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party combine as a main political force are the most significant aspects of the electoral verdict in Orissa. The BJD-BJP alliance has registered a massive win with its candidates capturing 19 of the 21 seats. Weakened by factionalism, the ruling Congress(I) seems to have been swept aside by an anti-incumbency sentiment. It won only two seats.

The BJD-BJP alliance had won 16 of the 21 seats in the 1998 elections while the Congress(I) had won five. The BJP, which made its first foray in the Lok Sabha elections from Orissa in 1998, won all the nine seats it contested this time. The BJD, which contested 12 seats, won 10. Congress(I)'s candidates Hema Gamang, wife of Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang, was elected from Koraput, defeating her BJD rival



Navin Patnaik, the BJD chief, was elected from Aska.

Jayaram Pangi, and K.P. Singh Deo from Dhenkanal, defeating Tathagat Satpathi of the BJD. Singh Deo benefited by the presence of a rebel BJP candidate.

A swing in favour of Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee and the incumbency factor may have dealt a bodyblow to the Congress(I). The BJD-BJP alliance had also helped cement the Opposition vote, the split of which had earlier benefited the Congress(I). With the J.B. Patnaik faction virtually staying out of electioneering, the Congress(I) failed to carry out a concerted campaign against the combine.

Never before had the Congress(I) faced such a humiliating defeat in its strongholds such as Berhampore, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur and Nawrangpur. In Berhampore, Jayanti Patnaik, wife of J.B. Patnaik, was defeated by BJP's Anadi Sahu by 50,000-odd votes.

In Jagatsinghpur, Ranjib Biswal, son of former Deputy Chief Minister Basant Biswal, lost to the BJD's Trilochan Kanungo by about 60,000 votes. In Jajpur, three-time winner Ramachandra Mallick was defeated by the BJD's Jagannath Mallick by a nearly one lakh votes. The BJP also won the Nawrangpur seat which the Congress(I) has always won.

In Bhubaneswar, BJD nominee Prasanna Patsani defeated his Congress(I) rival by a record margin of 2.32 lakh votes. The BJD president and Union Minister for Steel and Mines Navin Patnaik won from Aska defeating the CPI candidate Dwiti Krishna Panda by over one lakh votes. The Congress(I) left the seat to the CPI after its candidates refused to run against Patnaik. Aska registered the lowest turnout. The CPI alleged that the Congress(I) supporters had not voted for the CPI. The BJP State president Juel Oram was elected from Sundergarh defeating the Congress(I) rival Christopher Ekka. The State party president and former Chief Minister Hemananda Biswal was defeated by Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Debendra Pradhan of the BJD at Deogarh.

THE Congress(I) leaders are now preparing themselves for an intense stock-taking and witch-hunt, mentioning "sabotage" by rival camps. Hemananda Biswal told *Frontline* that he had received information about sabotage by party rebels from different parts of the State. He also hinted at a major reshuffle in the Ministry as well as the party organisation. Several Congress(I) leaders are of the view that the "great experiment" of imposing Giridhar Gamang as Chief Minister and nominating

Hemananda Biswal as State party president had failed. The central leadership seemed to have realised this after a harrowing experience during campaigning. The leaders feel that the party cannot face the Assembly elections under the present set-up. Hemananda Biswal has offered to step down owning responsibility for the party's poor performance.ing.

Navin Patnaik told *Frontline* that the people had "rejected the corrupt Congress(I) Government". He said the BJD's victory had "vindicated our contention that our party is the real inheritor" of Biju Patnaik's legacy. ■

MAHARASHTRA

Total seats	**48**
BJP	**13**
Shiv Sena	**15**
Congress (I)	**10**
NCP	**6**
BBM	**1**
Janata Dal (Secular)	**1**
Peasants and Workers Party	**1**
Independents	**1**

PRAVEEN SWAMI
LYLA BAVADAM

WITH horrible inevitability, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has propelled secular political forces in Maharashtra to disaster. The NCP and the Congress(I) together won 16 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats. United they had taken 33 seats in 1998. The combined vote share of the NCP and the Congress(I) rose significantly from the 1998 level, illustrating the depth of public disgust with the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance. The split in the Congress(I) allowed the right-wing alliance to win the bulk of the seats.

Most observers had anticipated that Pawar's decision to break away from the Congress(I) would benefit the alliance. Few, however, had predicted just how devastating its impact would be. Preliminary figures suggests that the NCP had won some 21 per cent of the vote, and the Congress(I) 29 per cent. Put together, this vote share is almost seven percentage points higher than what the undivided Congress(I) gathered in 1998.

Perhaps the character of the Shiv Sena-BJP triumph is best illustrated by the fact that its victories came despite a marked erosion in its vote share from 1998. Early figures suggest the BJP's share of the vote declined by some two percentage points from 22.5 per cent, and that of the Shiv Sena by three percentage points from 19.7 per cent. Despite a higher share of the vote in 1998, the alliance had been able to win a dismal 10 of the 47 seats it contested then. The reason for its debacle was the unity of the anti-alliance parties, with the Congress(I) standing united with the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and most Republican Party of India (RPI) factions.

This time around, the chaos in the Congress(I) tore the winning combination apart. The powerful RPI factions of Ramdas Athvale and Prakash Ambedkar went with the NCP and the Congress(I) respectively. Other peripheral RPI factions went their own way, with one leader, Namdeo Dhasal, endorsing the Shiv Sena. The S.P. chose to ally itself with the NCP.

The sole factor in the Hindu Right's triumph was the division in the opposition's vote. Even in Pawar's Marathwada heartland, several constituencies won from the Sena-BJP in 1998, including Osmanabad, Aurangabad and Hingoli, were lost to the Hindu Right this time around.

Similar reverses took place in western Maharashtra. In 1996, the BJP-Sena alliance had signalled its rise, taking Sholapur, Satara and Kopargaon. The Congress(I) hit back last year, and the Shiv Sena won only one seat, Ahmednagar, while the BJP saw its 1996 gains completely destroyed. This time, the NCP had a significant impact in the region, taking along with Athvale, seven of the 12 seats. But in the process, the BJP was able to take Pune and hold on to Ahmednagar, vacated by the Shiv Sena in its favour. The Shiv Sena also won the Kopargaon seat.

Details of the impact of the split between the Congress(I) and the NCP votes were not immediately available, but the case of the Mumbai North-East constituency is instructive. Congress(I) strongman Gurudas Kamat surprisingly lost the constituency to BJP's Kirit Somaiya, polling 3,93,104 votes to Somaiya's 4,00,322 votes. It could well have been a comfortable victory for the Congress(I) had not the NCP candidate, journalist-turned-politician Ram Manohar Tripati, taken away 1,02,472 votes. Similar patterns have been repeated through the State.

The overwhelming majority of voters opposed to the Shiv Sena-BJP will not be this election's only casualties. Pawar's media-manufactured aura of invincibility has been shattered. The *raison d'etre* of setting up the NCP has thus been subverted. Both the NCP and the Congress(I) must engage in some serious introspection. ■



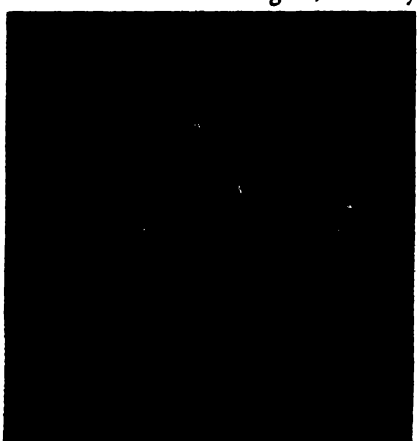
SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

THE results in West Bengal indicate that although the ruling Left Front still retains a strong hold, it may be losing ground in some pockets to the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine. The Left Front won 29 seats, four less than it did in 1998. The Trinamul Congress won eight seats, against seven in 1998; the BJP too bettered its performance, winning two seats against only one last year. The Congress(I), which won only one seat in 1998, increased its tally to three.

The three Congress(I) leaders who won this time are A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhuri (from Malda), Priya Ranjan Das Munshi (Raiganj) and Adhir Chowdhuri (Behrampur). Ghani Khan Chowdhuri defeated Sailen Sarkar of the CPI(M) by 24,853 votes and Das Munshi won by 75,255 votes. However, former Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray, attempting a political comeback, finished third in Calcutta North-West, behind Sudip Bandopadhyay of the Trinamul Congress, who won, and Rajdeo Goala of the CPI(M).

Tapan Sikdar, president of the State unit of the BJP, retained the Dum Dum seat, which came as something of a surprise. In another surprise result, Satyabrata Mukherjee of the BJP won in Krishnanagar, defeating CPI(M) candidate Dilip Chakroborti.

The Trinamul Congress, led by



Jyoti Basu, West Bengal Chief Minister.



SUSHANTO PATRONOBIS

Mamata Banerjee. The Trinamul Congress made many gains in West Bengal.

Mamata Banerjee, has made some inroads into what was and still is the Left Front's fort – rural Bengal. The party won in Barasat, Nabadwip and Contai and the BJP won in Krishnanagar. This is perhaps an indication that the Left Front has to step up its work among the rural masses. The defeat of Sudhir Giri, who had won four successive parliamentary elections in Contai, came as a stunner. Nitish Sengupta of the Trinamul Congress defeated him by 12,133 votes. CPI(M) State Secretariat member Biman Bose acknowledged that the Left Front was late in reaching out to the people and "convincing them about the danger of communal forces."

In Calcutta South, Mamata Banerjee won by 2.14 lakh votes, the highest in the State, over her nearest rival, Subhankar Chakraborti of the CPI(M). In Calcutta North-West, Sudip Bandopadhyay, one of the founders of the Trinamul Congress, won by 94,170 votes. Former Union Minister Ajit Panja of the Trinamul Congress, won in Calcutta North-East, defeating Mohammed Salim of the CPI(M) by 41,574 votes. In Jadavpur, once a bastion of the CPI(M), Krishna Bose of the Trinamul Congress won for the second time. The Trinamul Congress also captured Serampur.

Chief Minister Jyoti Basu admitted that the fact that the Left Front 's performance was a matter of "concern". He said that the party would see where it had failed and try and make rectifications.

However, the Left Front showed that its hold over North Bengal and Burdwan district continues to be strong. In Panksura, Gita Mukherjee of the CPI won by 46,858 votes, and CPI(M) candidates Sunil Khan, Bikas Choudhuri, Nikhilananda Sor and Mehboob Jahedi won in Durgapur, Asansol, Burdwan and Katwa respectively. Minati Sen and S.P. Lepcha, both of the CPI(M), won in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling respectively. Noted parliamentarian and veteran CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee won easily in Bolpur for the third consecutive time, by 1,86,389 votes over his nearest rival, Suniti Chattaraj of the Trinamul Congress. Another noted parliamentarian, Indrajit Gupta of the CPI, won in Midnapore, defeating M. Dutta of the BJP by 28,773 votes. Gupta's victory margin was far smaller than the 2,75,419 votes in 1988. The same is the case with Gita Mukherjee: in 1998, she won by 1,79,543 votes over her Trinamul Congress rival; this year, it was only 46,858 votes.

However, the Left Front scored a significant victory by winning back the Howrah constituency it lost in 1998. Swadesh Chakroborti of the CPI(M) defeated Kakoli Ghoshdastidar of the Trinamul Congress by 1,03,449 votes: the failure of the Trinamul Congress to nominate Bikram Sarkar, who had won in 1998, was a bit of a puzzle.

Byelections to five Assembly seats were held simultaneously on October 3. Of these, the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine won three, and the CPI(M) two. Badal Bhattacharcya became the first BJP member of the Assembly: he won the Ashoknagar seat in North 24 Parganas defeating CPI(M) candidate and All India Democratic Women's Association leader Rekha Goswami by 9,498 votes. ■

KERALA

Total seats	20
Congress (I)	8
CPI (M)	8
Muslim League	2
Kerala Congress (Mani)	1
Kerala Congress (Joseph)	1

R. KRISHNAKUMAR

KERALA surprised pollsters by not changing its verdict. The tally of the rival coalitions led by the CPI(M) and the Congress(I) remained the same as in 1998. The ruling CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) won nine and the Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) 11 of the 20 seats.

A significant aspect of the results was, however, the impressive gain made by the CPI(M), which, for the first time secured eight seats. For the first time also, the Kerala Congress (Joseph) won as a constituent of the LDF. The party delivered a shocking defeat on the scandal-tainted Congress(I) veteran P. J. Kurien in Idukki.

The CPI was the loser within the LDF; its members in the previous Lok Sabha, V. V. Raghavan and Chengara Surendran, were defeated in Thrissur and Adoor respectively. The party's hopes of winning the Thiruvananthapuram seat were dashed by a combination of unlikely factors that conspired to favour a little-known lawyer V. S. Sivakumar.

For the Congress(I), the defeat of Kurien at Idukki, of five-times MP Mullappally Ramachandran in violence-hit Kannur and of P.C. Chacko at Kottayam in the Christian heartland was demoralising and took away the sheen off the victory of its candidates A.C. Jose (Thrissur), K. Muraleedharan (Kozhikode) and Sivakumar (Thiruvananthapuram).

The victory of the CPI(M) candidates in Kollam and Kannur was essential for the party, because during the seat-sharing exercises it had forced its alliance partners, the RSP and the NCP, to give up their claim over these constituencies. The split in the State unit of the RSP had weakened the LDF's chances to retain the Kollam seat and the NCP, despite contesting the politically-sensitive constituency Kannur seat several times in the past as Congress(S), had proved its inability to break the Congress(I)'s winning streak.

Former Union Minister K. Karunakaran and his twice-defeated son Muraleedharan had impressive victories in Mukundapuram and Kozhikode respectively. Karunakaran defeated E. M. Sreedharan, son of CPI(M) veteran E.M.S. Namboodiripad, by 52,463 votes. Muraleedharan's candidature looked almost like a gamble. However, the absence of his traditional rival M.P. Veerendrakumar of the Janata Dal facilitated Muraleedharan's handsome victory over Janata Dal (U)'s C.M. Ibrahim by 50,402 votes. Ibrahim, Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka, failed to woo minority votes for the LDF.

Congress(I)'s Ramesh Chennithala who had switched from Kottayam to Mavelikkara came out triumphant overcoming the antipathy that he experienced in his party. In Kollam, as in Idukki, the Congress(I) fielded a candidate who is facing allegations and paid the price. In Thrissur by fielding A.C. Jose it successfully rode on the wave of Christian sentiments.

The BJP had the satisfaction of record-

ing its highest number of votes in any election in the State from Thiruvananthapuram. The party's Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, O. Rajagopal, secured 1,58,221 votes, making inroads into the vote banks of both the alliances. The BJP's overall vote share was only 8.08 per cent (it was 1.76 per cent in 1996).

According to reports, both the Congress(I) and the CPI(M) resorted to "unholy tactics" in their pockets. The UDF's pretension of being the sole victim of rigging and booth capturing did not cut much ice. Significantly, the CPI(M)'s youth leader A.P. Abdullakkutty wrested the Kannur seat from the Congress(I), despite a new bout of violence against its cadres by the BJP on the eve of the election.

The CPI(M) was the eventual winner in all northern constituencies except Kozhikode and Manjeri and Ponnani, both won by Muslim League. Of the eight seats won by the CPI(M), five – Kasargod, Kannur, Vadakara, Palakkad and Ottappalam – are in north Kerala with a sizable Muslim population.

In the constituencies in south and central Kerala, with the exception of Idukki and Kottyam, Christians generally favoured the Congress(I). In Chirayinkeezhu, which has a large Muslim population, the victory margin of 3,128 votes of the CPI(M) candidate Varkala Radhakrishnan against the Congress(I)'s M.I. Shanavas was the smallest in the State.

The LDF's allegations of the Congress(I) forging a secret understanding with the BJP by fielding a weak candidate in Thiruvananthapuram (in return for a similar favour in Mukundapuram where Karunakaran was contesting) did not have the expected effect in the constituency where Kaniyapuram Ramachandran (CPI) was expected to win.

Despite the CPI(M)'s party machinery going the whole hog in Alappuzha, cine actor Murali could not turn the tables on "Mr. Clean" V.M. Sudheeran. The Congress(I)'s two-time MP defeated Murali by 35,094 votes. In Kottayam, the Christian stronghold where the CPI(M) election apparatus was similarly active, its candidate Suresh Kurup scored an impressive victory over P.C. Chacko.

In a way, the Congress(I) in Alappuzha, the CPI(M) in Kottayam and to a lesser extent the BJP in Thiruvananthapuram proved that an efficient and "clean" candidate who truly represented the party's policies and a sincere party machinery could override considerations of religion and caste. ■

RAJASTHAN

Total seats	**25**
BJP	**16**
Congress (I)	**9**

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

GOING into the polls in Rajasthan, there was a great deal of speculation over the prospect of a large-scale desertion of the Congress(I) by the Jat community, until now one of its most influential social constituencies. Jat ire had been aroused by the Ashok Gehlot Government's failure to deliver on a promise to extend the benefits of backward class status to the community. Jat influence had begun to wane considerably on account of the reservations for backward classes in the local bodies.

Gehlot as the State's first Chief Minister of backward class extraction was keen to see that the limited benefits available under reservations were not diluted. Unwilling to yield to the Jat demand, he gambled on two factors to retain and consolidate the gains that the Congress(I) had made in the parliamentary and Assembly elections of 1998. First, it was evident that the Congress(I) had by far the more credible Jat candidates, who should not have had great difficulty in the northern and western regions, where the community was especially numerous. And in other regions, Gehlot bargained on an accretion to the Congress(I) ranks of backward classes that were traditional BJP adherents in order to offset any possible desertion of the Jats.

As the results began to come in, it became evident that the gamble had not quite paid off. The Congress(I), which went into the elections with 18 seats won in 1998 and two added on through the induction of Buta Singh and Sis Ram Ola, was reduced to nine.

A preliminary reading of the results seems to indicate that the Jat factor, although important, was not decisive. Far from a swing of votes away from the Congress(I), what has really determined the course of this election has been an amazing consolidation of the BJP vote.

The aggregate figures convey some sense of the factors underlying the BJP's gain of 11 seats: it won 48.3 per cent of the popular vote as against 44.6 per cent for the Congress. This represents a fractional gain in the popular vote share of the Congress(I) and a solid accretion of 6.6 percentage points to the BJP's share. If the Assembly elections of 1998 were to be used as the benchmark, then the Congress(I) has suffered a marginal erosion of 0.3 percentage points in its vote share. The difference stems from the colossal gain of 15 points for the BJP.

The different agendas involved in national and State level elections undoubtedly account for a part of this dramatic switch. Another part is perhaps explained by the drop in voter turnout from 61 per cent in the 1998 elections to 54 per cent now. This has evidently hurt the Congress(I) more than the BJP. Apart from their direct vote, the Jats of Rajasthan have also been rather energetic in inducing the participation of other sections in the electoral process. The drop in the turnout of the Congress' traditional supporters could be partially ascribed to the alienation of the Jats.

The Jat Mahasabha fielded Vijay Punia in Nagaur on the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) symbol and Sumitra Singh in Jhunjhunu and Gopal Lal Jat in Bhilwara as Independents. In its effort to derive maximum capital from the prospect of genuine triangular contests in a State where bipolar contests are the norm, the BJP adopted a novel strategy. In both Jhunjhunu and Nagaur it fielded non-Jat candidates in the belief that a division of the dominant community's votes and a consolidation of other communities under its banner would propel it to victory. The strategy came a cropper with the Congress(I) candidates – Sis Ram Ola in Jhunjhunu and Ram Raghunath Chaudhury in Nagaur – winning with a fair measure of comfort.

A triangular battle did, however, hurt the Congress(I) in Sikar, although this had nothing to do with the BJP's strategy. Amra Ram of the CPI (M) took away more than 80,000 votes in Sikar in a contest which Balram Jakhar of the Congress(I) narrowly lost to Subhash Mehariya of the BJP. A fairly strong showing by Amra Ram was predictable though, and Jakhar's defeat had more to do with the lack of cooperation from two Congress(I) MLAs of the Sikar Assembly segments.

Rajesh Pilot's rather unconvincing victory in Dausa by less than 7,000 votes has again been ascribed to the subtle undermining of his campaign by a Jat legislator from the area.

Bharatpur also witnessed a strong third placed performance by the BSP's Nasru Khan – a candidate allegedly sponsored by the BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat with the specific intention of undermining the Congress' claims to the numerous Meo Muslim votes in this constituency. Jagat Singh of the Congress(I), son of former Union Minister K. Natwar Singh, lost in

the event by close to 100,000 votes. His fortunes obviously would not have been materially different even with the 80,000 votes that Nasru Khan cornered.

Notable winners from the Congress(I) included State unit president Girija Vyas (Udaipur) and Buta Singh (Jalore). From the BJP, Vasundhara Raje Scindia (Jhalawar) and Girdhari Lal Bhargava (Jaipur) won their fifth consecutive elections by margins in the vicinity of 1,50,000.

The essential character of Rajasthan as a two-party state has been reinforced in these elections despite the perturbations in individual constituencies. The two principal contestants this time around have taken 93 per cent of the votes.

Even when the Congress(I) was at its lowest ebb in Rajasthan, the Jat community was never quite comfortable in the BJP orbit. The Congress(I) under Gehlot will now have to make the strategic choice of either wooing them back to the fold or seek to diversify the party's base. ■

DELHI	
Total seats	7
BJP	7

S.K. PANDE

FOR the first time since 1977, when the Congress(I) was swept aside in Delhi by a tidal wave of popular anger following the imposition of Emergency, the party has lost all seven parliamentary seats in the national capital. This time, however, there was no perceptible swing one way or another, only voter fatigue, which manifested itself in the low voter turnout.

The Congress(I)'s prospects were substantially undermined by intense infighting and the absence of an election machinery to take on the well-oiled BJP machinery. Unlike in November 1998, when the BJP was done in by its poor record of governance and tussles between its senior leaders – most notably between Madan Lal Khurana and Sahib Singh Verma – the Hindutva party this time papered over all its cracks. The result left the Congress(I), which had hoped to get a majority of the seats, shell-shocked; in point of fact, even the BJP was more than surprised by the rout of the Congress(I).

Madan Lal Khurana on a victory procession in the Sadar area of Delhi.



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

The most stunning defeat for the Congress(I) was that of former Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, who lost to Vijay Kumar Malhotra of the BJP byover 29,000 votes in South Delhi. Manmohan Singh was being projected as one of the prime ministerial candidates. Manmohan Singh attributed his defeat to the low voter turnout; significantly, he fared badly even in the Assembly segments that are Congress(I) strongholds. Reports have surfaced of skullduggery by saboteurs within the party, but the more plausible explanation is that the party's election machinery just could not get going.

The one constituency where the Congress(I) did put up a fight was Chandni Chowk, where J.P. Aggarwal lost by less than 2,000 votes to Vijay Goel of the BJP. The presence in the fray of Shoib Iqbal of the Janata Dal-Secular, who secured over 52,000 votes, worked against the Congress(I). Congress(I) leaders suspect that some MLAs from the party queered the pitch for Aggarwal.

In Sadar, Khurana was pitted against Jagdish Tytler; in Outer Delhi, Verma was challenged by Deep Chand Sharma of the Congress(I). Khurana won by less than 14,000 votes; in fact, he was trailing for a while. In contrast, Verma won by over 2 lakh votes against a lightweight candidate who, many Congress(I) leaders admit, should never have been fielded.

In Karol Bagh, two-term winner Meira Kumar of the Congress(I) lost by over 12,000 votes to newcomer Anita Arya of the BJP. There was a palpable feeling among the electorate that Meira Kumar had not done enough to "nurse" the constituency. The daughter of former Union Minister Jagjivan Ram too appears to have been the victim of inner-party tussles.

In New Delhi, Union Minister Jagmohan of the BJP defeated Congress Working Committee member R.K. Dhawan by over 27,000 votes. In East Delhi, Lal Behari Tewari of the BJP easily defeated former Lt. Governor H.L. Kapur by over 90,000 votes. Kapur's campaign never really took off, being severely hamstrung by popular perceptions of him as an "outsider". This constituency was once a Congress(I) stronghold nurtured by among others, former Union Minister H.K.L. Bhagat.

The result in Delhi has come as a rude jolt for the Congress(I), particularly since it has fared badly even in the Assembly segments where it did well in November 1998. The Congress(I) then had won in 51 of the 70 Assembly constituencies. Except in Chandni Chowk – and to a lesser extent in Karol Bagh and Sadar – the Congress(I) did not even put up a reasonable fight.

The infighting in the Congress(I) has now intensified, with the organisational leaders targeting Chief Minister Sheila Dixit. Some changes may be in the offing. ■

PUNJAB	
Total seats	13
BJP	1
Shiromani Akali Dal	2
Congress (I)	8
CPI	1
Akali Dal (Mann)	1

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

THE National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Punjab– the Akali Dal (Badal) and the Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha (DBSM) besides the BJP – suffered one of its worst defeats in the 13 constituencies and in the Union Territory of Chandigarh. The BJP-led alliance had won all the seats in 1998, but this time the NDA won only three. The Congress (I), which had drawn a blank last time, gained eight seats and its alliance partner, the CPI, took one. One seat went to the little-fancied Akali Dal (Mann). Its president Simranjit Singh Mann defeated Akali Dal(B) stalwart and Union Minister Surjit Singh Barnala in Sangrur by an impressive margin of 82,600 votes.

The results smashed the theory that an Akali Dal-BJP combination is invincible because it supposedly brought about the union of the two dominant communities, the Jat Sikhs and Hindus. According to initial estimates, the NDA's vote share dipped by a whopping 17 per cent as compared to 1998. Then, the NDA constituents had 45 per cent of the popular vote with the Akali Dal, the BJP and the DBSM accounting for 32.93 per cent, 11.67 per cent and 0.40 per cent respectively. The Congress(I) on its



Jagmeet Singh Brar. He defeated Sukhbir Singh Badal of the SAD in Faridkot.

own is presumed to have increased its vote share by approximately 7 per cent from its 1998 figure of 25.85 per cent. The vote share of other contestants such as Gurcharan Singh Tohra's All India Shiromani Akali Dal (AISAD) and its electoral partner the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), are not clear although this combination weaned away a significant chunk of the Akali Dal (B) votes.

The extent of the popular feeling against the NDA is illustrated by the results in Faridkot, Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Jullundhar. Akali Dal apparatchiks had billed the election in Faridkot as a prestigious contest. Sukhbir Singh Badal, Union Minister and son of Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, was pitted against Congress(I)'s Jagmeet Singh Brar here. Brar won, albeit with a small margin of 5,148 votes. At Gurdaspur, the NDA was represented by film star Vinod Khanna (BJP), rated as one of the most popular candidates of the NDA. Although Khanna managed to win against Sukhbans Kaur of the Congress(I), it was with a meagre margin of 1,399, a far cry from 1,06,833 votes in 1998.

In Amritsar and Jullundhar, where former Union Minister R.L. Bhatia and former MP Balbir Singh respectively were the Congress(I) candidates, the NDA had hoped to benefit from the dissidence within the Congress(I). Prominent local Congress(I) leaders such as Amritsar Mayor O.P. Soni and former MP Umrao Singh were critical of the choice of candidates. Despite this Bhatia defeated BJP's State president Daya Singh Sodhi by 31,999 votes and Balbir Singh beat Akali Dal (B)'s Prabhjot Kaur by 34,566 votes.

According to Narendra Modi, BJP's national general secretary in charge of Punjab, the anti-incumbency feeling against the Prakash Singh Badal Government and the split in the Akali Dal votes were the two principal factors that led to the NDA's reverses.

Congress(I) State president Amarinder Singh, while admitting that the reasons cited by Modi did play a role, said three additional factors had contributed to the final result. These are the absence of the Vajpayee and Kargil factors, the Congress(I)'s electoral adjustments with the Left parties and a significant shift of the Dalit vote from the BSP to the Congress(I). ■

Union Territory of Chandigarh	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	**1**
Congress (I)	**1**

IN Chandigarh, what went against the NDA was the candidature of K.L. Sharma, senior vice-president of the BJP. Sharma, virtually unknown in the constituency, was given the ticket displacing S.P. Jain, who had won the seat twice in a row. This generated the "outsider effect" and in a seat which has only 5.5 lakh voters, this was bound to be burdensome, especially because the Congress(I)'s winning candidate Pawan Kumar Bansal was a local person with strong personal connections. ■

MADHYA PRADESH	
[redacted]	
Total seats	**40**
BJP	**29**
Congress (I)	**11**

V. VENKATESAN

THE BJP repeated its 1998 performance in Madhya Pradesh winning 29 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats. If Chief Minister Digvijay Singh's positive governance explained the Congress(I)'s victory in the Assembly elections last year, the A.B. Vajpayee factor (he hails from Gwalior) has once again favoured the BJP as in 1996 and 1998.

The ruling party, which had hoped to increase its last year's tally of 10, won the Guna, Khajuraho, Rewa, Sarguja (ST), Janjgir, Mahasamund, Chindwara, Khargone, Dhar (ST), Jhabua (ST) and Rajgarh seats. There are six seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and nine for Scheduled Tribes in the State. The Congress(I) lost three ST seats to the BJP by a margin of less than 10,000 votes. Kantilal Bhuria, former member of the Digvijay Singh Cabinet, retained the Jhabua seat. Khel Sai Singh was elected from Sarguja (ST), which was held by the BJP's Larang Sai.

Senior Congress(I) leaders who won the elections include former Union Ministers S.C. Shukla (Mahasamund), Kamal Nath (Chindwara) and Madhavrao Scindia (Guna). Madhavrao Scindia, who had earlier represented Gwalior, switched to Guna, a constituency which was represented by his mother Vijayaraje Scindia. He had a lead of 2,14,428 votes over his BJP rival. The surprise losses for the Congress(I) are party spokesperson Ajit Jogi from Shahdol and former Chief Minister Motilal Vora from Rajnandgaon. Pushpadevi Singh of the Congress(I) lost to Vishnudeo Sai of the BJP in Raigarh.

The BJP has uniformly done well in all the regions of the State. Among the key contests involving the party notables were Hoshangabad, Bhopal, Indore and Rajgarh. In Hoshangabad, former Chief Minister Sunderlal Patwa won by a margin of 44,447 votes. Uma Bharati won the Bhopal seat despite resistance within the party, defeating the Congress(I)'s Suresh Pachouri. The BJP's general secretary, Sumitra Mahajan, retained the Indore seat, defeating the Congress(I)'s Mahesh Joshi by more than 1,30,000 votes. Union Minister Satyanarayan Jatia retained the Ujjain seat. In Rajgarh, television star Nitish Bharadwaj lost to Digvijay Singh's brother Lakshman Singh by over 65,000 votes. The outcome established the fact that Rajgarh is Digvijay Singh's citadel.

The BJP's P.R. Khute wrested the Sarangarh seat from the Congress(I)'s Parasaram Bharadwaj. Jaibhan Singh Pavaiya, an erstwhile leader of the Bajrang Dal, won Gwalior defeating Chandra Mohan Nagori, Congress(I).

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which won two seats in the Vindhya Pradesh region in 1996, came second only in Rewa. The seat was won by Sunderlal Tiwari of the Congress(I).

If the results of the Lok Sabha elections are an indicator of Digvijay Singh's governance, the outcome of the three Assembly by-elections in Alirajpur (Jhabua), Manawar (Dhar) and Guna, provide a different picture. The Congress(I) won all the three seats with an increased vote share. ■

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Total seats	4
BJP	3
HVC	1

S.K. PANDE

THE Bharatiya Janata Party-Himachal Vikas Congress (BJP-HVC) combine won all the four seats in Himachal Pradesh, giving a jolt to the Congress(I). In the 1998 polls, the BJP had won three seats as against the Congress(I)'s one seat.

The results showed a marginal shift in voter preference in favour of the BJP. With both the key factions of the party, those led by Chief Minister P.K. Dhumal and former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar, having buried their differences, it was a relatively united BJP that went to the polls. Shanta Kumar won the Kangra seat, countering speculation of infighting in the party. The Mandi and Hamirpur seats were retained by the BJP.

A major upset was witnessed in the traditional Congress centre of Shimla (reserved) where Lt. Col Dhani Ram Shandil of the HVC defeated Gangu Ram Musafir of the Congress(I) by 49,000 votes. The BJP's decision to give the Shimla seat to the HVC paid off. The Congress(I) had in the last minute changed its candidate in Shimla, replacing K.D. Sultanpuri, who had won the seat several times in the past.

The results carry different messages for the Congress(I) and the BJP. What is significant is that the BJP has led in many Assembly segments in the Shimla region now represented by the Congress(I). Its alliance with Sukh Ram helped the BJP make a dent on the Congress(I) vote bank. The BJP had a better election machinery, and the patch-up between Dhumal and Shanta Kumar also helped matters. The Kargil factor also worked to the advantage of the BJP. In fact, it was more pronounced than in most other parts of the country.

The Congress(I) found the defeat all the more shocking as it lost in a direct contest. For Sukh Ram, it was sweet revenge against his arch-rival and former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, who was humbled in his stronghold of Shimla.

The defeat could lead to a change of leadership as many senior leaders have lost. The Congress(I) election machinery was largely ineffective. The apple-growers' lobby, which was close to the Congress(I) has also partly shifted its allegiance to the BJP. ■

ASSAM

Total seats	14
Election held	13
BJP	2
Congress (I)	9
CPI (M-L)	1
Independent	1

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

OF the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam, the Congress(I) won nine, two short of its 1998 tally. The election in Dhubri was suspended following the murder of the BJP candidate, Pannalal Oswal. The ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) did not win any seat and finished only third in nine seats. The BJP, which emerged as the main rival to the Congress(I), won two seats, Guwahati and Nagaon, and finished second in seven seats.

In 1998, the BJP won only one seat, Silchar in the Bengali-populated Barak Valley. This time, however, the Congress(I) took the Silchar seat back from the BJP. Kabindra Purkayastha, who was a member of the last Union Cabinet, was trounced by former Union Minister Santosh Mohan Dev of the Congress(I) by over 1.7 lakh votes. The Congress(I) was able to get a majority of the seats because of the support it received from the minorities and tea garden labourers.

The AGP allotted two seats to the CPI(M) and one to the CPI. Jayanti Rongpi of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) won in Diphu defeating Biren Singh Ingty of the Congress(I). Sansuma Khunggur Bwismutiary, an independent backed by the All-Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Bodo People's Faction, was elected from Kokrajhar.



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Bijaya Chakraborty, BJP MP from Guwahati.

The BJP, which won two seats from the Brahamaputra Valley – Guwahati and Nagaon – has benefited from the people's disillusionment with the AGP. The victory of the BJP's Rajen Gohain from Nagaon, from where Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta hails, and that of Bijoya Chakravarty from Guwahati, shows that the AGP has lost votes to the BJP. Chakravarty is a leading figure in the anti-foreigner movement. By shifting to the BJP she appears to have won over the Assamese Hindus, who generally supported the AGP.

Similarly, Gohain's victory in another AGP centre is politically significant for the BJP as he is the first BJP MP from the Ahom tribal community, which accounts for about 23 per cent of the voters in the State. The BJP is all set to expand its influence among the community.

The overall poll outcome shows that the AGP has lost a substantial section of supporters to the BJP, especially in the urban areas.

The Congress(I) demanded that Mahanta should step down because he had lost the mandate. State Congress(I) president Tarun Gogoi said that Mahanta has lost the "moral right to continue in office". Gogoi, who has been re-elected to the Lok Sabha from Koliabor, said that the fact that the AGP had failed to win a single seat in two successive elections indicated the total erosion of its support base. ■

TRIPURA

Total seats	2
CPI (M)	2

THE outcome of the Lok Sabha elections in Tripura has reconfirmed the State's position as a Left stronghold in the region. The CPI(M)-led ruling Left Front has retained the State's two Lok Sabha seats. Bajuban Reang and Samar Chowdhury of the CPI(M) were re-elected from East Tripura and West Tripura constituencies respectively. Chowdhury won the West Tripura seat defeating his nearest Trinamul Congress (T.C.) rival and former Congress(I) Chief Minister S.R. Majumdar by nearly two lakh votes. Pijush Biswas of the Congress(I) polled only 83,384 votes. In East Tripura, CPI(M) candidate Bajuban Reang defeated his nearest BJP rival, Jishnu Debbarma, by over 1.5 lakh votes. Kashiram Reang of the Congress(I)

polled 83,789 votes. In the Shantir Bazar Assembly byelection, the CPI(M) candidate won by a margin of over 8,000 votes.

A notable feature of this election was the emergence of the BJP-Trinamul Congress-Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) combine as the main Opposition formation. A break-up of the Assembly segments results reveals that the Congress(I) lost ground throughout Tripura. In East Tripura the party failed to secure even the second position in many Assembly segments.

S.R. Majumdar claimed that the people had rejected the Congress(I). But the State Congress(I) president Gopal Roy blamed a section of party leaders for the debacle. "The result is undoubtedly disappointing, but we will assess the situation and take corrective measures," he said.

Despite poll-related violence and the poll-boycott call by the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), more than 65 per cent voting was recorded. ■

MANIPUR	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	2
Elections held	1
MSCP	1

FOR the third time in a row, Thounoujam Chaoba Singh of the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP), a constituent of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, retained the Inner Manipur seat. He defeated Khaidem Mani of the Manipur People's Party (MPP) by 8,000 votes. Nimaichand Luwang of the Congress(I) came third. Chaoba Singh won the seat in 1996 on the Congress(I) ticket and in 1998 as the MSCP candidate.

The election in Outer Manipur was suspended following large-scale violence. Intimidation of voters, snatching of polling material, and firing between security personnel and outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muivah) activists operating from the Nagaland-Manipur border, marred the election on October 3. Repolling in most of the booths where elections were disrupted by militants is scheduled to take place on October 28.

All the major political parties in Manipur had severed their ties with their alliance partners and fielded their own candidates. As a result, there was a multi-cornered contest. The NDA constituents in the State are the ruling MSCP, a breakaway group of the Congress(I), the Federal Party of Manipur (FPM) and the BJP, while the



RITU RAJ KONWAR

P.A. Sangma, elected from Tura for the seventh time.

Opposition Secular Democratic Front (SDF) includes the Manipur People's Party, the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Janata Dal (Secular). The Congress(I) was a constituent of the SDF initially, but pulled out during the seat-sharing stage because it sought both seats for itself.

Human rights activist-turned politician Kahidem Mani, who contested his first election, proved his popularity by emerging as the runner-up to Chaoba Singh. Mani was the consensus candidate of the SDF. ■

MEGHALAYA	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	2
Congress (I)	1
NCP	1

TRUE to his claim of being the "uncrowned monarch of the Garos" former Lok Sabha Speaker and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) general secretary Purno Agitok Sangma retained the Tura seat for a record seventh term. Sangma defeated Atul C. Marak of the Congress(I) by one lakh votes. P.R. Kyndiah of the Congress(I) was re-elected from Shillong. He defeated S.D. Khongwir of the United Democratic Party (UDP).

F. Marak, general secretary of the NCP's Garo Hills unit, told *Frontline* that Sangma's victory could prompt several Congress(I) legislators to join the NCP. For the Congress(I), the NCP leader's victory by a huge margin has been a "lesson" in electoral politics. Other Congress(I) leaders, however, admitted that they could not measure up to Sangma.

The ruling UDP is facing a revolt by its MLAs after its stunning defeat in Shillong by the Congress(I), which is its coalition partner in the State. Some UDP legislators consider the defeat to be a popular verdict on its current coalition arrangement with the Congress(I), a partnership which had turned sour even before the polls. ■

NAGALAND	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	1
Congress (I)	1

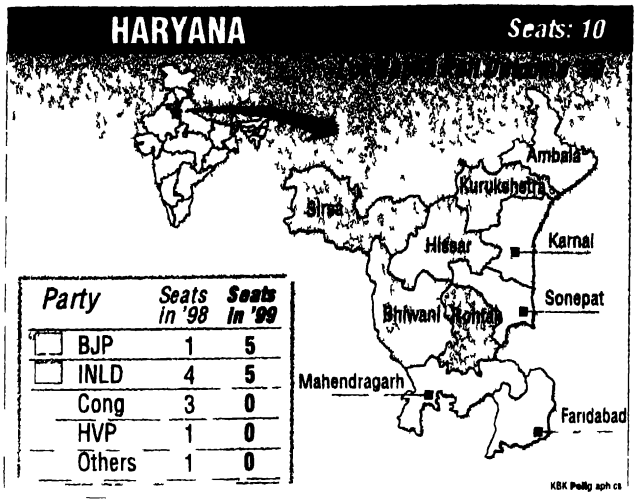
THE Congress(I)'s victory in Nagaland has once again proved that the people of the State do not favour the growth and consolidation of regional parties. In a five-cornered contest for the Kohima seat, K. Asungba Sangtam of the Congress(I) defeated Shurhozelie, who was fielded by an alliance that included the NCP, the National Democratic Movement (NDM) led by former Nagaland Chief Minister Hokishe Sema and the Nagaland People's Council. The BJP's N. Bhesto was also in the fray.

An independent, Lima Yanger, won the byelection to the Alongtaki Assembly seat, which encompasses Chief Minister S.C. Jamir's home district of Mokokchung. Yanger, a retired engineer, defeated his nearest rival Nukshi Longkumar of the Congress(I) by 172 votes without any backing from the regional parties.

Unlike during the 1998 elections, the underground insurgent groups including the Khaplang and the Issac-Muivah factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) had not openly called for a poll boycott in Nagaland and in the predominantly Naga areas in Manipur. ■

MIZORAM	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	1
MNF-MPC	1

AFTER the end of the decade-long Congress(I) rule under Chief Minister Lalthanhawla following the Assembly elections in November 1998, Mizoram seems to have turned into a playground for regional politics. The Mizo National Front-Mizo People's Conference (MNF-MPC) alliance had won more than three-fourths of the 40 Assembly seats. This time, Vanlalzawma, an independent supported by the MNF-MPC, was elected from the lone Aizawl constituency, defeating another independent, Rokamlova, who was backed by the Congress(I), the MNF (Nationalist) and the Janata Dal (Secular). The third candidate in the fray was H. Vanchhawang of the BJP, which has hardly any base in this tiny hill State. ■



Party	Seats in '98	Seats in '99
BJP	1	5
INLD	4	5
Cong	3	0
HVP	1	0
Others	1	0

T K RAJALAKSHMI

THE Indian National Lok Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party (INLD-BJP) combine, in what seemed an unexpected outcome, swept all the 10 Lok Sabha seats in the State Both parties secured five seats each leaving none to the Congress(I), the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) For the BJP, which bagged just one seat in the last elections, it was a big leap forward The INLD, for its part, bettered its 1998 tally of four by one

For the BJP it was a tactical alliance that worked The combine established a more than comfortable lead in 85 of the total 90 Assembly segments The Congress(I) led in the remaining five – three in the Mewat region, one in Mahendargarh and one in the Tosham segment of Bhiwani constituency The leads in Tosham and Mahendargarh could be of some consolation to the Congress as the former is the home constituency of HVP leader Bansi Lal and Mahendargarh is represented by Ram Vilas Sharma, president of the BJP State unit The Congress(I) was expected not only to hold on to its three seats of Rohtak, Mahendargarh and Karnal but also win Faridabad and Hissar

The Congress(I) lost many of its stalwarts to what is unofficially attributed as the "Vajpayee image" factor as well as rabid infighting within its ranks The party, however, maintained that its initial support to the unpopular Bansi Lal Government had eroded its credibility

The BJP which shared power with HVP earlier, dumped it to escape the anti-incumbency factor. Forging an alliance with Chautala was one of its many strategic moves. Also, the fact that the maximum of casualties in the Kargil war were from this State especially from Rohtak and Mahendargarh areas, aided it

The INLD's strategy of fielding a retired serviceman and the wife of a slain Border Security Force (BSF) commandant paid dividends The crippling defeat of two Congress(I) "invincibles", Bhupinder Singh Hooda from Rohtak and Rao Inderjit Singh from Mahendargarh is unexplainable but for these factors The expected polarisation of the Jat versus the non Jat votes also did not take place in a manner beneficial to the Congress(I), though its vote share improved when compared to the last elections

Among other significant reverses for the Congress(I) was the defeat of party strongman and former chief minister Bhajan Lal by I D Swami of the BJP in Karnal with a margin of nearly 1 5 lakh votes In 1998, Swami had lost to Bhajan Lal by 50,000 votes

At Rohtak, Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhupinder Singh Hooda lost to a political greenhorn, Inder Singh, by a margin of 1,44,693 votes Hooda, who had trounced Devi Lal three times from here, was believed to be the only Congressperson capable of taking on the INLD, though in 1998 he had won by a wafer-thin margin of 383 votes The INLD's entry into certain Congress(I) bastions is not insignificant Congress(I) heavyweight and former PCC president Birender Singh, lost to Surinder Singh Barwala in Hissar by a huge margin of 1 6 lakh votes While Singh lost in all the nine Assembly segments including Uchana, which he represents in the Assembly, Barwala doubled his victory margin of the last elections

In Faridabad, which has a significant Muslim population, the Congress(I) hopes were foiled by Ram Chander Bainda (BJP) who won for the third time albeit with a small margin Other winners include Kailasho Devi (INLD) who defeated Congress(I) candidate O P Jindal in Kurukshetra, Kishan Singh Sangwan (BJP) defeated Congress(I) veteran Chiranji Lal by over 2 lakh votes, and Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD) defeated Om Prakash Keharwala of the Congress(I) by 2 19 lakh votes

The political consequences for the HVP are graver as it lost its lone seat in Bhiwani, held by Surinder Singh, son of Bansi Lal Not only was Surinder Singh deemed to be the political heir of Bansi Lal but his victory could have given a boost to the party's sinking political stature Surinder trailed in all the Assembly segments including Tosham, his father s Assembly segment as well as hometown Ajay Singh Chautala, son of Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, won the seat, Dharambir of the Congress(I) was runner-up Surinder came a poor third and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) which had put up a candidate for the first time, came fourth The HVP candidate in Faridabad lost his deposit

The victory margins on the whole, have been much better when compared to the last elections and the re-election of all the sitting INLD and BJP MPs indicates that there was no major anti-incumbency sentiment

The BJP has made substantial gains in Mahendargarh, Ambala Sonepat and Karnal even though it has done so with the help of the INLD The BSP's vote share in the Ambala seat was considerably reduced as compared to last year ■

GOA

Lok Sabha	
Total seats	2
BJP	2

RAVI SHARMA

A CONSOLIDATION of anti-Congress votes enabled the Bharatiya Janata Party to win both the Lok Sabha seats from this tiny coastal State for the first time The victory was not wholly unexpected For the ruling Congress however, which held both seats, the loss was a reminder of the topsy-turvy nature of Goan politics It also brought into the open the disgruntlement in the party towards Chief Minister Luizinho Faleiro There have already been demands, albeit privately, for his resignation

The BJP's win is a further indication of the party's growing strength in Goa It increased its tally in the Assembly from four to ten in the June 1999 elections Observers say the BJP has filled the void left by the Maharashtravadi Gomantak

Party (MGP) which was the main Opposition party during the last decade and a half. MGP stalwart and former Union Minister for Law, Ramakant Khalap, who had defected to the Congress shortly before the polls, lost to BJP's Shripad Naik in the North Goa (Panaji) seat by 36,721 votes. The Congress(I) managed a lead in just two of the 19 Assembly segments here

In South Goa (Mormugao), Ramakant Angle of the BJP defeated Congress(I)'s Joachim Alemao (brother of former Chief Minister and present State Industries Minister Churchill Alemao) by 14,457 votes. A notable casualty was former Goa Chief Minister Wilfred D'Souza who contested on the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) ticket. The BJP cornered 48 per cent of the vote and the Congress 42 per cent. The NCP was a poor third with 4 per cent.

The BJP is indebted to the MGP in no small way. The surprise withdrawal of the MGP candidates – who reasoned that their presence would help Khalap - from both seats hours before the deadline for withdrawal helped garner anti-Congress votes for the BJP. The MGP has said that the people have taught Khalap a lesson for switching sides.

Congress leaders including Faleiro have blamed the party's patchy campaigning, inadequate time for campaigning and the anti-incumbency factor for the loss. Khalap, for his part, was highly critical of the way Congress MLAs and Ministers campaigned. ■

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Total seats	**6**
N.C.	**4**
BJP	**2**

PRAVEEN SWAMI

"HE who casts the first vote will get the first bullet," read the Hizbul-Mujahudeen poster nailed on to an electricity pole at Tral, Anantnag. The 1999 Lok Sabha elections will perhaps be remembered for the curious unity of electoral interests it forged between terrorists and the National Conference (N.C.) establishment.

In some senses, no single party has got the upperhand in the elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Both the N.C., which took the three Lok Sabha seats in the Kashmir Valley as well as Ladakh, and the BJP,



AIZAZ RAHI/AP

Omar Abdullah, retains the Srinagar seat.

which beat back the Congress(I) in Jammu and Udhampur, are celebrating. But the real cost of this bitterly contested and controversial election are certain to become evident in the future. The N.C. and the BJP could well find their celebrations premature.

Low voter turnouts in the Valley, as observers had predicted, ensured an N.C. sweep in Kashmir. Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's son and former MP from Srinagar, Omar Abdullah, retained his seat comfortably. The young Abdullah, marketed as the heir-apparent to the organisation built by his grandfather Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, took 55,542 votes to the 19,879 polled by his closest rival, the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) Mehbooba Mufti.

The daughter of former Union Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, Mehbooba Mufti had been widely expected to challenge the N.C.'s historic control of the Srinagar seat. But a combination of factors ensured the PDP's defeat. An election-eve formation, the PDP both lost votes to the Congress(I), whose candidate Aga Syed Mehdi polled 18,683 votes, and suffered because there was no apparatus to counter terrorist intimidation.

In Baramulla the defection of Sayeed's key ally Abdul Rasheed Shaheen to the N.C. meant that the PDP had little organisational backup. Shaheen took the seat with 84,243 votes, backed by high turnouts in N.C. pocketboroughs such as Uri and Gurez. PDP candidate Muzaffar Baig polled 46,130 votes, and former Union Minister Saifuddin Soz only 11,230.Anantnag saw the most violent run-up to the polling, witnessing a succession of attacks on candidates including one attack that claimed the life of a BJP candidate.

On polling day, one N.C. worker was killed and a Communist Party of India (Marxist) worker injured in a blast at a polling station. Widespread booth-capturing and poll malpractices, allegedly executed by the N.C., were reported from several areas, although no action was taken by the Election Commission. CPI(M) candidate Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami was attacked by N.C. workers when he attempted to stop a booth-capturing bid at Qazigund, and again while seeking to evict plainclothes police personnel from a counting centre in Anantnag town.

If the N.C. pulled out all the stops in Anantnag, its objective was simple: the defeat of Sayeed who snatched the seat in 1998. The N.C. succeeded in the attempt, and its candidate Ali Mohammad Naik polled 38,745 votes to the PDP's 25,253. Again, a low turnout helped the N.C. at least as much as alleged malpractice. Interestingly, the CPI(M), won some 17,000 votes, coming first in the Kulgam segment represented by Tarigami in the Assembly, and second in Noorabad, Wachi, Devsar and Homeshalibugh. Had turnouts been higher, results in Anantnag as elsewhere in Kashmir could well have been different.

South of the Banihal Pass, both the seats in the Jammu region were taken by the BJP with comfortable margins. Members of the dissolved Lok Sabha, Vaid Vishnu Dutt from Jammu and Chaman Lal Gupta from Udhampur, defeated their nearest Congress(I) rivals by over 1,10,000 votes.In the Ladakh seat, fought on communal lines between Buddhist Leh and Muslim Kargil, the N.C.'s Ghulam Hassan triumphed.

But the election results are bound to have other serious consequences. For one, PDP leaders are warning of unrest, pointing to the rise of terrorism in Kashmir after the controversial 1988 Assembly elections. By leaving unchecked the anti-poll campaign of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, the State government has given the secessionist organisation credibility. Finally, poor security deployment during the election period – which inexplicably went down from 356 companies in 1998 to just six this year – showed that there is little chance of a fair electoral fight without support from New Delhi. The consequences of a wide erosion of faith in the democratic process are obvious. ■

Fractured mandate in Maharashtra

PRAVEEN SWAMI
LYLA BAVADAM

MAHARASHTRA	
Total seats	288
BJP	69
Shiv Sena	56
Congress(I)	75
NCP	58
PWP	5
BBM	3
CPI (M)	2
Janata Dal (S)	2
Samajwadi Party	2
GRP	1
NPP	1
RPI	1
SJPM	1
Independents	12

DESPITE the reverses it suffered in the State in the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress(I) has emerged as the single largest party in the Assembly in Maharashtra. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Sharad Pawar's image as a major national political figure, carefully built up and marketed through his years in politics by a friendly Mumbai media, has been shattered by the Assembly results. The NCP's failure to emerge as the stronger force has left Pawar with no option but to secure a suitably packaged deal from the Congress(I). The deal is certainly going to be an unpleasant one for the former Union Minister, for he has few cards to play.

With the Shiv Sena-BJP combine lobbying energetically to become the first group to be invited to form the new government in Maharashtra, Pawar is at a crossroads. A deal with the Congress(I) would mean accepting the reality of the NCP's status as a junior partner. Failing to do so, however, holds the even more embarrassing prospect of desertions from his new army.

Shiv Sena-BJP politicians have had little reason for delight in the Assembly results. Despite the break in the Congress(I), the right-wing alliance could gather only 125 seats, well short of a majority in a House of 288. Of these, the Shiv Sena took 69 seats, down two from its 1995 figure, and the BJP 56, dropping from 80 in the previous Assembly. The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance's performance represented a sharp decline from 1995, when it won 151 seats. The Congress(I), for its part, saw its representation in the Assembly decline by just five seats, from 80 to 75, despite competition for votes with the NCP, won only 58 seats.

Why did the Shiv Sena-BJP fail to replicate at the Assembly level its success in the Lok Sabha election? Some interesting facts are evident in the preliminary figures. Consider the case of the Ahmednagar Lok Sabha constituency, which the BJP won this time in place of the Shiv Sena which took it in 1998. In the 1995 elections, the Shiv Sena-BJP had won all the six Assembly seats that make up the Lok Sabha constituency. This time, despite its overall majority in the Lok Sabha seat, it lost the Shrigoda Assembly seat to the Congress(I) and Shevgaon to the NCP. A third segment, Ahmednagar (North), was taken by an independent. While a disunited Opposition could not wrest the Ahmednagar Lok Sabha seat, the depth of local resentment against the Shiv Sena-BJP formation expressed itself sharply at the Assembly level.

Similar realities expressed themselves in the Mumbai (North-East) Lok Sabha seat, where the BJP's Kirit Somaiya defeated the Congress(I)'s Gurudas Kamat with ease. The Shiv Sena-BJP had won all six Assembly segments here in 1995, but it lost Trombay and Kurla this time around. In 1995, the Shiv Sena-BJP had triumphed in all the six Assembly segments of the Kohlapur Lok Sabha constituency, but this time lost all but one. Clear mandates to the NCP in four segments here meant the party also took the Lok Sabha seat. By contrast, the NCP took only one Assembly segment of the Sangli Lok Sabha seat this time, while the Congress(I) captured four. Again, the Shiv Sena-BJP could not retain even one of the segments it won in 1995.

Thus, while the NCP-Congress(I) split enabled the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance to hang on to several Lok Sabha seats, public anger against its government ensured that this success could not be replicated in the Assembly elections. Assembly segments were lost even where the Shiv Sena-BJP managed to hang on to the Lok Sabha seat, reflecting the general decline in the right-wing alliance's vote share. Although it is too early to work out specific details, it seems probable that a united Congress challenge would have seen the Shiv Sena-BJP decimated in all but a handful of Assembly seats.

Given the fractured mandate, both the major formations in the State now have a shot at power. Broadly, the Shiv Sena-BJP's bid will depend on support from the 12 independents. The previous government of the alliance depended entirely on the backing of independents, 33 of whom came to power against a background of large numbers of Congress(I) dissidents fighting the official candidates. This time the situation is different. Feelers have also been sent to the newly elected Ulhasnagar MLA, Suresh 'Pappu' Kalani, who allegedly has underworld links. Kalani, after his recent release from jail, set up the Native People's Party.

Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray argues that given the fact that it is a pre-poll alliance, the Shiv Sena-BJP combine should be called first to form a government. Governor P.C. Alexander's response to this argument will take a few days to



VIVEK BENDRE

Nationalist Congress Party leaders Sharad Pawar, Chhagan Bhujbal and others at a meeting with party MLAs on October 8.

come, but the numbers are clearly not promising in the case of the alliance. By contrast, a possible Congress(I)-NCP front could count on support from two Peasants and Workers Party MLAs, two Samajwadi Party MLAs, and probable outside support from two Communist Party of India (Marxist) MLAs. The two Janata Dal (Secular) MLAs could also follow suit. Several of the 12 independents are known to have some form of affiliation to either the Congress(I) or the NCP. All these make it possible to cobble together a government with a thin majority.

But will a Congress(I)-NCP alliance come about? Although elementary political sense dictates that it ought to, several personality-related obstacles lie in the way. Suresh Kalmadi, who was among Pawar's key associates in the not-too-distant past, demanded that there should be no alliance with the NCP until its leaders apologised for their opposition to Sonia Gandhi's leadership of the Congress(I). At an October 8 press conference Pawar in turn ruled out a rapprochement with the Congress(I) as long as it was led by Sonia Gandhi. Observers believe that these positions are at least in part polemical postures, a cover for the inevitable hard bargaining over seats and ministerial portfolios.

One possible deal some people within the NCP privately advocate is the appointment of an acceptable Congress(I) figure as Chief Minister, possibly Sushil Kumar Shinde, with representation in the Cabinet for both formations. The real danger is that if the mechanics of such an arrangement take too long to be realised, at least some elements in the NCP could head the Shiv Sena-BJP way. The principal problem with such a deal for Pawar is that it would amount to a public acknowledgement of the fact that the NCP experiment has failed. That, in turn, would only leave him the option of an embarrassing return to the Congress(I), with his authority and influence more than limited when he left the party.

History suggests that Pawar may, indeed, have to engage in precisely this kind of a retreat. The supposed centrepiece of Maharashtra politics, contrary to popular perception, has never led the Congress(I) or any other formation to an outright victory in an Assembly election. In 1978, he became Maharashtra's youngest Chief Minister by breaking the Congress(I) and forming the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF). Two years later, the Congress(I) routed the PDF, taking 186 of the 288 seats. In 1985, despite five years of scandal-ridden Congress(I) rule, which saw five Chief Ministers in as many years, it managed to win 162 seats although the entire Opposition united behind Pawar's Congress(S). Pawar returned to the Congress(I) only to lead it first to a minority government, in 1990, and then to disaster, in 1995.

Although Pawar has a significant power base of his own, it is far from adequate to secure an unequivocal victory in the State. The creation of the NCP may have come about as an immediate consequence of the frivolous issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin; however, the development was driven also by the Congress(I)'s lack of inner-party democracy and tactical sense. What lessons both Pawar and the Congress(I) establishment learn from the experience of the 1999 elections could shape Maharashtra politics in the years to come. The party's one major success in the State, in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, came after the shaping of a broad secular alliance, bringing together the Samajwadi Party and a spectrum of Republican Party of India factions. It ought now to move towards a revival of that alliance, and a healing of its own fissures.

Should the mainstream Congress(I) seek to impose a humiliating surrender on the NCP, it too shall suffer as a consequence. Whether it has the will to open itself up to allow a return of the NCP is, of course, altogether another question.



VIVEK BENDRE



VIVEK BENDRE

Maharashtra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee chief Prataprao Bhosle (centre) along with party leaders at the Raj Bhavan in Mumbai to stake their claim to form the government. (Below) Shiv Sena-BJP leaders celebrating the combine's victory at Sena Bhavan in Mumbai.

THE evening after the results were declared, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) president Prataprao Bhonsale met the Governor to present a letter staking his party's claim to form the government. The letter said the Congress(I) was the single largest party in the State and should therefore be given a chance to prove its majority.

Bhonsale told mediapersons that he expected support from the Janata Dal, the CPI(M), some independents and some members of the PWP. He was, however, non-committal about a tie-up with the NCP, saying that Pawar has "insulted the Congress". Pawar indicated that since the chances of Sonia Gandhi becoming Prime Minister had faded, he was not averse to a tie-up with the Congress(I) in the State.

Former Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde was elected the BJP's leader in the Assembly. On October 9, the Shiv Sena-BJP planned to elect an alliance leader as well as make a representation to the Governor to stake its claim to form the next government. However, these plans were shelved because that day was *amavasya*, (a day with moonless night), traditionally considered inauspicious. The parties decided to leave the matter of choosing the alliance leader to Bal Thackeray and Atal Behari Vajpayee. ■

Silent shift

PARVATHI MENON

KARNATAKA

Assembly	
Total seats	224
Congress(I)	133
BJP	44
Janata Dal (U)	19
Janata Dal (S)	8
AIADMK	1
Independents	19

THE Congress(I) made a spectacular comeback to power in Karnataka, winning over substantial sections of its traditional vote base which it had lost to the Janata Dal in the 1994 Assembly elections. It won 133 seats in the 224-member Legislative Assembly. The BJP, which had run a very confident campaign despite being saddled with an alliance partner it did not want, won 44 seats marking a marginal increase over its 1994 tally. Its ally, the Janata Dal (United) was all but wiped out. It won just 19 seats with former Chief Minister J H Patel and a large number of his ministerial colleagues defeated by large margins. The Janata Dal (Secular), led by former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, fared even worse winning just eight seats. Independent candidates won 19 seats.

Just as the 1994 elections brought the Janata Dal to power on a massive anti-incumbency wave, these elections have demonstrated the popular rejection of the Janata Dal government. In 1994, the Janata Dal won 115 seats and 33.56 per cent of the vote share, while the Congress(I) won just 36 seats and 27.4 per cent of the vote share. Today their positions stand reversed. The recent split in the Janata Dal, with the section led by J H Patel seeking an alliance with the BJP in a desperate attempt to shore up its eroding base, is a factor that had a great impact on the results. The BJP-JD(U) alliance, opportunistic as it was in its timing and motive, was no compensation for a tenure of virtual non-governance, especially in the last two years, by the Janata Dal in power.

The results also demonstrated the rejection of the BJP and its divisive ideology, which it sought to downplay in these elections. The BJP campaign was built around the Kargil and Vajpayee symbols for the Lok Sabha elections and local issues for the Assembly elections. The losses the party suffered even in constituencies that were considered 'safe' for it (Shimoga, Dharwad, Bangalore South, Mysore and the coastal constituencies) point to an erosion of its base quite independent of that in the case of its ally. The series of communal incidents that occured in small towns in some of these constituencies last year, in which members of the minority community were the victims of attacks by organisations belonging to the Sangh Parivar, could well have contributed to the alienation of people from the party.

Added to the poor overall performance by the BJP-JD (U) is the defeat of several prominent leaders of these parties. Among them are those who engineered cynical political alliances, those who did not meet popular expectations as Ministers, and even those such as State BJP president B S Yediyurappa who obviously held out no promise for the electorate of a constituency he thought would never desert him. Among those who lost were J H Patel who contested from Channagiri in Davangere district he lost to Vadnal Rajanna a BJP rebel candidate, by a margin of almost 30,000 votes. The other Cabinet Ministers who lost include K N Nage Gowda (Kirugavalu), M S Patil (Raichur), G Basavannappa (Holehunnur), K M Krishna Reddy (Chintamani), Anant Nag (Basavangudi), and M P Prakash (Hadagali).

Also among those who lost were former Deputy Chief Minister Siddaramaiah of the JD(S) in Chamundeswari constituency in Mysore district, the president of the Karnataka Lok Shakti Jeevraj Alva, from Jayamahal in Bangalore district and Deve Gowda's sons H D Revanna and H D Kumaraswamy in Holenarasipur and Satnur Assembly constituencies respectively. For the BJP the most stunning defeat was that of Yediyurappa in Shikaripura in Shimoga district, and those of senior leaders K S Eashwarappa and Premila Nesargi in Shimoga and Chamarajpet.

Among the prominent persons who won were S M Krishna of the Congress(I) from Maddur, former Congress(I) Minister Y K Ghorpade (Sandur), P G R Sindhia (Kanakapura) and B N Bacche Gowda (Hoskote) of the JD(U) and former Ministers Roshan Baig (Jayamahal) and Ramalinga Reddy (Jayanagar) of the Congress(I). Former Chief Secretary J Alexander, who had a controversial record in office, won on the Congress(I) ticket from Shantinagar in



T L PRABHAKAR

AICC observer Ghulam Nabi Azad greeting S.M. Krishna in Bangalore.

Bangalore city. Suresh Kumar of the BJP won the Rajajinagar seat.

S.M. Krishna, who was elected leader of the Congress Legislative Party on October 10, paving the way for his choice as Chief Minister, feels that the verdict was a positive one and not merely the consequence of an anti-incumbency wave. He told *Frontline* "We made capital out of the disastrous rule of the Janata Dal government of J.H. Patel, but I don't think that this played a major role. It was Sonia Gandhi's presence in Karnataka and the unity exhibited by the leadership that enthused our party workers and ensured our victory."

In the last three Assembly elections in Karnataka – 1999, 1994 and 1989 – the anti-incumbency factor was responsible for the decisive nature of the verdicts. In 1989, the Congress(I) won 178 seats with a vote share of 43.79 per cent. The Janata Dal had split prior to the elections after one of its periodic bouts of factionalism. Deve Gowda had left the party and joined the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP). The Janata Dal won just 24 seats in 1989 and Deve Gowda lost in both the constituencies he contested, Holenarasipura and Hassan. The present situation is in many ways similar to the one at that time.

The 1999 elections in Karnataka followed the 1989 pattern in another respect as well. The last time the State saw elections to both the Lok Sabha and the Assembly was in 1989, and, as in 1999, the electorate voted overwhelmingly for the same party in both elections, and voted against the all-India trend. If the Congress(I) led in both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in 1989, the voting pattern ran counter to the all-India trend, which was against the party. This time too the verdict in Karnataka is very much at odds with that in the rest of the country which has, by and large, given the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) the mandate to rule at the Centre.

It is clear that in Karnataka a silent shift of the support base from the constituents of the Janata Dal to the Congress(I) has taken place, and this resulted in a sweep that surprised even the Congress(I). Kargil, the Vajpayee factor, and *swadeshi* versus *videshi* talk obviously meant nothing to the voters. People voted with their eyes on local issues, punishing individuals and parties who made promises but did not deliver on them. The voter decided that if a party is not fit to govern the State it is not fit to govern at the Centre.

The shift in the support base from the Janata Dal to the Congress(I), which will be better substantiated as more election data are available, has resulted in a considerable shift in voting patterns in some areas that were considered traditional strongholds of the BJP. For example, the Congress(I) has made inroads into the BJP base in the coastal belt, in Shimoga and in Bangalore city. Of the 24 Assembly segments that constitute the three Lok Sabha constituencies of Kanara, Udupi and Mangalore, the Congress(I) won 15 seats and the BJP seven. In Shimoga, the Congress(I) won six Assembly seats and the BJP only one. And in Bangalore city (North and South), the Congress(I) won 10 out of 16 Assembly seats whereas the BJP won only four. This happened despite the fact that the Congress(I) did not really run a coherent and well-planned election campaign. The party in fact ran a defensive campaign, which responded to issues raised by the BJP. For the Congress(I), the focus was Bellary, and all senior leaders were personally involved, at one level or another, in ensuring the victory of party president Sonia Gandhi.

To what extent the alliance of the BJP with the JD(U) transferred the anti-incumbency vote from the BJP kitty to that of the Congress(I) can be fully understood only when the details of the voting patterns are available. The alliance with the JD(U), which was forced upon the local BJP unit, came into operation only a day before the last date for the withdrawal of nominations. There was in fact no alliance on the ground. In almost 50 constituencies, BJP and JD(U) candidates fought each other; in a number of constituencies the committed BJP cadre did not work for the non-BJP candidate. Unlike in 1998, when Lok Shakti and BJP leaders conducted a joint campaign, this time there was no such show of unity even at the leadership level. In fact, resentments and accusations were openly expressed by leaders of the JD(U) and the BJP.

In its post-mortem of these elections, the BJP State unit will surely make the JD(U) the scapegoat for its own unexpectedly poor performance. It has already started to do so. Would the BJP have done better without the alliance, or would it have done even worse? The fact that there has been a significant erosion of its support in its traditional strongholds suggests that the blame for the BJP's losses cannot be laid entirely at the door of the JD(U). Veteran leaders of the BJP were defeated in these elections, and the reasons surely go beyond the alliance. ■

DASU KESAVA RAO

BEATING back a spirited Congress(I) challenge, N. Chandrababu Naidu steered the Telugu Desam Party-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance to a phenomenal victory in the Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh. The combine secured a two-thirds majority in the 294-member House.

Chandrababu Naidu and 30 of his Cabinet Ministers were re-elected. The BJP improved its position, particularly in the Telengana region where it wrested seats from the Congress(I). The BJP held only two seats in the previous Assembly.

The TDP's massive mandate exceeded its own estimate. A seemingly reinvigorated Congress(I), under the leadership of Pradesh Congress(I) Committee chief Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, was widely expected to give a tough fight to or if not defeat the TDP. Favourable opinion poll and exit poll predictions notwithstanding, the success of the TDP was never taken for granted, more so in the context of the hype of near-invincibility built up around the party by the Congress(I) campaign managers.

Significantly, the TDP went to the polls on highlighting its performance in government rather than making attractive promises or by raising emotional issues. If an anti-incumbency factor existed, Chandrababu Naidu seemed to have overcome it.

Chandrababu Naidu sees the mandate as an endorsement of his government's performance in the four years it was in office, and the total support of women voters who responded to his repeated calls at election rallies to vote in good numbers. It is his conviction that people would reward good governance and credible leadership. With this in mind, he worked almost "18 hours a day, 30 days a month and 365 days a year" right from the time he assumed office on September 1, 1995. He said that the triumph of the TDP only strengthened his resolve to continue the work with greater vigour.

THE Congress(I), which had visions of a grand revival, was shell-shocked, although it improved its presence in the Assembly to 90 from a mere 26 (short of the minimum required for its leader to get recogised as the Leader of the Opposition) in 1994. The PCC(I) chief said that the party would accept the people's verdict, and attributed the defeat to the coming togeth-

A clear majority for TDP

er of the BJP and the TDP.

It was quite a setback for Rajasekhara Reddy and Congress(I) Legislature Party leader P. Janardhana Reddy who strengthened the organisation after the party's rout in 1994. The former had firmly set his eyes on the chief ministership. On the eve of the counting of votes, Rajasekhara Reddy said that he would embrace political *sanyas* if the Congress(I) failed to win and challenged the Chief Minister to do likewise. However, he backed out on the promise later on the grounds that Chandrababu Naidu had not accepted the challenge. He maintained that he was prepared to give up the party leadership but left the decision to the high command.

ANDHRA PRADESH

[illegible]	294
Elections held	293
TDP	180
BJP	12
Congress(I)	90
AIMIM	4
CPI(M)	2
Independents	5

The Congress(I) suffered major upsets in several constituencies. Janardhana Reddy lost to K. Vijayarama Rao, former Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (who contested on the TDP ticket) in the Khairatabad constituency by a slender margin of 5,400 votes. Other Congress(I) losers include the legislative party office-bearers Gade. Venkata Reddy (Parchur) and M. Kodanda Reddy (Murshidabad), party spokesmen K. Rosaiah (Tenali), Gali Muddukrishnama Naidu (Puttur) and P. Veeranna (Mahabubnagar). Only two members of the earlier Chandrababau Naidu Cabinet – Patnam Subbaiah (Palamner) and Padala Aruna (who was fielded from the Bobbili Lok Sabha constituency) – suffered defeat. PCC chief Rajashekara Reddy was elected from the Pulivendla constituency.

The ruling party performed fairly well in the coastal districts of the Andhra region and in Rayalaseema, a traditional stronghold of the Congress(I), but lost ground in the Telengana region where it shared the honours with the Congress(I). Party leaders dismissed the view that by joining hands with the BJP, it had alienated Muslims and other minorities. In fact, TDP nominees were elected in some constituencies with a considerable minority presence. The fact that the TDP's term was generally free of communal incidents in Hyderabad stood the party in good stead. (Chandrababu Naidu had made 30 nearly surprise visits to the old city of Hyderabad, which has a predominant Muslim population.) In Hyderabad, the TDP won four seats and the BJP two, whereas the Congress(I) won only the Afifnagar seat. The TDP candidate polled 1,400 votes fewer than sitting MLA and Majlis Bachao Tehreeq chief Mohd. Amanullah Khan and about 14,000 votes fewer than the Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) winner in the Chandrayangutta constituency. In Charminar, the TDP took the second spot behind the MIM while the Congress(I) finished fourth and polled less than half the TDP votes.

The election witnessed setbacks to the Left parties, once trusted allies of Chandrababu Naidu, and the smaller players in the arena such as the NTR-TDP, the Anna-TDP and the Mahajan Front. The Left parties had a combined strength of 33 in the 10th Assembly. The majority of the sitting MLAs of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) were defeated. The CPI(M) won two seats and the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) one. The Communists' loss turned out to be the Congress(I)' gain.

The NTR-TDP leader Lakshmi Parvati, was defeated in both Sompeta and Eluru Assembly constituencies; she polled a mere 1,500 votes in the latter. Nandamuri Harikrishna, Anna TDP chief, finished third in the Gudivada Assembly constituency, the seat which was once held by his father N.T. Rama Rao.

The Congress(I) levelled several charges of corruption against the Chief Minister and even sought the Governor's permission to launch prosecution proceedings against him. The Left parties had launched an extensive campaign against the World Bank loans the State obtained on disadvantageous terms.

The Congress(I) promised free power supply to farmers. This had appeared to catch the imagination of the voters, particularly in Telengana. But the Chief Minister countered this by saying that he did not wish the painstaking reforms in the power sector to be jeopardised for political gains.

CHANDRABABU NAIDU has reason to feel happy about the outcome of the elections. This was the first time that his party faced simultaneous elections to the Assembly and the Lok Sabha under his stewardship. Further, there was no NTR charisma to fetch votes for the party.

His *Praja Deevena* (people's blessings) call to intellectuals, professionals and non-committed voters to evince interest in the elections as a matter of right had a good response. A case in point was the entry into the electoral fray of Vijayarama Rao and women functionaries of the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and women college lecturers. (Andhra Pradesh has the highest number of DWCRA groups – about 2.5 lakh – which pooled savings to the tune of Rs.500 crores. Chandrababu Naidu promoted the DWCRA concept vigorously and covered the group members in the 'Deepam' – free cooking gas to rural poor women – scheme.) Industrialists such as T.G. Venkatesh (Kurnool) and 'Ambica' Krishna (Eluru) picked up seats for the TDP.



KR DEEPAK

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

The TDP's attempts to portray Rajasekhara Reddy as a faction leader with a criminal record – it described him as having the potential to extend the bomb culture of Rayalaseema to other parts of the State – was given up midway after a bomb exploded in the premises of the Panchayati Raj Minister and TDP candidate for the Narasaraopet Assembly seat, Dr. Kodela Siva Prasada Rao. The TDP's managers reverted to focussing on the party's policies and performance. Siva Prasad Rao won the seat.

With a solid mandate, Chandrababu Naidu plans to be back in the business of furthering the reform process, increasing the pace of development and pursuing the goal of 'Swarnandhrapradesh'. ■

Dual victory for SDF

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

SIKKIM	
Lok Sabha	
Total seats	1
SDF	1
Assembly	
Total seats	32
SDF	24
SSP	7
Independent	1

THE Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) was swept back to power in the Himalayan State with a two-thirds majority in the 32-member Assembly. The SDF also won the lone parliamentary seat.

The SDF's dual victory not only shattered the hopes of Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) chief Nar Bahadur Bhandari to regain power but also reaffirmed the domination of regional forces over a national party, the Congress(I). The Congress(I), which was responsible for the State's merger with the Indian Union 24 years ago, has never been elected to power in the State. It ruled Sikkim twice in the past by co-opting a ruling regional party into its fold.

The SDF, led by Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, which contested 31 seats, won 24 seats, and the SSP seven. The country's only non-territorial seat, the Sangha (monasteries), was won by an independent, Palden Lama, who was backed by the SDF. The Congress(I) and the SSP contested all the 32 seats. In 1994 the SDF won 19 seats but its tally increased to 25 when it admitted six SSP deserters.

The SDF's Bhim Dahal won the Lok Sabha seat for the third consecutive time by defeating his SSP rival, Satish Chandra Rai, by more than 20,000 votes. The Congress(I) candidate, Somnath Poudyal, got a little more than 9,000 votes.

Chamling was elected from his home constituency of Damthang for the fifth time in a row. However, two of his ministerial colleagues, D.P. Kharel (Health) and Ram Lepcha (Finance), lost to the SSP in the Central Pandam and Pathing constituencies respectively. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, who ruled the State with a iron hand for almost 15 years until 1994, made it to the House from Rhenock, a constituency dominated by upper-caste Nepalis. However, he was defeated in his native Soreng seat by the SDF's R.B. Subba, by 66 votes. His wife and former member of Parliament, Dil Kumari Bhandari, lost to State Tourism Minister Garajaman Gurung in Temi Tarku by more than 1,300 votes. The key Gangtok seat in East district went to the SSP's Narendra Pradhan for a second time.

Ethnic issues dominated the election scene. The 2,55,253 voters consisted mainly of the three ethnic communities of Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalis. The SDF enjoys the support of the Other Backward Classes within the majority Nepali community. Nepalis constitute about 72 per cent of the State's population of nearly six lakh (upper castes 26 per cent, OBCs 38 per cent and Scheduled Caste 8 per cent). The remaining 28 per cent comprises of the minority Buddhist Bhutia-Lepcha tribal community and a fraction of the plains people.

THE results have indicated that the SDF's support base in the rural areas has remained intact. In a bid to win over the Bhutia-Lepcha community, the SDF had demanded that one more seat be reserved for Sikkim in both Houses of Parliament. The SDF had also demanded that Newars, Bahuns and Chhetries, or the NBC, and Jogis, Sanyasis and Thamis be included in the list of OBCs. This helped the SDF garner the electoral support of a sizable section of upper-caste Nepalis, in addition to that of Bhutias and Lepchas, who belong to backward communities. The fact that Chamling himself belongs to the OBC category, which constitutes the largest chunk of the electorate, helped the SDF win the support of voters of those communities.

Chamlings's hold over the Nepalis of Mongoloid origin was seen to be intact as he won all the 16 seats in the South and West districts. On the other hand, Bhandari, an upper-caste Nepali Kshatriya, and his candidates won six out of the 12 seats in the upper-caste-dominated East district. In the last Assembly elections, the SSP won eight seats in the district. Of the 12 seats reserved for Bhutias and Lepchas, the SDF won 10 and the SSP two. In the previous elections, the SSP had won six reserved seats. The SDF retained the two reserved seats of Reteypani Western Pandam and Khamdons.

Former Chief Minister Sanchaman Limboo and former Ministers, including Man Bahadur Dahal, Thukchuck Lachungpa and Taraman Rai, who contested on the Congress(I) ticket, were defeated. Former SDF Deputy Chief Minister P.T. Lucksom and former head of the Sikkim Ekta Manch Laxmi Prasad Tewari, who represented the Congress(I), were defeated in Renchinpong and Dentam constituencies respectively.

Unable to win a single seat, the Congress(I)'s game plan failed. The State party leadership was aware of the fact that it would not be able to win a good number of Assembly seats. But it tried to win at least three seats in addition to the four it has in the previous Assembly, in order to be in a position to strike a deal with the SDF or the SSP in the event of a hung Assembly. With the hope of capturing the tribal vote bank in the rural areas, the Congress(I) kicked off its poll campaign immediately after the announcement of poll dates by holding a rally in Gangtok.

The Congress(I) ruled the State for five years from 1974. It started losing strength after the 1979 elections. Bhandari quit the Congress(I) and formed the SSP, which was elected to power in 1979. He ruled for three terms, barring a brief break in 1984 when the State was under President's Rule. In the 1985 elections the SSP won 29 of the 32 seats. Its performance was astounding in the 1989 elections, when it won all the 32 seats. It was in 1993, a year before another round of Assembly elections was due, that Chamling, a Minister in Bhandari's Cabinet, broke away to form the regional party, the SDF. The party won an absolute majority in the 1994 elections. This time it has come to power with increased strength, marginalising the SSP and decimating the Congress(I). ■



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

P.K. Chamling.

Congress(I) sweep

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

IN a landslide victory, the ruling Congress(I) won the two Lok Sabha seats and 53 seats in the 60-member Legislative Assembly in Arunachal Pradesh, decimating the Arunachal Congress, led by Gegong Apang, former Chief Minister, and once again proving that the people of this hilly northeastern State are opposed to the growth of regional forces.

The main advantage for the Congress(I) was that the anti-incumbency factor had not come into play as the party came to power only in January this year, replacing the Arunchal Congress government headed by Apang. Four Congress(I) candidates, including Chief Minister Mukut Mithi, were elected unopposed.

In the East Arunachal Lok Sabha constituency, two-time winner Wangcha Rajkumar defeated the BJP's Tapir Gao by 41,403 votes. The constituency comprises Rajkumar's home district of Tirap and the five other districts of Changlang, Lohit, Dibang Valley and Upper and East Siang. In Arunachal West, Jarbon Gamlin won by 55,000 votes against Union Minister of State Omak Apang of the Arunachal Congress.

Mukut Mithi's gamble of dissolving the Assembly eight months ahead of the expiry of its term and opting for simultaneous polls paid off. Apang opposed the holding of Assembly elections along with the Lok Sabha elections, saying that the situation was not conducive to free and fair elections. He suggested that the State be put under President's Rule until the time was ripe for Assembly elections. Apang alleged that the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang faction), active in Tirap and Changlang districts bordering Nagaland, had declared that only the Congress(I) would be allowed to contest. The elections were, however, held in a peaceful atmosphere, and the voter turnout was more than 65 per cent.

Of the 42 candidates fielded for the Assembly by the Arunachal Congress, only Gegong Apang was elected. He contested from his home constituency of Yingkiong in Upper Siang district. He, however, lost from Liromba, a second seat he contested.

The BJP, an ally of the Arunachal Congress, fielded 28 candidates but did not win a single seat. The two parties had reached an understanding on the parliamentary seats but not for the Assembly polls. In 10 constituencies they fielded candidates against each other thereby spliting opposition votes.

The fledgling Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) of Sharad Pawar fielded 18 candidates and won four seats.

The election process in this frontier State, which borders China, Myanmar and Bhutan, was a challenge for both the candidates and the poll officials. Candidates had often to trek for miles across jungles to reach remote villages. Twenty-five major tribes and 120 subtribes constitute the State's population.

Arunachal Pradesh is traditionally a Congress(I) stronghold. In the 1995 Assembly elections, the Congress(I) won an overwhelming majority and formed a government with Gegong Apang as Chief Minister. Apang left the party following differences with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and formed the Arunachal Congress in September 1996 with the support of 54 MLAs. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the Arunachal Congress allied itself with the BJP. Omak Apang was elected from Arunachal West and was later inducted into the A.B. Vajpayee Ministry.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

[redacted]

Total seats	2
Congress (I)	2

[redacted]

Total seats	60
Congress(I)	53
NCP	4
Arunachal Congress	1
Independents	2

Several leaders of the party, even Apang's close associates, were not happy with the way Gegong Apang pushed for his son's entry into the Ministry, depriving senior leader Wangcha Rajkumar, two-time winner from Arunachal East, of a chance to become a Minister. Rajkumar was angry, and a revolt followed. Five Ministers, including Mukut Mithi, who stood by Rajkumar, were dropped from the State Cabinet. Shortly thereafter the dissidents led by Mukut Mithi, formed the Arunachal Congress (Mithi) with 40 MLAs on their side. Mithi was installed as Chief Minister in January. In April, the Arunachal Congress (Mithi) merged with the Congress(I), which had only four MLAs, and formed the Congress(I) government.

Mukut Mithi, who has now led the Congress(I) to a resounding victory, said that the main task before him was the overall development of the State, which has hardly any industrial infrastructure. The State's primary problem is communications. "What I want to achieve is a peaceful and prosperous Arunachal with equal opportunities and gainful employment for all," Mithi said. ■



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Mukut Mithi, leads the Congress(I) to a resounding victory.



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Gegong Apang. The lone winner for the Arunachal Congress.

An unsettled living

The situation in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal has become alarming as the governments of Nepal and Bhutan fail to find a permanent place of settlement for the homeless Nepalis.

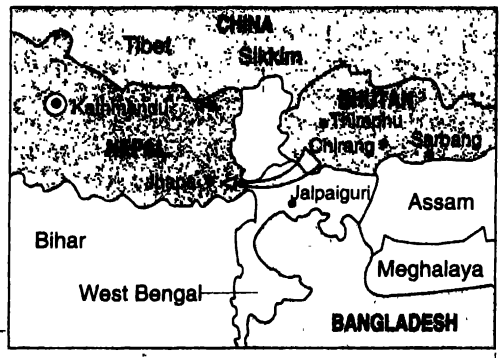
KALYAN CHAUDHURI

AFTER seven years and several rounds of talks between the Bhutan and Nepal governments, the fate of thousands of Bhutanese of Nepali origin, who fled southern Bhutan to seek shelter in eastern Nepal, remains uncertain. The hope of finding a place of permanent settlement for these refugees has receded.

The conditions in the six makeshift camps set up by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jhapa and Damak districts of Nepal, close to the Indian border, are worsening. The camps are overcrowded, and there is an acute scarcity of food, drinking water and medicines. Several people are dying of hunger and disease. Despite the presence of international non-government agencies such as Lutheran World Service and Save the Children Fund, apart from the UNHCR, the situation has become unmanageable. To make matters worse, the influx of homeless Nepalis continues.

As the camps are full, shanties have come up on the dry sand bed of the Mahananda in Siliguri and Darjeeling districts of northern West Bengal. According to the figures provided by the Appeal Movement Coordination Council of the Jhapa refugees, the number of registered Nepali refugees in Jhapa and Damak was more than 86,000 as of August 1999. The number of unregistered refugees who stayed with friends and relatives in West Bengal is estimated at 30,000. Gastro-enteritis, typhoid and malaria, which at one stage broke out in epidemic form, have taken a heavy toll of lives.

WHAT forced the Nepali-speaking people, including Lhotsampas (Nepali immigrants in Bhutan who have been granted citizenship), mostly from the four southern districts of Sarbhang, Chirang, Samchi and Dagana, to flee? The exodus started in June 1991 when the Government of Bhutan took up a programme of "Bhutanisation" of the Nepali-speaking people (*Frontline*, October 9, 1992). According to the refugees, in the process security forces of the Drukpa



SAPNA BHATTACHARYA



Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin marching from the Jhapa refugee camp in eastern Nepal in 1996.

Government resorted to repressive measures. The immigrants were forced to adopt in 1989 a dress code which prescribed the *kho* (a long robe tied around the waist by a belt) for men and the *kira* (an ankle-length dress) for women. Any resistance meant harassment, torture and even arrest. Orders from the Government were harsh, such as: "During preliminary checking some people are detected roaming around without wearing national dress. Therefore, they must be asked to report to the office of the local administration along with a fine of Nu 100 (the exchange rate prevailing then was Nu 1 = Re.1) per head without fail" or "Any Bhutanese national leaving the country to assist and help the Ngolops (antinationals, that is, Nepali immigrants) shall no longer be considered Bhutanese citizens... Such people's family members will also be held fully responsible and have to forfeit their citizenship."

For decades Nepalis have flocked to the tiny kingdom, seeking a better livelihood. Tensions between the native Drukpas and the Lhotsampas, many of whom had lived in Bhutan for decades, worsened in the early 1980s as the tide of impoverished immigrants from Nepal rose (as per estimates made at that time, Nepalis constituted about 35 per cent of Bhutan's population). In 1985, the government enacted a citizenship law, which said that anyone who came to Bhutan after 1958 would be considered an illegal immigrant. The law was largely ignored, and poor and jobless Nepalis continued to arrive. In 1988, the Government enforced the Citizenship Act, with strict speech and dress codes, ostensibly meant to preserve the country's socio-economic structure and cultural identity. Angry Nepalis began to organise themselves, and in 1990 formed the Bhutan People's Party (BPP), which is now banned.

As tensions between the two communities deepened, the Nepalis launched a militant movement under the banner of the BPP and the Bhutan National Democratic Party. Although the movement was concentrated in the southern districts, the Bhutanese Government was not ready to take chances. In July 1998, the 76th session of the National Assembly, which, for the first time in Bhutan's political history, elected a Council of Ministers as per King Jigme Singye Wangchuk's wishes, passed a resolution stating that "people who have emigrated from Bhutan should not be allowed to return to the country."

The fate of thousands of Bhutanese of Nepali origin, who fled southern Bhutan to seek shelter in eastern Nepal, remains uncertain. The hope of finding a place of permanent settlement for these refugees has receded.

Bhutan's Home Minister Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho stated in the Assembly that the Government's policy regarding "the people in the camps in Nepal claiming to be Bhutanese refugees" had always been clear. He pointed out that after several rounds of talks, the two governments had agreed that there were four categories of people in the camps: *bona fide* Bhutanese who have been evicted forcibly, Bhutanese who have emigrated, non-Bhutanese people, and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts. Gyamtsho said that Bhutan had always maintained that if any citizen was found to have been evicted, it would take full responsibility for that. Such people would be recognised as genuine refugees and any person found responsible for evicting them forcibly would be punished, he said. The Minister said that the second category of people would be dealt with according to the citizenship and immigration laws of Bhutan and Nepal. Non-Bhutanese should return to the countries of their origin, and the repatriation of those who had committed criminal acts would be conducted as per the laws of Nepal and Bhutan. He said that they would be given an opportunity to prove their innocence in a court of law in Bhutan.

The Minister also told the Assembly that apart from holding bilateral official-level meetings, the King himself had conveyed Bhutan's stand on these four categories of people to successive Prime Ministers of Nepal.

Bhutan maintains that those people who left the country have been 'disenfranchised' and therefore cannot return. Nepal says it cannot recognise the refugees at Jhapa as Nepali citizens as they have been living in Bhutan for decades and have earned citizenship rights in that country. Bhutan has turned down Nepal's repeated appeals to take the refugees back.

THE homeless people organised a peace march in 1998 to Thimphu through Indian territory, only to be prevented by the West Bengal Police on the Darjeeling-Nepal border. The police arrested some leaders of the Appeal Movement Coordination Council and the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement.

The West Bengal Government did not want to allow any individual or group to use Indian territory to wage a movement against Bhutan, which has a special relationship with India. From the diplomatic point of view, the External Affairs Ministry's stand is not only pragmatic but in accordance with the values upheld by the country. India has maintained from the outset that the refugee problem is strictly one involving Nepal and Bhutan. Diplomatic compulsions have prevented India from looking at the humanitarian aspect of the problem.

The problem is of greater significance to the West Bengal Government as 30,000 Nepali refugees have infiltrated into the Darjeeling district. The State Government cannot bear the increasing burden of maintaining them.

THE plight of the refugees has generated sympathy and the Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling are increasingly getting involved in the movement for their rehabilitation. Gorkha National Front (GNLF) leader Subash Gishing has not made any public statement on the matter; however, another Gorkha organisation, the All-India Gorkha League (AIGL), is actively involved in the rehabilitation work. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and other Left parties have lent their support to the refugees' demands.

If the GNLF decides to take part in the movement, a possibility that is not ruled out, it will only vitiate the tense situation. The proximity of the area to the sensitive northeastern region has made the situation even more alarming, for the movement is likely to get the support of Bodo or United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militants. Given up by Bhutan and Nepal, the refugees may ultimately find a safe haven in the Terai region of northern Bengal from where they may launch a direct movement against Bhutan. ■

A simmering dispute

The renewed dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over the sharing of Cauvery waters continues to simmer despite rainfall.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Chennai

RAIN in the Cauvery delta districts of Tamil Nadu last fortnight provided a breather in the State's war of nerves with Karnataka over the sharing of the river's waters. However, a row has erupted between the two principal parties in Tamil Nadu: the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Opposition All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

The controversy related to over the deletion of a clause in the original draft scheme of May 30, 1997 which empowered the Centre to take over the reservoirs in Karnataka if it failed to implement the Interim Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. The Interim Order had required Karnataka to release 205 tmc ft of water to Tamil Nadu at the latter's reservior at Mettur every rain year (from June to May) on a prescribed weekly basis. If there was a shortfall in one week, Karnataka should make good the following week.

Raising the issue, AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha criticised Chief Minister and DMK president M. Karunanidhi for agreeing to the deletion of the clause, which, she said, was vital in order to restrain Karnataka from transgressing the rule of law. She said the clause was in the "cardinal interest" of Tamil Nadu farmers. A verbal battle between the two leaders, through press releases and statements, followed Jayalalitha's criticism.

Jayalalitha asked: "Why did Karunanidhi in August 1998 agree to the deletion of the clause from the original draft scheme? Why was he hesitant to stand up for Tamil Nadu?" (On August 7, 1998, the Chief Ministers of the four riparian States – Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Kerala – signed an agreement on a scheme to implement the Interim Order.)

She described as a "toothless wonder" the Cauvery River Authority (CRA), which was formed under the August 1998 agreement and comprised the Prime Minister (as Chairman) and the four Chief Ministers. In her view, a monitoring committee consisting of officials and backed by an (expected, favourable) Supreme Court order alone would have forced the Karnataka Government to adhere to the interim order.

Karunanidhi replied that the CRA would not have become a reality if he had not agreed to the dropping of the clause in question. The Chief Ministers of both Karnataka and Kerala, J.H. Patel and E.K. Nayanar respectively, opposed the provision on the grounds that it was against the spirit of federalism.

Karunanidhi said that at the all-party conference held in Chennai on August 6, 1998 most of the parties, including the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), had expressed the view that there was no need for the clause.

Regarding Jayalalitha's preference for a monitoring committee, Karunanidhi argued that since the CRA comprised the Prime Minister and four Chief Ministers, it was a far more powerful body than a monitoring committee consisting of officials. "When the Karnataka Chief Minister and other Ministers issue statements refusing to accept the decisions of the CRA, headed by the Prime Minister himself, will they accept the decisions of committee consisting of only officials?" Karunanidhi wondered. He denied that the CRA was toothless. He pointed out that the Central Gazette dated August 11, 1998 had listed the powers of the CRA and said that its order was binding on the four States. He said that since the agreed final scheme came under Section 6-A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, it had legal status. Karunanidhi said: "The Authority has constitutional validity and it definitely has powers to implement the Tribunal's orders." He accused Jayalalitha of politicising the issue.

Earlier, in the second fortnight of September, Karnataka had refused to release to Tamil Nadu its share of water. This was despite an appeal from Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to J.H. Patel and a recommendation of the monitoring committee of the CRA to the Karnataka Government to release 9 tmc feet of water to Tamil Nadu to save standing crops. A Central team headed by Union Water Resources Secretary Zafrul Hasan endorsed the recommendation after visiting the reservoirs in Karnataka and the Mettur dam. Karnataka's refusal jeopardised the *kuruvai* crop on 80,000 hectares and *samba* nurseries on another 20,000 ha.

According to a Tamil Nadu Government official, there was a shortfall of 30 tmc feet in releases by Karnataka up to September 30.

EVEN as this battle went on in the first week of October, the ground situation in the delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam underwent a dramatic change with rain drenching the area. S. Ranganathan, secretary, Cauvery Delta Farmers' Welfare Association, said on October 6: "The rain was very helpful; it saved *kuruvai* and *samba* from destruction."

Ranganathan said that "an encouraging sign" was the visit by a four-member team from the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) to the delta region in Tamil Nadu. The team, which included V. Sesha Reddy, its vice-president, was deputed by its president M.D. Nanjundaswamy at the suggestion of Ranganathan. It saw crops withering in villages near Mannargudi, Needamanagalm, Thanjavur, Tiruvaiyaru and Tirukattupalli. (Even as the team began its visit, the rain started.)

Ranganathan told the team that 10 tmc feet of water was needed to save the *kuruvai* crop and another 25 to 30 tmc feet for the *samba* crop. At a press conference in Bangalore on October 3, the team said that 25 to 30 tmc feet was needed to save the *kuruvai* and *samba* crops in Tamil Nadu till rains came.

The rain and the announcement of the results of the Lok Sabha elections put a halt to the controversy, for now. ■

Reign of terror

Extremist outfits in Tripura resort to large-scale abductions and extortion in order to raise money to build up their arsenals and fund their leaders' lavish lifestyle.

SYED SAJJAD ALI
in Agartala

PARTHAPRATIM MAJUMDAR, a government doctor, was on his way to the primary health centre at Burakha, 20 km from Agartala, the State capital, on a September morning last year. With him in a jeep were 20 passengers, most of them small traders and junior-level employees of government health centres and agricultural farms. Just as the jeep crossed Lalitbazar, four young men emerged from the bushes and stopped it at gunpoint. After seperating the other passengers, they attacked Dr. Majumdar with AK-47 rifles, hitting him on the ribs and the stomach. Minutes later, they tied him up with towels (*ghamcha*) and took him away. This was the beginning of a 12-day nightmare for Mujumdar. Although he emerged out of it unscathed physically, he remains shaken.

Recounting his experience Majumdar said: "They asked me to run. They were apprehensive that soldiers of the Maratha Light Infantry may catch up with the group. They told me, 'if the Marathas come, you will die with us'."

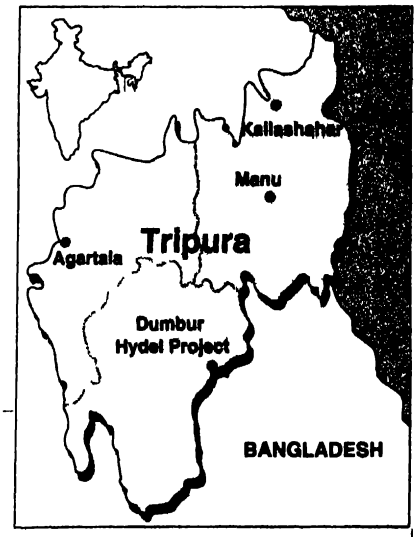
On the third day of his forced march through some of Tripura's toughest jungles, Majumdar found himself descending a hill into an undulating terrain full of tea gardens. "I knew they were taking me into Bangladesh," he said. "I knew that it was the Sylhet region from where my wife hails."

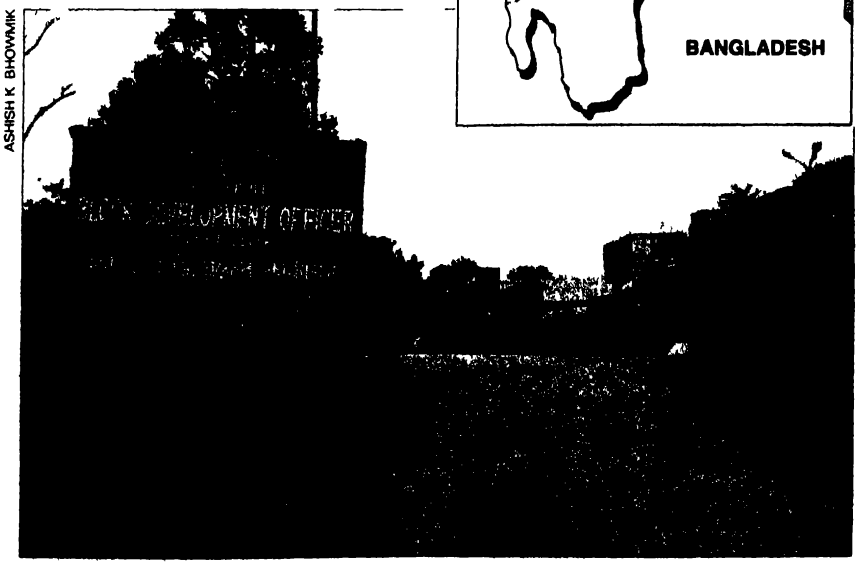
However, Majumdar is one of the luckiest among the nearly 3,000 people – mostly Bengali migrants – who have been kidnapped for ransom by insurgents in Tripura over the last few years. Soon after his abduction, his brother-in-law Subir Bhaumik, who is the BBC's eastern India correspondent and who has good contacts amongst the rebels, intervened. Upon this, the rebels, members of the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), who had demanded Rs.25 lakhs from Majumdar's father, a retired police officer, backed off. Rebel groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which have a close relationship with the ATTF, pressured the ATTF to release Majumdar. Besides, several tribal leaders who were staying in Agartala reportedly received threats from unknown quarters that they would be killed if Majumdar was not released. (Most of Tripura's guerillas are impoverished tribal people who lost their land to Bengali migrants and feel marginalised by the continuous influx of people from Bangladesh. The influx has in fact changed the demography of the erstwhile princely state; tribal people, who were once a majority here, have now become a minority.)

Majumdar himself does not appear to be angry with his abductors. "The rebel soldiers are simple tribal folk, far too innocent to see through their leaders' propaganda," he said. "They gave me the best food they could find because I began to treat them medically."

According to political scientist Sabyasachi Basu Roy Choudhury, Tripura offers an example of the "sons of the soil becoming outsiders in their own land." The State has hardly any industry despite it being rich in natural gas (Tripura is in fact unable to meet its own power requirements.) Roy Choudhury says it is not surprising that tribal youth stray into crime, with the "kidnap industry" becoming a major money-spinner.

Bhaumik, whose book *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India*, a Lancer publication, 1996, is noted for the research it reflects on the northeastern region, says that what he finds unacceptable is that no rebel group raises the issue of land. "They do not demand restoration of tribal lands," he says. "They just come up with the empty rhetoric of independence.





ASHISH K. BHOWMIK

Outside the Block Development Officer's office at Manu, from where 16 government employees were kidnapped by the National Liberation Front of Tripura in September. The organisation has demanded a ransom of Rs. 1 crore for their release.

What they really do is to raise millions of rupees through abductions, which is then blown up in foreign countries by a small group of 'leaders'. They behave like mafias, not like guerillas with a cause." K.T.D. Singh, Director-General of Police, Tripura, says that leaders of the extremist organisations lure poor tribal youth and use them to carry out kidnappings. According to him, these leaders maintain lavish lifestyles with the ransom money.

Bhaumik is of the opinion that the State government should go in for a major power project using its natural gas so that the State's meagre electricity needs are meet (the current peak demand is 110 MW). He believes that since the Dumbur Hydel Project in south Tripura produces only 5 to 7 MW, the more than 40,000 hectares of fertile tribal land that was submerged for the project should be reclaimed and handed back to the 25,000 or so landless tribal families, whose *jhum* harvest lasts them for barely four months a year. These are the families from which the insurgents have emerged.

"Reorientation of development priorities is needed to solve the problem of insurgency," says Bhaumik. "It may sound old-fashioned, but it is this and not the Western market economy formula that can solve Tripura's ethnic insurgency problem."

Until such bold steps are taken, Tripura's two-decade-old insurgency problem will continue. The first phase of insurgency ended with the surrender of members of the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) in 1988 after an accord with the Centre. "Those days we attacked security forces and Bengali settlements that had come up on tribal land. We did not go after money," says Bijoy Hrangkhawl, the TNV supremo, as he speaks derisively of the present crop of guerillas. His one-time deputy Dhananjoy Reang adds: "We had a system of raising taxes... people were not fleeced; they were asked to pay whatever they could. Now it is sheer extortion."

The ATTF and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) are the main groups that indulge in kidnapping and extortion. Lesser known groups comprising small-time criminals also operate in the region. Often they kidnap a person and "sell" him to a bigger group for a price. Bigger groups such as the NLFT and the ATTF, according to reliable sources, demand as ransom double the amount they would pay the smaller groups. "It is a well-oiled trade," says Tripura's Police Intelligence chief Dilipjit Debbarma.

While the Assam government has cracked down on tea companies that "bought" peace by paying large sums of money to the ULFA or Bodo rebels, in Tripura the government is seen to have often fought shy of attacking the "finance line" of the rebels. Lieutenant-General H.R.S. Kalkat, Chief of the Army's Eastern Command, says: "In Assam, the government cooperated with the Army and struck against the rebels in every possible way."

In June 1996, the ATTF kidnapped Yugabrata Chakrabarty, one of the State's leading tea planters and chairman of the Tea Association of India's Tripura branch. His family paid a ransom of nearly Rs.30 lakhs – only to be told that Chakrabarty had died of renal failure at a rebel base in Bangladesh. ("The rebels told me that Chakrabarty had died on the same bed they gave me," says Majumdar. By all indications, Majumdar and Chakrabarty were held captive in Satcherri, 6 km inside Bangladesh's Sylhet region across Tripura's Simna area.) Chakrabarty's family requested the rebels to return his body. His brother Shantibrata Chakrabarty alleges that the rebels asked for an additional Rs.10 lakhs to do so.

Most of those kidnapped are neither as unfortunate as Chakrabarty nor as fortunate as Majumdar. Usually, the kidnapped persons are released after the families pay the ransom. But during the negotiation period, the victims are often beaten and denied food. The Dumbur Hydel Project's executive engineer, Durgapada Guchait, who was kidnapped by the insurgents in November 1998, was all skin and bones when he was released. The release took place after Amnesty International made an appeal, perhaps for the first time in the case of individual, to Ranjit Debbarma, the group's leader. "They gave me food only once in several days. I could hardly eat what they gave me. They were angry because my family had established contact with Amnesty through a friend in Calcutta," Guchait says. His wife Gayatri and brother-in-law Bhabatosh Roy say that they had to pay nearly Rs.7 lakhs before Amnesty intervened and forestalled further extortion.

In recent times, Amnesty has begun to condemn the senseless kidnappings. When the NLFT kidnapped 16 government employees from Manu in northern Tripura in September this year, Amnesty promptly appealed to the group to release the captives and asked it to "stop the kidnapping of innocent civilians". It sent a letter to an NLFT base in Bangladesh,

GOVERNMENT OF THE
PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF TWIPRA
LFD BY NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT OF TWIPRA
MOTTO "SACRIFICE FOR LIBERATION"
REVENUE & TAX DEPARTMENT

Estd 1399 T E / 1989 A D

Ref No R 4 (1 R)/NLFT/_____ / _____ Date 11/1/98

To
Mr/Mrs/Mst [illegible]

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Government of Twipra of the Revenue & Tax department hereby notified that according to the assessment year of 199[illegible] 199[illegible] to pay as Taxes of Rs [illegible] (in word) [illegible] on your annual income of all sources the amount should be paid within 15/1/98. If any person is found to pay he/she shall be imposed violation act under sec 7(1) of the Revenue & Tax act 1989

Collector

(J. BOSONG)
Secretary
of Revenue & Tax Dept
NLFT

A "tax notification" issued by the NLFT. Those who do not pay up run the risk of being kidnapped or killed.

Kidnapping cases: 1993 to 1998

Year	No. of cases reported	Hostages released	Hostages killed	Hostages missing
1993	109	85	13	11
1994	216	187	22	7
1995	367	323	21	23
1996	298	248	16	34
1997	126	96	13	17
1998	405	315	18	72

Source police records



ASHISH K. BHOWMIK

Durgapada Guchait, an engineer with the Dumbur hydel project, who was kidnapped by the ATTF.

Holding Tripura to ransom

SYED SAJJAD ALI

YUGABRATA CHAKRABARTY, a tea planter, was the first prominent victim of Tripura's extremist groups. He was kidnapped in June 1996. His family paid nearly Rs.30 lakhs for his release. However, after accepting the ransom, the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), the organisation that kidnapped him, said that Chakrabarty had died of renal failure a few days earlier. According to Chakrabarty's family members, the outfit demanded an additional Rs.10 lakhs to hand over his body.

Mrinal Choudhury, another tea planter, was kidnapped by ATTF extremists. His son was shot dead while trying to resist the abductors. Choudhury was later killed and his body thrown into an abandoned well in a remote area.

Bimal Sinha, Tripura's Health Minister, was shot dead by NLFT extremists when he went to negotiate with them to secure the release of his brother Bikram, who had been kidnapped by them. (This was the first instance of a Minister being killed by extremists in insurgency-ravaged north-eastern India.) When the Minister refused to pay what the extremists demanded, he and another of his brothers, who accompanied him, were gunned down.

Three legislators – Debabrata Koloi of the IPFT and Pranab Debbarma and Purna Mohan Tripura of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – were kidnapped by the ATTF in separate incidents in 1997. While Pranab Debbarma escaped from the ATTF hideout in Bangladesh, the others were released after the ransom amount was paid.

Mystery surrounds the kidnapping of Dr. Pradip Reang, a doctor belonging to the tribal community. He was kidnapped by unidentified men last year and is yet to be traced. The police suspect that he may have been killed.

In November 1997, two kidnapped persons died in an exchange of fire between extremists and the police and paramilitary forces that raided a NLFT hideout in the Fatikroy area in north Tripura.

Ethnic riots broke out in the sensitive sub-division of Khowai in west Tripura in February 1997 after a leader of the local Bengali community Upendra Das, was abducted. Over 100 people, mostly Bengalis, were killed in riots that raged for four days.

In the largest ever kidnapping incident in the State's two-decade-old history of insurgency, NLFT cadres kidnapped 16 government employees from the block development office at Manu in Dhalai district in September this year. They have reportedly demanded Rs. 1 crore for the safe release of the victims.

Suspected NLFT rebels kidnapped four Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh leaders from Dhalai district. In this case too the extremists demanded a ransom of Rs.1 crore.

* * *

Subrata Choudhury, 30, is one of the 16 government employees who were kidnapped from the block development office at Manu in Dhalai district of Tripura on September 6. Choudhury, who was posted at the Fatikroy panchayat office, was in the district town at that time to attend a meeting on development activities.

Subrata Choudhury is the sole breadwinner in his family of seven, which includes his three sisters, two brothers and widowed mother. The family, which lives in a small bamboo house in Kailasahar in north Tripura, is now going through an agonising time.

"We are very poor. It is difficult for us to raise even a few thousand rupees. How can we think in terms of lakhs?" asks Supta Choudhury, one of his sisters, referring to the ransom demand made by the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). The NLFT has demanded Rs.1 crore for the safe release of the 16 hostages. The amount works out to a little over Rs.6.25 lakh for each of them. Supta Choudhury met the Chief Minister and top government officials. She has been assured of all help.

State government officials say that the government is sparing no effort to secure the release of the employees. An Army helicopter was pressed into service to try and locate the NLFT base where the hostages are held. It flew over the dense forests and hills of Dhalai district for three days, but to no avail. Combing operations by the Assam Rifles, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Tripura State Rifles yielded no result.

"We can only appeal to our brothers (extremists) to release them unharmed and unconditionally," Supta said in a broken voice. ■

where the group's leader, Biswa Debbarma, stays. This created a furore because now it was known where the group's leadership was holed up. K.T.D. Singh said: "Many of those who were kidnapped said that they were kept in extremist camps across the border. However, we cannot go to another country to conduct a rescue operation. The authorities concerned may take this serious problem to the appropriate level".

Despite Amnesty's intervention, the NLFT has said that it will not release the employees unless the government pays Rs.1 crore. Lesser amounts have been paid to secure the release of government employees and relatives of Ministers and legislators (see box). The money came from the "untied funds" available to the State government. Economist Arunoday Saha says: "This is a deadly cycle. The rebels need money for weapons and equipment, so they kidnap government officials. They know the money will come from the untied funds. Thus, government money meant for development ends up developing the rebel forces' arsenal." Tripura's Industries Minister Pabitra Kar says: "It is important to deny the rebels the funds. Unless we stop that, the rebel forces will increase in numbers, there will be more guns, and the situation will become unmanageable."



ASHISH K. BHOWMIK

K.T.D. Singh, DGP, Tripura.

In the past two years, the number of kidnappings – and the ransom claims – have increased sharply. According to

Central intelligence agencies, the NLFT and the ATTF lost large amounts of money they had deposited in banks in Thailand and the Philippines in local currency funds during the economic crisis in South-East Asia two years ago. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior official of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau said: "These amounts were kept ready to fund arms purchases from smuggling syndicates in Ranong (Thailand), but their value plummeted during the crash. Rebel groups are desperate for fresh funds because they need to make up for the loss."

Mass kidnappings have therefore increased in Tripura. Mohan Reang, a surrendered NLFT leader, says: "It serves them well to kidnap 20 bus passengers at one time because they can negotiate for a big amount."

However, for every reported case of kidnapping, there are at least two that are not officially recorded because the relatives do not report the incident to the police. "Civil society in Tripura is on the verge of collapse," says human rights lawyer Subhashis Talapatra. Satya Debbarma, a village council chief, says: "This means that the tribal people suffer much more than Bengalis, who can afford to pay up or go outside the State for treatment or education. We have nowhere to go."

This explains why insurgents may have killed more tribal people than Bengalis during the current phase of ethnic insurgency, which began earlier in the decade. As Jaldiham Reang, a schoolteacher in south Tripura who is a tribal person, says: "They (the tribal people) cannot pay ransom, so they are killed. They are suspected of acting as informants to the security forces. They are even killed if they refuse to serve foods to guerilla groups."

Asked why kidnappings could not be contained, K.T.D. Singh said: "Most of the kidnappings take place in the interior areas. The terrain is very difficult. Extremists, who are mainly local people, are familiar with each and every corner of the area. The paramilitary troops deployed to counter insurgency find it difficult to track them down." He added: "The absence of adequate intelligence is also a major irritant." According to K.T.D. Singh, "added to this is the delay in getting information. For example, by the time information about kidnappings reaches the police or the security forces, the kidnappers would have moved out of that area." ■

A police force under pressure

The police firing in Surat and the subsequent action against certain police officials highlight the pressures faced by the police force in Gujarat under a BJP government.

V. VENKATESAN
in Ahmedabad and Surat

THE police firing on an irate crowd at Limbayat Nagar in Surat in Gujarat during the Ganesh idol immersion ceremony on September 24 has left the State's Bharatiya Janata Party Government and the State police confused about their respective roles. The BJP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar were faced with the embarrassment of the State police having fired at their supporters.

The Government reacted to the incident by transferring to Ahmedabad Vipul Vijoy, Additional Police Commissioner, Surat, who had ordered the firing, but did not to take immediate action against Manoj Aggarwal, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Surat (East), who was at the spot when the firing was resorted to. Seven persons were killed in the firing.

Later, faced with an aggressive demand by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and some local residents for punishment to the police officials concerned, the Government placed both Vijoy and Aggarwal under suspension. (The VHP and the Bajrang Dal, instead of trying to use the incident to launch an agitation against a party in power for allegedly betraying the cause of Hindutva, staged a mild protest and "pardoned" the Government after it ordered the suspension of the officers.)

The officers were suspended under Rule 3 of the All-India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969, which empowers a State government to place a member of the Central services under suspension if disciplinary proceedings are either contemplated or are pending against him or her. A one-man commission is headed by Justice S.D. Dave, who retired on September 30 from the Gujarat High Court, has begun investigating the incident.

The Government based the transfer order on the report submitted by Director-General of Police C.P. Singh, who visited Surat the day after the incident. C.P. Singh apparently told the Government that the situation could have been controlled with lathicharge and the use of teargas.

The Indian Police Service Officers Association in Gujarat has stated in its memorandum to the Chief Minister that C.P. Singh had in Surat congratulated the officers for their excellent work in handling the situation but that on returning to Ahmedabad he reported to the Government that they had resorted to firing although the matter could have been handled tactfully. Incidentally, Vijoy was awarded the President's Police Medal in January for 16 years of meritorious service. His meeting with the Governor to receive the award has not yet been fixed.

The Government has not taken any action against the Police Commissioner, Kuldip Sharma, although there were protests against his continuance. The association demanded that Sharma take the responsibility for the firing and move out of Surat in order to facilitate a fair inquiry. Union Minister Kashiram Rana and State Minister from Surat Narottam Patel demanded action against Sharma.

Sharma's style of functioning has earned him both admiration and criticism. While he claims to have brought down Surat's crime rate significantly, his critics, mainly supporters of Kanshiram Rana, blame him for ignoring them. Sharma attributes the campaign against his continuance to vested interests, who suffered setbacks since he assumed charge.

Keshubhai Patel's reluctance to shift Sharma from Surat has led to at least two theories. One is that the Chief Minister

wants an adversary of Kanshiram Rana to be at the helm of the police force in Surat. Another theory is that the Chief Minister has in mind the municipal elections slated for January next, when the strength of the party's factions would be on test. Leader of the Opposition Amarsinh Choudhury alleged in the State Assembly that Sharma had collected election funds on behalf of the ruling party and thereby earned immunity from any action against him. Whatever the truth, now it seems it will be difficult for Keshubhai Patel to let Sharma continue in Surat.

The VHP does not see eye to eye with the Keshubhai Patel Government on the law and order issue, but it is not yet ready for a confrontation with it.

Meanwhile, Vijoy and Aggarwal have obtained a stay on the government order (GO), which they had challenged in the High Court. They have since moved the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), after the Government raised a procedural objection against the matter being heard in the High Court.

The IPS Officers Association claimed that the suspension orders had demoralised the State police and that this could lead to poor handling of the law and order situation in future due to inaction on the part of officers. This was proved correct on September 27 when VHP and Bajrang Dal activists disrupted a beauty pageant organised in Vadodara by a local organisation, 'Cops Group'. A passive police force watched helplessly and the programme was abandoned amidst violence.

KULDIP SHARMA told *Frontline* that Vijoy and Aggarwal had no option but to open fire. Police officials, members of the Ganesha Utsav Samiti of Limbayat, and local politicians including C.R. Patil, Chairman of a State public sector corporation and two BJP corporators, Murlidhar Patil and Ravindra Patil, had met before September 24 to decide the route to be taken for the immersion procession. A proposal to avoid the Madina Masjid area came from the Marathi-speaking people, who suggested that the people of Sanjay Nagar in the Limbayat area take the idols through another route, avoiding the masjid area. Vijoy and Aggarwal approved of the idea and requested the Commissioner to allow a route other than the one followed every year.

The Commissioner was receptive to the proposal and felt that the new route would be safer. Clashes have been witnessed every year near the Madina Masjid and trouble was expected this year too. Muslims generally lock the mosque and give the keys to the police before the procession passed through the area. This year, however, the immersion of idols took place on a Friday, when many Muslims were expected to arrive at the mosque to perform *namaz*.

However, the leaders who had agreed to the new route failed to persuade the local people to change the route. Some idols passed through the Masjid area before 9.15 a.m., the deadline set by the police and as per the permit given to the organisers. At that time two processions remained in the Sanjay Nagar area. The processionists insisted that they would take the traditional route. This was resisted by Vijoy and Aggarwal, who pointed out that the permit period had lapsed and that they would have to take the alternative route. The crowd entered into an argument with the police.

C.R. Patil failed to convince the crowd. It began throwing stones either triggering or following a lathicharge. C.R. Patil was injured The police fired 150 teargas shells and requested the control room to send 500 more. The stock of shells having been exhausted, they resorted to firing, first in self-defence and later to disperse the mob. Vijoy claimed that the Commissioner was informed about the incidents on the mobile phone and that they had got the clearance to respond to the situation as they deemed fit. The Commissioner agreed that as senior officers they had the powers to respond to a given situation. Finding the force outnumbered (the strength of the mob was put at around 20,000, whereas the police force was 100-strong), the Commissioner asked Vijoy to let the two remaining idols take the traditional route if C.R. Patil could guarantee peace at the masjid area.

The crowd had by then started pelting the police with stones, injuring 15 of them. Drunken revellers in the crowd were in no mood to listen to the police. Both Vijoy and Aggarwal were injured. Vijoy claimed that the police went through the formalities such as issuing adequate warning over the public address system, before opening fire. It is said that the crowd challenged the police to shoot.

There are murmurs within the police force that precautionary measures such as taking potential trouble-makers into preventive custody had not been taken. The police apprehended trouble in the Limbayat area partly because of the deaths in encounters of two gangsters belonging to the Chhota Rajan group in mid-September. Further, they opened fire on a mob which protested against the encounter deaths of Asif Amdawadi and Dilip Maratha. The police claim to have shot Amdawadi in retaliation for his killing of Maratha. Muslims' ire was one reason why the police feared the possibility of a clash if the processionists took the traditional route in the Limbayat area.

MEANWHILE, the VHP denied that its activists burnt the effigies of the Chief Minister, the Home Minister and the Surat Police Commissioner in protest against the firing. In fact, in the days following the incident VHP units were more concerned about organising a protest march in Surat against the abduction of a few Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activists in the northeastern. The reason for the VHP's reticence is not far to seek. It does not see eye to eye with the Keshubhai Patel Government on the law and order issue, but it is not yet ready for a confrontation as it sees the BJP governments at the State and the Centre as being responsive to its interests. Although some of the VHP's recent actions have tarnished the image of the State Government, the VHP does not want to appear to be opposing the State Government, as only under a BJP Government can it enjoy sufficient freedom to pursue its sectarian agenda.

The Surat episode took place at a time when the credibility of the Keshubhai Patel Government and the Gujarat Police was low. Kantilal Amrutiya, the BJP MLA from Morvi, was arrested for his alleged role in the murder of the former BJP president of the Morvi Municipal Corporation, Prakash Revashia, in September. Gangaram Tapu, one of the main accused in the case, was allegedly close to Keshubhai Patel. Cases relating to the murder of a former president of Mandvi municipality, a BJP corporator from Surat, and a close associate of Industries Minister Suresh Mehta earlier this year in Kutch are yet to be solved. Involvement of BJP supporters or activists in these cases is either suspected or alleged. ■

"I thought I would be the last person on earth to be affected by the Y2K Bug."

Ajay Jadeja, [illegible]

"Why me? I'm not a business man. I'm not one of those hep-to-the-computer guys. Unfortunately, the Bug doesn't care. It affects me — and you. I use electricity, water, and telephones — so do you. All these services and more are, run on microchips, at some level. If the microchips are date dependent, they can be affected by the Bug. And that's bad news for all of us.

We need to become more aware of the problem. And help others become more aware. We're in the slog overs - there's not much time left. Only a team effort can do it."

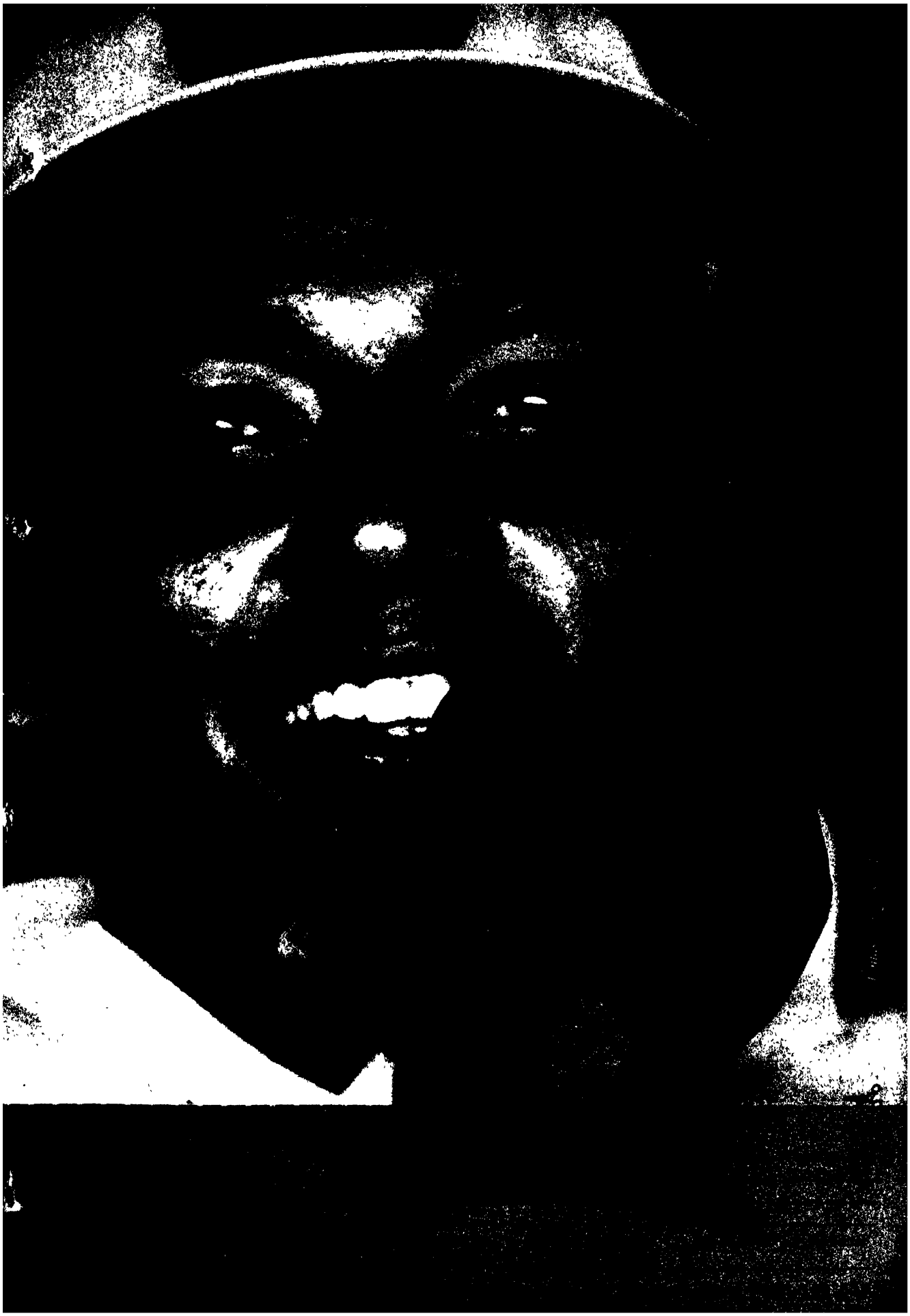
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2000

DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRONICS
GOVT. OF INDIA

LET'S MAKE INDIA Y2K OK.

Y2K ALARM!



Nature's fury

Floods leave West Bengal and Bihar ravaged.

SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

HEAVY rainfall following the formation of a low pressure trough left large parts of West Bengal, Bihar and neighbouring Bangladesh flooded in the third week of September Of the three, West Bengal seemed to have been the worst affected

On the morning of August 24, West Bengal woke up to find itself almost submerged following a downpour that persisted for over 12 hours In Calcutta, the weather office recorded 247 mm of rainfall – second only to the level of 370 mm of rain recorded in September 1978 – from midnight until noon on August 24 Fifteen of the 17 districts in the State were declared flood-affect ed In the two following days, with the water level showing no sign of receding, over 1 5 million people in the State, including Calcutta, were rendered homeless There was a food crisis too The situation was especially bad in the districts of North and South 24 Parganas, Malda, Purulia, Burdwan, Midnapore, Howrah, Hooghly, Murshidabad and Nadia

For two days, w[illegible]logged roads b[illegible]ht life in C[illegible]cutta to a standstill. The intrepid few who had ventured out could be seen wading through waist-deep water, some of them pushing their cars The State-wide death toll which on the first day of the flood was 11, had risen to 54 at the end of the fourth day

An estimated five million people in the state were affected Around 260,000 houses were completely destroyed while over 67,000 houses were damaged There has been considerable damage to crops too, over one million hectares, approximately 20 per cent of the total agricultural land in West Bengal, was submerged

To combat the crisis, the State Government released funds to the tune of Rs 35 crores On September 26, the Army despatched two relief teams, comprising 150 jawans, officers and doctors, to the flood-hit districts Rescue work and distribution of relief materials were carried out with the aid of eight high-speed boats provided by the Civil Defence and the Army, and two helicopters provided by the Air Force



SUBIR HALDAR/AP

People wade through the flooded main road of Nabadwip in Nadia district of West Bengal.

The water level in the rivers crossed the danger mark Fears that incessant rain in the catchment areas of major reservoirs such as Mayurakshi and Kansabati and those of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) would flood the neighbouring areas, led to over 90,000 cusecs of water being released from the Kansabati reservoir and 80,000 cusecs from the DVC reservoir on September 24 The water thus released, along with the rain water, ravaged large areas of South Bengal, washing away thousands of houses and leaving people marooned

On September 29, the DVC released 35,000 cusecs of water from its reservoirs while 26,000 cusecs were released from the Farakka barrage. Even after the flood situation was brought under control and

water started receding, rivers such as the Kulin, Atrayee and Tangon in north Bengal were flowing above the danger mark. In the temple-town of Nabadwip in Nadia district, the Bhagirathi rose to over 10.65 metres, inundating the area. Nadia district has been the worst affected. An area of around 3,080 sq km was submerged, about 700,000 people were affected and 39,000 houses were damaged. Food packets were air-dropped. While most areas in the State returned to normal by October 2, Nadia went to the polls still submerged in water. In many areas, people came to the polling stations in boats.



An aerial view in north Bihar.

In Malda, over 200 villages were submerged and around 400,000 people were affected. Murshidabad and Malda remained cut off from southern Bengal as large parts of National Highway 34 was submerged.

State Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta said that the West Bengal Government had asked for Rs. 250 crore from the National Calamity Fund. He estimated that with 15 States being declared flood-hit, and millions of people being affected, losses would have exceeded Rs. 1,000 crores.

The flood also brought in its wake gastro-enteric diseases. The government distributed oral rehydration solution packets and tablets, and deployed portable pumps in parts of Calcutta where drinking water shortage was acute. In many parts of Calcutta, the water level did not recede because outfall canals in the city could not cope with the flow. The full-moon tide in the Hooghly further complicated efforts to flush out the water.

IN Bihar the situation became serious when heavy rains, cyclonic winds and discharge of river water from Nepal made the Ganga and some of its tributaries submerge vast areas. Power generation was disrupted when the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) plant at Kahalgaon was inundated. In Bhagalpur and Bankra districts, two of the worst-hit areas in Bihar, property worth an estimated Rs.10 crores was destroyed and more than 10 people were feared killed.

The water level in the Banka, Chandan and Kataria rivers rose, destroying several road bridges and disrupting road communication. The roads were also affected by subsidence and erosion. The Ganga crossed the danger mark at Hathidah and Kahalgao. The Burhi Gandak was above the danger mark by 86 cm at Khagaria, and the Baltara at Baltara and Kursaila by 64 cm and 150 cm respectively. Rail traffic came to a halt, as at places such as Ekchari and Ghogha, the tracks were submerged.

The flood situation resulted in the postponement of polling from October 3 to October 28 in the Lok Sabha constituencies of Purnea, Rajmahal, Bhagalpur and Khagaria. The Election Commission (E.C.) also deferred elections in the Assembly segments of Katba and Manihari in the Katihar constituency, to October 5.



PARTH SANYAL



SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

(Top) A flooded street in south Calcutta; on their way to a relief camp in Shantipur, Nadia district.

IN flood-prone Bangladesh, day-long rain on September 22 resulted in extensive waterlogging in Dhaka as well as in the city's suburbs and villages.

In Comilla, two days of rain damaged standing crops and paralysed life. More than 150 mud houses collapsed and 4,500 ha of agricultural land was submerged. Relief materials and medical help could not reach all the flood-affected areas in time. In areas where aid was delayed, such as Lalmonirhat, the flood-victims were exposed to starvation and epidemics. Even in the relief centres, people found it difficult to cook their food owing to scarcity of fuel and firewood. According to district officials, of the 2.45 lakh victims in the Aditamri Thana area, it was possible to accommodate only 200 people in three relief camps. ■

Diplomatic deals

India and the United States engage in a diplomatic exercise to minimise differences and discover new areas of cooperation.

JOHN CHERIAN

ALTHOUGH he represented only a caretaker government, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh was extraordinarily active in recent weeks as he focussed on strengthening the ties with Washington. There are indications that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government would like President Bill Clinton to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade in the year 2000. As part of the ongoing diplomatic exercises, senior officials from the United States have visited New Delhi to prepare the ground for the proposed visit, and the White House wanted to sort out a few details before it made a final commitment. The Clinton administration would meanwhile certainly like India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Brajesh Mishra recently said during a discussion on television that the U.S. administration had asked India to create a favourable climate for a visit by Clinton. He said that India was ready to sign the CTBT if there was a "political consensus" on the matter. He asserted that a "consensus" was emerging in support of the BJP-led government's stance. He said that concrete steps leading up to the initialling of the CTBT would be taken after the new Parliament was convened.

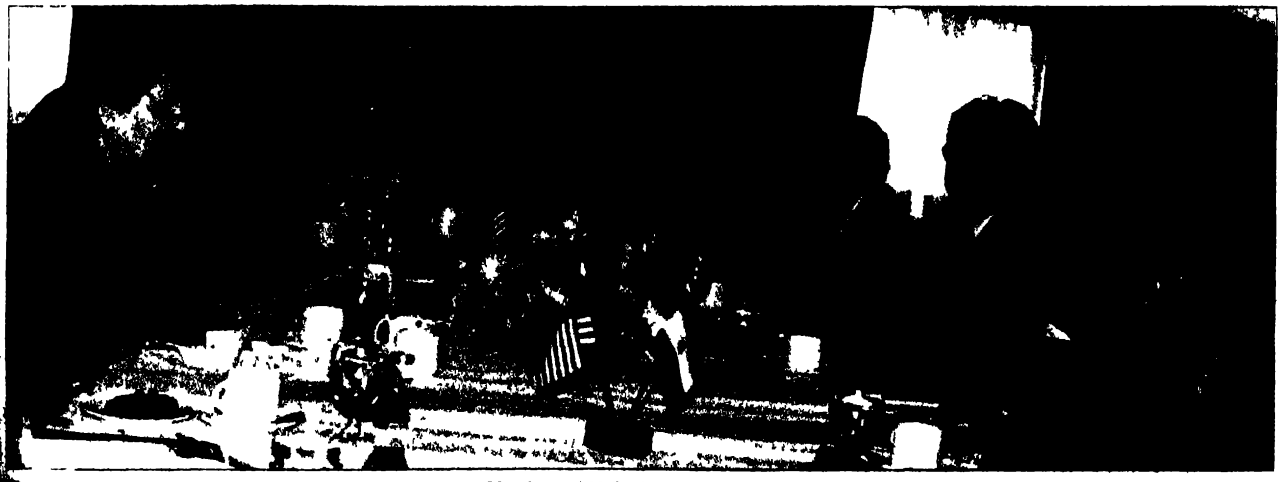
The Congress(I) and other Opposition parties expressed serious concern over the statements of the National Security Adviser. The Congress(I) said that Mishra's remarks smacked of "an element of irresponsibility". Jaswant Singh, at a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in New York in August, had reiterated India's desire to see Washington create a better atmosphere that would enable India to sign the treaty.

Interestingly, counter-terrorism was one of the issues raised at the meeting. The chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) counter-terrorism unit said that terrorism by Islamic radicals "was the greatest threat...domestically". He said that transnational groups were engaged in several theatres of war and mentioned Kashmir as being one of them. India and the U.S. expressed satisfaction at the two rounds of talks on counter-terrorism and agreed to make this an area of "serious and sustained consultations".

Jaswant Singh and Madeleine Albright noted the growing convergence of bilateral interests in battling international terrorism. In July, Clinton signed an executive order imposing financial and other commercial sanctions on the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The reason cited by the administration was the Taliban's support for Osama bin Laden, the billionaire fugitive from Saudi Arabia, who promotes terrorism by Islamic fundamentalists. In August, India imposed sanctions on the Taliban government. India stopped the Afghan national airline Ariana's flights from Amritsar to Kabul. Many of the passengers using the service were Afghan Sikhs.

Osama bin Laden is alleged to have named in mid-September the U.S. and India as the two major enemies of Islam. The Taliban government denied that he had made such a statement. The Taliban gave sanctuary to Laden on the condition that he desisted from political activity and remained inaccessible to the media. But for many countries Laden comes in handy as the most convenient symbol of Islamic terrorism worldwide. One of the reasons cited by the Russian government for its attacks on Chechnya (story on page 55) is the purported involvement of Laden and the Taliban in the region.

External Affairs Ministry officials say that they have not taken a simplistic view of the issue of terrorism. They say that Indo-U.S. cooperation on the issue flows from the recognition of the fact that terrorism today has become a complex activ-



Teams led by External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright meet on September 27 in New York.

Great expectations

SRIDHAR KRISHNASWAMI
in Washington

THERE was a lull in the dialogue between India and the United States during the Lok Sabha elections, but the momentum was expected to pick up once a new government was formed. One of the first items on the agenda here will be the visit of President Bill Clinton to India, along with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In the immediate future, the Clinton administration's spokespersons will probably repeat the obvious, that irrespective of who comes to power in New Delhi, the U.S. will work with the new government on issues of common concern. However it will be interesting to see how New Delhi and Washington will cement their relationship, which was marred by the nuclear tests at Pokhran in 1998.

The new government in New Delhi, whatever its shape or constitution, must keep in mind the fact that the Clinton administration is on its last legs and Clinton can perform only limited tasks in his remaining months in office.

Politicians and bureaucrats in New Delhi must start looking at the post-Clinton phase and perhaps even beyond the Democratic Party, which has retained the presidency for eight years. Going by the current political environment in Washington, the Indian government may have to build bridges with the Republicans. Many frontrunners of the party, including George W. Bush, do not think beyond East Asia.

One argument projected of late in India and in the U.S. is that bilateral relations, in spite of frequent political changes in New Delhi, have been on the upswing because of the process of economic reforms introduced in the 1990s. While U.S. business houses have responded favourably to the changes and official and congressional circles have evinced an interest in the liberalisation agenda, the bottomline perception has been that much more needs to be done.

Politically, and in a strategic sense, it can be argued that India and the U.S. have come closer in identifying mutual interests, such as combating international terrorism. The convergence of interests on the issue of terrorism is only natural as both India and the U.S. have had to contend with this problem – regionally by the former and globally by the latter.

New Delhi has been able to hammer away at this topic more forcefully since Kargil. Washington has admitted that apart from the other problems from across the border, India has to deal with mercenaries and soldiers of fortune. One of the common links in this bilateral dialogue has been Osama bin Laden, the Saudi fugitive who is more than a nuisance to New Delhi and Washington. In a roundabout way, congressional circles accept that Pakistan must be branded a state that supports terrorism because, among other things, it has close contacts with the Taliban, which has sheltered Osama bin Laden.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

President Bill Clinton.

Senior officials of the Clinton administration have often made the point that bilateral relations will have to go back to the situation prior to May 1998 – that is, giving depth and substance to a relationship that could not be confined to any one aspect. It would seem that Washington is linking the future course of relations to progress on the dialogue on nuclear issues.

Given the geopolitical realities, Washington and New Delhi have to be careful about how they define a "partnership" in South Asia. Some hardliners argue that Washington must strike a closer relationship with India as a counterweight to China.

At the other end of the spectrum, the administration is being warned of the growing "nexus" among India, China and Russia and its implications to the U.S. Hardline elements inside and outside the political establishment in Washington point to the possibility of Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi coming together on a common platform, for instance in tackling Islamic fundamentalism, and feel that their combined nuclear arsenal would be a cause for worry.

A question to be asked following the "consensus" on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in India after the elections is, what can be expected from the U.S. in return.

It is highly unlikely that Bill Clinton can cobble together a "package" that would entail substantial relaxation in the flow of high-end or dual-use technology to India. The main stumbling block would be Congress, which is in charge of "selling" this package to Capitol Hill. Given the political compulsions, Clinton's focus is going to be elsewhere. This is the presidential election year and First Lady Hilary Clinton is likely to contest the New York Senate seat vacated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

However, the Clinton administration could take some steps to set the right tone for the President's visit to South Asia. For instance, it could take a hard look at the Entities List, a rather unfocussed list that has been derided as meaningless in many quarters, including sections of Congress.

The administration could give useful inputs on the issue of sanctions, even though it is basically legislative business. The present one-year waiver was due to expire on September 30 but the deadline was extended. In any case, it is expected that the Conference Committee of the House and the Senate will pass a permanent waiver on the subject and in the process retain the Pressler Amendment, which some law-makers and the administration have tried to abolish.

The Clinton administration has said for a long time that the U.S. and India should work towards a positive environment leading to Bill Clinton's visit to India. After talking about this for about two years, the President is likely to visit India between January and March – the first visit by a U.S. President in more than two decades. But the real test will be whether the two countries will be able to foster a relationship that is anchored in the commonality of interests and not in any vague slogans that reiterate the obvious. ■

ity, which transcends national boundaries and is financed and supported by vested interests. According to Indian officials, Washington and New Delhi are keen to sustain the dialogue on terrorism.

IT was in this context that U.S. ambassador at large and State Department Coordinator for Counter-terrorism Michael Sheehan visited New Delhi in September. Indian officials say that the initiative had come from the Clinton administration. While in New Delhi, Sheehan called on top officials in the Home, External Affairs and Defence Ministries. He also called on Brajesh Mishra. Senior South Block officials say that both countries agreed to set up a joint working group (JWG) on terrorism.

There is no confirmation as yet from the U.S. side on the matter of about the JWG on terrorism but Indian officials expect the first JWG meeting to take place soon. External Affairs Ministry spokespersons told the media after Sheehan's visit that a "new chapter" in Indo-U.S. relations had opened. Two officials of the External Affairs Ministry were in Washington recently to discuss issues related to terrorism.

Sections of the Indian media reported that the FBI was setting up office in New Delhi. Indian officials, however, say that no decision has been taken on the matter so far. External Affairs Ministry officials say that cooperation between the two sides to counter international terrorism started in the mid-1980s when Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister. During Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Washington in June 1985, India and the U.S. discussed the international dimensions of terrorism. Both sides signed an extradition treaty in 1997. Bilateral military cooperation started in 1991, when the two countries held joint naval exercises.

A former Chief of the Army Staff, the late General B.C. Joshi, visited the U.S. in September 1994 and held substantive discussions with the U.S. Defence Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A tentative Indo-U.S. strategic cooperation was initiated during P.V. Narasimha Rao's prime ministership. Joint defence planning and technology groups were set up. After the post-Pokhran sanctions, key aspects of the security equation were put on hold. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington has put its strategic global interest ahead of regional calculations. The pro-Pakistan tilt, which earlier characterised U.S. policy in the subcontinent, is a thing of the past.

Many Indian analysts warn that the U.S. posture during the Kargil War and on the Line of Control (LoC) should not be taken as reflecting a change of policy on Kashmir in general. The Clinton administration has not given up its position that Kashmir is a flashpoint in nuclear-weapons and missile terms. There are many people who believe that the West will use Kashmir as a lever to extract concessions from India in nuclear matters. In September, more than 60 U.S. legislators wrote to Clinton saying that "Kashmir is the most dangerous flashpoint in the world today" and demanded that the President appoint a special envoy to Kashmir.

Indian officials say that they have indicated to Washington that bilateral relations could improve if the U.S. becomes more receptive to Indian concerns on Kashmir and related security issues. India and the U.S., according to them, interact on a whole spectrum of issues. The issue of terrorism, they insist, would not have an overarching influence on India's relations with other countries.

External Affairs Ministry officials insist that India's neighbours have nothing to fear from it. India, they point out, has never been a part of a regional, political or military bloc. An official said: "India's relations are based on pragmatic considerations. On certain issues, India, China and Russia can also cooperate." They say India's focus on terrorism is aimed at convincing the international community about the culpability of some of its neighbours in acts of cross-border terrorism. India sought to highlight the Islamabad-Kabul nexus and the efforts of Islamic fundamentalists to destabilise governments in many parts of the world. The Pakistan government's support to the militant Harkat-ul-Ansar grouping engaged in cross-border terrorism, was cited as an example.

Meanwhile, the U.S. administration has started preparations for Clinton's visit to the subcontinent early next year. It expects significant concessions from New Delhi and Islamabad on the nuclear issue and Kashmir before the visit materialises The BJP-led government has made it clear that it has no serious reservations with regard to the CTBT. Officials said that a "positive environment along with a domestic consensus should be created" before signing the CTBT. The Clinton administration also expects India to be ready with a package of risk reduction measures on the nuclear front. ■

AMIT BARUAH
in Islamabad

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf has emerged the winner in a game of power politics in Pakistan. The General stood his ground in a virtually open confrontation with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when he declared recently that he would complete his term as the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), which is to run until on April 8, 2000. Musharraf scored a victory when the government announced on September 29 that he had been appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) and that his term would be coterminus with his new responsibility, until October 6, 2001.

There had been intense speculation that with the appointment of Musharraf as the JCSC Chairman of the JCSC, a largely ceremonial post, Nawaz Sharif planned to instal a man of his choice as the COAS. An official announcement, however, hoped that "this step (giving Musharraf the additional responsibility) will once and for all set at rest the uncalled (for) rumours and speculation about the change of command in the Army that certain vested interests were fanning in pursuance of their political agenda." Whether that happens or not, the statement from the Prime Minister's Office confirmed that speculation did exist about the appointment of a new COAS. The candidate being mentioned was the Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lt. Gen. Khwaja Ziauddin.

Two statements set the tone for the confrontation between the COAS and the Prime Minister. On September 13, former Foreign Secretary and "secret diplomat" Niaz Naik stated that Sharif had come to know about the intrusion in Kargil only on April 26; that is, the same day that the Government of India became aware of it. By doing this, Naik locked horns with Musharraf, who had stated on July 16 that "everyone was on board" the Kargil operation. Secondly, the United States warned on September 20 of a possible Army coup in Pakistan if Kargil's can of worms was opened.

While there is no definitive evidence of how much the Prime Minister knew or did not know about Kargil, the fact remains that had he been kept in the dark, action against Musharraf would have

A face-off averted

Nawaz Sharif avoids a confrontation with his Army chief over the Kargil issue by extending his term.

been initiated much earlier. Further, if he was really unaware of it, then that would raise serious questions about who actually takes decisions in Pakistan. In a situation where Sharif has consolidated his power base and position, he would have hardly tolerated a *suo motu* initiative by the Army.

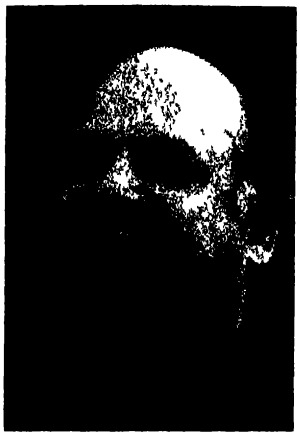
While the debate on Kargil continues, the fact remains that differences of opinion between Musharraf and the Prime Minister do exist. Needless to say, it is Kargil that was responsible for the souring of their relations. At best, the September 29 announcement will serve to improve them temporarily.

Unlike his predecessor, General Jehangir Karamat, who resigned when he was asked to do so by Sharif in October 1998, Musharraf made it clear that he would not be the "fall guy" for Kargil. Musharraf superseded two senior Generals on his way to becoming the COAS last year. Sharif presumably chose Musharraf for two reasons: he was a Mohajir, and he did not have a "base" in the largely Punjabi-Pathan Army.

THE speculation of a possible "intervention" by the Army was triggered by the U.S. warning, which was a clear message to the khaki-clad armed forces against effecting any "extra-constitutional change" in Pakistan. Washington's statement followed meetings between the Prime Minister's younger brother and "special envoy" Shahbaz Sharif (he is the Punjab Chief Minister) with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. Yet it is not known why the U.S. issued the warning when it did.

Writing about the tussle between Sharif and Musharraf, Ayaz Amir, a columnist for the newspaper *Dawn*, argued:

"On the domestic front this is the first check Nawaz Sharif has received since the beginning of his tenure. He had his way over the 13th Amendment which stripped the President of his powers to dismiss the National Assembly and appoint the Service chiefs. He saw off (Farooq) Leghari and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah when the fight with the Supreme Court erupted in the latter half of 1997. General Jehangir Karamat left as Army chief when his statement in support of a National Security Council received wide publicity. But he has not been able to have his way in the present instance. This should act as a salutary check on Nawaz Sharif's marked preference for riding roughshod over everything. Provided of course that he has learnt his lessons. Otherwise there is likely to be more of the same.



Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.



P K BANGASH AP

General Pervez Musharraf, the Chief of the Army Staff.

"It can well be asked as to why the Government had to dither for so long before putting an end to the uncertainty clouding its relations with GHQ (General Headquarters, Rawalpindi)? But for the Government to have acted in a timely and sensible fashion would have been to betray its own hallowed style of working. Right from the start this Government has displayed an unquenchable desire to first manufacture a crisis and then, when the damage is truly advanced, to be struck by doubt and vacillation."

According to Ayaz Amir, the U.S. need not have issued the statement as no coup was being planned.

GENERAL Musharraf and the Prime Minister may have agreed on an informal ceasefire for the present, but the tensions are far from over. Already the Army chief has started expressing his views on the domestic situation; he has described the law and order situation as being bad and hoped that it will improve soon.

On signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), he has repeatedly stated that the decision should be taken in the best interests of the nation. Clearly, he would have expressed his opinion on the issue directly to the civilian government. The COAS was quoted as saying, denying that the Army was putting pressure on the government not to sign the CTBT: "No, there is no such pressure. But the armed forces strongly believe that the Government should take a decision about signing the Treaty in the best national interest."

Ruling out an inquiry into the Kargil events, the General told the media on September 30 that the two meetings he had had with Shahbaz Sharif and Petroleum Minister Nisar Ali Khan were held in order to settle the modalities relating to the setting up of the office of Chairman of the JCSC.

On the country's economic situation, the General was quoted as saying: "There is a need to improve the economic scenario and I hope the Government will do its best in this regard."

Although he has not spoken about Pakistan's relations with India in the post-Kargil phase, it would be interesting to see what, if any, is the public response to the resumption of dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad. With a new government assuming power in New Delhi, and with both Islamabad and New Delhi making the right noises about the resumption of dialogue, it is only a matter of time before the discussions resume.

Given the Kargil experience, India will have to watch its step at every stage of the dialogue. The ground reality must necessarily govern the process. At least in the past Sharif has publicly stressed the need for a dialogue with India. For Pakistan essentially this means a dialogue to resolve the core issue of Kashmir while for India it has been a multi-faceted engagement. ■

Iranian rumpus

The conservatives and the reformers step up their confrontation.

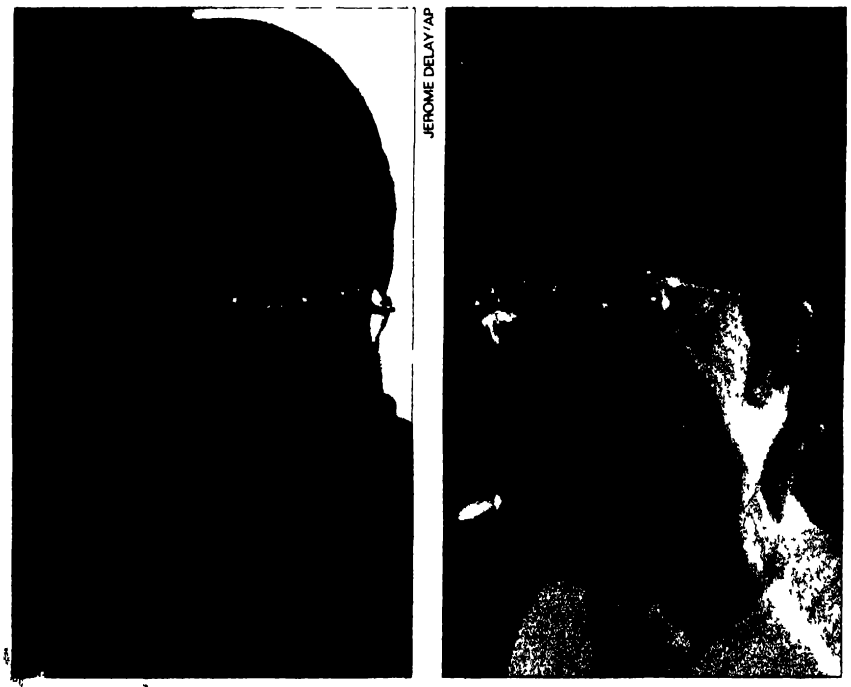
KESAVA MENON
in Bahrain

OVER most of the Muslim-majority belt in West Asia and North Africa, the quest to build a civil society is being led by the adherents of Islamic movements. In Iran, where the Islamic movement reached its apogee, the building up of civic institutions is regarded as the necessary means whereby the clerical regime can be moderated. If the efforts now under way in Iran succeed, it might have just as profound an effect on West Asia and North Africa as the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Hojatolesslam Syed Mohammed Khatami became President of Iran two years ago with the promise that he would strive to build a civil society and establish the rule of law. In the context of the Iranian situation it was easy to interpret what this promise meant in concrete terms. The essence of the post-revolutionary Iranian situation was the concept that the state and society would be run according to Koranic principles and that a core group of believers would define and apply these principles. Khatami, and the pro-reform faction of which he became the symbol, recognised that such a dispensation could not meet the people's aspirations. They also recognised that those who had a vested interest in the given dispensation had multiple levers by which their control could be perpetuated.

Since Khatami and his supporters also believe in the broad ideals of the Revolution, they have no desire to overthrow it *in toto*. A counter-revolutionary upsurge could also have unforeseeable consequences. Therefore, what Khatami and his followers chose in order to take Iran out of its predicament was that of calibrated reform. Since the entrenched conservatives had access to multiple levers to exert their power, the reform process could only progress if a multiplicity of civic institutions – the press, an impartial judiciary, students' and women's organisations, political parties and so on – were created or given fresh life. Once these institutions began to make an impact on Iranian society, all the institutions, old and new, could be confined to their legally defined spheres of activity – that is, the whole system would operate under the rule of law.

On the surface, such a reform process might not appear to be a very radical one since it does not envisage an overthrow of the existing order. Considering, however, that the conservatives had a grip on almost every aspect of Iranian society – controlling everything from dress codes to strategic affairs – the Khatami experiment aims at wide-ranging emancipation. If youth, student and women's bodies, trade unions and chambers of commerce are able to establish their norms in their respective spheres on rational grounds and unclouded by theological considerations, then the sphere left to the clerical establishment would be a considerably circumscribed one.



JEROME DELAY/AP

President Mohammed Khatami and, right, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei. It is as yet unclear whether Khamenei and Khatami are working in tandem or have just worked out an accommodation with each other.

KHATAMI formally took up the office of President in August 1997 and the two years since then have witnessed a spate of minor and major struggles between the conservatives and the reformers. Viewed incident by incident this has been a ding-dong struggle with one side or the other alternatively enjoying supremacy. If a broad trend is considered, however, it is possible to venture the assessment that the tide has run slowly but steadily in favour of the reformers. At every successive stage the conservatives have fought back from a more withdrawn position, and pro-reform elements have been able to widen steadily the envelope in respect of the issues they have challenged. There is the alternative assessment that Khatami and his cohorts are not able to keep pace with the subaltern pressure for reform, but at this stage that remains a hypothesis.

One ironic indicator of the advances made in the reform process is provided by the fact that the conservatives have already resorted to the most powerful weapon in their rhetorical armoury. They have levelled the charge of blasphemy



JEROME DELAY AP

Students on the Teheran University campus. Students and youth in the country are determined to agitate in favour of the norms they prefer to live by.

against two young playwrights who published a satirical piece in a students' magazine. This satire is based on the familiar theme wherein a historic figure, in this case the Twelfth Imam of the Shia line, Mohammed al Muntazar, returns to earth only to find that those who mouth his words behave in manner directly contradictory to his preachings. The satire was directed at the conservatives, but in a peculiar twist conservative ideologues made out as if the play lampooned the Twelfth Imam, declared it a blasphemous act and demanded that the playwrights be sentenced to death.

Iranian security services let it be known that they had already taken the two playwrights into custody and this was followed by another leak that a third person had also been arrested in this connection. Then came the bomb-shell. Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, the Wali Faqih (Supreme Religious Jurisconsult), chose the late Imam Ruhollah Khomeini's centenary celebrations as the occasion to make a pronouncement on the matter. The Supreme Leader, who is vested with powers vaster than Presidents, warned that he would not permit any "arbitrary, individual or overly emotional reaction" to the satire. News agencies quoted Khamenei as saying: "Nobody has the right to react on the basis of feelings and assume the right to defend the values of Islam. I legally and religiously forbid any act against the authors of the offence against the Twelfth Imam. It is down to the judiciary to examine and assess the offence and to nobody else. I would like to warn the various political factions against exploiting such topics for their own interests."

The immediate effect of Khamenei's pronouncement is that the question of whether the playwrights committed blasphemy will be examined strictly according to rules. Conservatives will not be able to run away with the trial and whip up emotions to discredit the entire reform process. Their campaign that such blasphemous acts could only be committed because the reforms had prepared the conditions and that the reform process should therefore be reversed, has been killed off before it could get going. A more stunning blow to the conservatives has been dealt by the fact that when Khamenei chose to come out of the shadows he did not come out in their favour but against them.

Till now most observers of the Iranian scene had believed, even in the absence of firm evidence, that Khamenei headed the conservative camp against Khatami's reformers. Khamenei has indeed spoken out against some of Khatami's initiatives, notably on rapprochement with the West, but he has also backed the President on as many occasions. Since operations at the highest echelons in Iran are not transparent, it is not possible to determine whether Khamenei and Khatami are working in tandem (in the "good cop, bad cop" format) or have just worked out an accommodation with each other. The texture of their personal relations might not be very relevant if Khamenei has recognised, as indeed he appears to, that the reform agenda is necessary and should be supported.

A conclusion that the conservatives have been decisively defeated on the blasphemy issue and that this has provided the crucial breakthrough for the reform process is probably premature. It would, however, be pertinent to make a sector-wise appraisal of the advances that have been made by the reformers. The one sector in which significant advances have been made is in the area of freedom of expression. The fact that some young Iranians are now showing the temerity to question the religiosity of the conservatives provides one benchmark. Another was provided by a newspaper called *Neshat* which challenged two very important tenets of the post-revolutionary scheme.

In articles published in September, *Neshat* dared to challenge the omnipotence of the Wali Faqih. It also simultaneously questioned the validity of the law of retribution (the provision in Islamic criminal jurisprudence that the victims of an aggression, and not the state, are the ones who can demand retribution on or recompense from the aggressor). *Neshat*, like a slew of other pro-reform newspapers, was shut down by the conservative-dominated courts which supervise press matters. But its publishers have challenged the court ruling. Pro-reform newspapers shut down earlier have been very prompt in re-launching their publications under new names, thus demonstrating that they are deriving so much support that they are not easily deterred by the conservatives. The uproar over the satirical play was closely followed by the closure of a publishing house, Narenj, which printed a book which Shia Muslims consider blasphemous to Shia Islam. According to an official at the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry, the book *Divaneh-ye-Dovvom* (The Second Lunatic), written in a "cryptic style", disparaged the Twelfth Imam, whose arrival is awaited by Shias. The case was sent to a State Publications Board for a final review.

As can be seen from the episodes concerning blasphemy and the *Neshat*'s challenge, the courts have been the main bastions of the conservatives' fight-back.

One blow had been struck for judicial reform early in Khatami s term when the government ensured that the trial of the former Teheran Mayor Gholamhussein Karbaschi was televised in its entirety At least for that one stand-out case, the government ensured transparency in judicial proceedings In September, Khatami took another major step towards judicial reform when he appointed a moderate to head the judiciary following the retirement of a conservative incumbent

The new head of the judiciary was hardly able to get his act together when a conservative judge in the lower echelons threw down the gauntlet by proclaiming that he had sentenced to death four persons who were said to have been active in the student riots of July No one knew when these four had been arraigned, tried or sentenced and there are reports that the new head of the judiciary, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, had no knowledge of the trial There have been no further developments on this issue after the initial pronouncement, but it could provide the next arena for combat between the conservatives and reformers

While judicial reforms are still in an early stage, Khatami and his associates have made progress in their efforts to introduce party-based politics into the Iranian system Several parties have been registered under a months-old law and even Khamenei has acknowledged the existence of parties and the validity of the system when he referred to the existence of "factions" in his address at the centenary celebrations The real test of whether a party-based political system has begun to take root in Iran will come in the parliamentary elections to be held in February next year

Students and youth are already determined to agitate in favour of the norms they prefer to live by The student riots in July in protest against the closure of a liberal newspaper was one instance An earlier one was the manner in which thousands of Iranian youth, including many young women, came out to greet the Iranian football team members when they returned after the last World Cup in which they beat the U.S team. The wild welcome given to the footballers was clearly in defiance of the conservatives.

So far under Khatami's dispensation the institutions of a civic society have slowly begun to emerge. If and when they begin to push back the bounds of conservative restraint they would begin a new chapter in the politics of the Muslim world. ■

Towards democracy

Indonesia moves forward to a long-awaited presidential election.

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Singapore

BY design or otherwise, the latest visit to Jakarta by United States Defence Secretary William Cohen set the juggernaut of democratic hopes and aspirations moving again in Indonesia By early October, Indonesia's new People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) had advanced the date of the country's presidential election – the long-awaited defining event in the country's search for a new identity as a resurgent democracy The MPR is the electoral college that chooses the country's highest constitutional office in a system of non-Gaullist executive presidency with Indonesian characteristics

In the run-up to the October 20 presidential election, leaders have begun to lobby for the support of the 700 members of the MPR The presidential aspirants were quick to acknowledge the significance of the election of Amien Rais, an Islamist leader with a modernist view about religion in politics, as the MPR's presiding officer after a secret ballot on the night of October 3. The message was clear· the country, which is within striking distance of becoming the world's third largest democracy after India and the U S , cannot do without "political Islam".

In practical terms, the election of Amien Rais as Speaker or Chairman of the MPR could boost the presidential hopes of his ally, Abdurrahman Wahid, whose political dynamism has to be seen to be believed, especially in the light of the fact that he suffers from vision impairment brought on by a stroke As head of the Nahdlatul Ulema, an Islamist organisation which wields considerable influence both within and without the political arena, Wahid said that he would be willing to stake his claim to the presidential office in the event of dissension, within the pro-democracy camp over the candidature of Megawati Sukarnoputri (It is to be noted that Wahid made his



BULLIT MARQUEZ/AP

President B.J. Habibie (right) with Gen. Wiranto, chief of the armed forces, at a ceremony on October 5 to celebrate the 54th anniversary of the armed forces.

Little else but hope



DAVID GUTTENFELDER/AP

Residents of Dili in East Timor line up before a food distribution centre.

SETH MYDANS

TWO weeks after the arrival of the first of the 7,500 international peacekeeping troops, the burning, looting and killing have tapered off around East Timor. But the toll of the wave of terror is still unclear. The United Nations is moving rapidly to open an investigation into the atrocities committed, but although bodies are beginning to be discovered in small, scattered groups, the extent of the killings is still not known. For many people here, the time for tears has arrived as the urgency of terror and hunger recedes and the pain emerges. Most of them do not have homes. Many of the people here do not know the fate of family members who were herded across the border into West Timor, which is still under Indonesia's control.

"My position as a professional investigator is that we should deal with facts and that until we have facts to go on we should be very cautious in accepting unconfirmed reports," said Alan Castle, a top police official with the U.N. "We had reports of up to 70 bodies found in a well," he said. "I was there when the investigators went to look and I saw what they found, which was one corpse."

In their initial assessments, foreign aid officials are also finding little evidence of the starvation that had been feared, with as many as half of East Timor's population of 800,000 driven from their homes. "The surprising story for us is how healthy people are looking in Dili and Dare, a nearby hillside refuge," said Abby Spring, a spokeswoman for the World Food Programme. "The huge unknown for us is how bad things are for the people who are still in the mountains." Officials said that more than 6,000 tonnes of rice is available in Dili, with more arriving every day. Foreign relief agencies planned the first large-scale handout of rice in the first week of October to as many as 100,000 people in the city, even as relief convoys spread supplies further across the territory.

With the city coming back to life, refugees are returning from the hillsides to organised encampments or to the shells of their homes. As the first brief downpours of the rainy season begin, many people trudge through the streets carrying what is now one of the most urgent commodities: tin roofing material stripped from burned-out buildings. Although there is still virtually no commerce in Dili, men and women with brooms are sweeping debris from the burned-out central market. The air is still tinged with the smell of smoke, but now the smoke comes not from burning buildings, but from cooking fires and smouldering refuse as a difficult clean-up operation begins in a city where hundreds of buildings lie in ruins. The most notable of these ruined buildings is Belo's residence, where more than 1,000 people took refuge when the terror began. On September 6, armed men drove the refugees from the compound, sending most of them to West Timor.

There were other small signs of the reconstruction that must precede the creation of an independent East Timor. Over the blue ocean, transport helicopters ferried supplies from cargo ships. And along the seafront road, a convoy of new white vehicles drove past, filled with food and medicine. Inside the courtyard of Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, two ducks walked among the feet of worshipers, pecking at the stony ground for food. They were a reminder of the belligerent graffiti that is found on vandalised buildings, telling the East Timorese people that freedom will bring privation: "A free East Timor will eat stones." It is a slogan one man in Dili remembered hearing soldiers shout from the back of a truck as they withdrew from the territory. ■

New York Times Service

plans abundantly clear even before Amien Rais' success on the floor of the MPR.) No less significant was Wahid's statement – made shortly before the election to the chairmanship of the MPR was held – that the doctors treating him had indicated that he would soon make a total recovery and would be able to take part actively in politics. In his view, there is an urgent need to galvanise pro-democracy sentiments and keep out the protagonists of the Suharto era despite their attempts to mould themselves according to the changing political situation – a reference to the ruling Golkar Party and its presidential nominee B.J. Habibie, the incumbent head of state.

At another level, Megawati, as leader of the party that secured the largest percentage of votes in the June 7 parliamentary elections, made no attempt to conceal her claim to the presidency. Her Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) did not secure the kind of parliamentary majority that would have made her an automatic choice for the post.

In spite of some reforms instituted in the Indonesian constitutional system, the electoral college for the presidency consists of nominated members of the MPR – who represent special interests, the military's non-elective mandarins, regional power-brokers, and so on – besides the newly elected members of Parliament, known as the House of Representatives or DPR. This political ground reality is *ipso facto* a catalyst to gamesmanship. Not surprisingly, Megawati had discovered by early October that her presidential dream was under threat, given her relative inexperience in politics and tendency to let events unfold instead of trying to shape them.

For his part, Gen. Wiranto, Indonesia's military chief, has been watching the political scene closely, aided in some ways by his image as a democracy-friendly soldier, especially since the fall of Gen. Suharto from power in May 1998. As a result, by the time the new MPR began its countdown to the presidential election, it became clear that the political battlelines for the contest could in some ways be determined by him. After all, the decisive role played by Wiranto in the high drama that led to Suharto's exit from power is already part of Indonesia's political folklore.

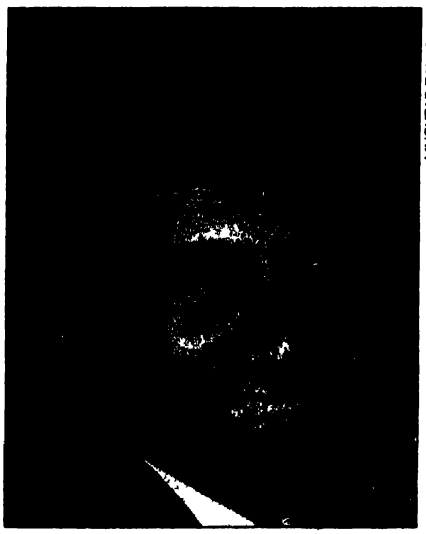
It was in this milieu that Habibie, who succeeded Suharto with Wiranto's support, remained firm in his resolve to contest the presidential polls despite the fact that doubts were raised within his own party about whether he would, under such volatile circumstances, be suitable for the post.



CHARLES DHARAPAK/AP

Megawati Sukarnoputri, leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle.

The political cross-currents were further complicated by the failure of some sections of the Golkar Party and supporters of Megawati to strike an alliance during the election of the Speaker and to split the Islamist political space represented by the "central axis" of Amien Rais and Wahid.



MUCHTAR ZAKARIA/AP

Amien Rais, the newly elected Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly.

At the start of the presidential race, while no one ruled out the eventual emergence of Wiranto as a last-minute consensus candidate, Habibie had other plans. He portrayed himself as a leader who took all the steps required to revive democracy. However, more controversial than this claim was his presidential act of granting United Nations-sponsored self-determination to the people of East Timor (see box).

When the U.N.-mandated and Australia-led international force for East Timor, INTERFET, consolidated its security grip over that territory by early October after the Indonesian military made a parallel exit from there (except for a token presence, for technical reasons), many Indonesians viewed this as a denouement of Habibie's misconstrued democratic impulse. They protested against Australia's realpolitik U-turn in derecognising Jakarta's mid-1970s annexation of East Timor and in ignoring Indonesian sensitivity by making haste to lead the INTERFET.

It was under these circumstances that William Cohen visited Jakarta on September 30 after having more or less endorsed the "Howard Doctrine", the latest affirmation by Australian Prime Minister John Howard that Canberra would henceforth play the role of a "deputy" to the U.S. military in the southern part of the Asia-Pacific region.

In an attempt to overcome the Indonesians' anger over the "Howard Doctrine", Cohen told the country's military and civilian leaders that their political and economic future would be determined by the U.S.-articulated international perception of official Jakarta's responses to East Timor's transition to an independent state. Cohen spoke of "economic consequences" and "diplomatic isolation" in the event of any mess-up in East Timor. At the recent Auckland summit of the forum for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), U.S. President Bill Clinton spoke about the equal importance of East Timor's transition to independence and Indonesia's own much larger march towards democracy. This was the same point that Cohen stressed on. It is anybody's guess whether the attempts to fine-tune Indonesia's march towards democracy can be linked to Cohen's Jakarta visit. When he was asked about this during a visit to Singapore on October 2, Cohen avoided taking credit for the developments but stressed the merits of the message he had delivered. ■

Air strikes against Chechnya

Russia resorts to air strikes at military and economic targets of importance to the Islamic militias in Chechnya and plans to divide the republic and set up a security zone around the areas controlled by the militants.

JOHN CHERIAN

RUSSIAN jets pounded targets in the breakaway republic of Chechnya incessantly in the last week of September, and it was clear that Moscow wanted to deal firmly with the government in Grozny and with the Chechen warlords running rampant in the northern Caucasus The latest round of the conflict started with an attempt by some Islamist militias based in Chechnya to move into neighbouring Dagestan and spread the message of secession After the militias were repulsed from Dagestan by Russian forces, a series of explosions rocked Moscow and other Russian cities and claimed the lives of more than 300 civilians Moscow was quick to blame the bombings on the militants

The refusal of the Chechen Government to condemn the Islamists for the bombings and the attempt to destabilise Dagestan gave Moscow an additional reason to rectify the constitutional aberration of an "independent" Chechnya within the Russian Federation Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov refused to condole with the families of the victims of bombings Maskhadov is considered a moderate in the Chechen context, and his refusal to condemn the activities of the militias is dictated by political exigencies. He has only about 6,000 armed presidential guards under his command while militant leaders such as Shamil Basayev and Khattab together have around 15,000 hardcore fighters Moscow is keeping its lines of communication with Maskhadov open As of now, he is the only Chechen leader of stature Moscow can do business with

After the air strikes against targets of military and strategic importance to the militants, Moscow is preparing to send ground troops into the breakaway republic Some Russian troops have already entered Chechen territory and captured villages about 15 km inside the border. But the emphasis is on air strikes: Russian authorities claim that they are following the 'Kosovo scenario", using high-precision weapons to minimise civilian casualties The Chechen Government has claimed that more than 100 civilians have been killed Russian jets are targeting industrial complexes, especially those in the petroleum sector, which generates revenue for the Chechen Republic

According to Russian media reports, the air strikes have virtually destroyed the oil industry The Russian authorities say that the militants use revenues from the petroleum industry to purchase weapons and to maintain foreign mercenaries Having learnt its lessons during the full-scale war with the separatist forces between 1994 and 1996, in which an estimated 80,000 people died, the Russian Government now appears to be going in for a limited war with specific objectives



STR/AP

Atop an armoured personnel carrier, Russian soldiers heading for the Chechen border.

General Anatoli Sitnov said recently that the Army had enough resources for a ground operation. A full-scale attack on Grozny is unlikely. Instead, Russia will in all likelihood partition Chechnya. the Russian plan is to occupy initially the flat areas of Chechnya, north of the Terek river

Russian military officials believe that victory was snatched from them in 1996. According to some of those who participated in the Chechen war, every time the Army was on the verge of establishing full control over the region, orders came from above either to withdraw or to stop fighting. Influential sections of the Army are once again for a military solution but the political leadership seems to be veering towards the idea of dividing Chechnya and forming a *cordon sanitaire* around the area that is under the control of the separatists. Russian public opinion is solidly behind the government's tough military stance. The average Russian has supported the air strikes, for only Chechens are getting killed. An invasion, on the other hand, would result in the deaths of Russian soldiers too. One reason why Russia withdrew from Chechnya in 1996 was the high rate of death of conscripts, who were unprepared for the kind of vicious warfare resorted to by the militias.



ALEXEI KONDRASHKIN/ AP

Refugees flee Chechnya as air strikes intensify.

Another sign that Russia meant business this time was the announcement in early October that Moscow no longer adhered to the Khasavyurt peace agreement of 1996. The Russian Government has instead indicated that it will soon set up north of the Terek a Chechen government comprising pro-Moscow deputies who were elected to the Chechen Parliament in February 1996. Russian Premier Vladimir Putin said recently that he wished to discuss the future of Chechnya directly with the representatives of the Chechen people.

MEANWHILE, Chechnya is all set for another war. The government has mobilised 30,000 reservists to defend the borders. The Russian Government and media allege that the Chechen government is recruiting mercenaries from Afghanistan and Iran. Shamil Basayev announced in Grozny recently that he was forming a "kamikaze" unit of 400 to 500 men "capable of fulfilling any, even the most complicated, task". For good measure, Russia has dragged the name of Osama bin Laden into the conflict. It suits the authorities to paint their military offensive as a war against Islamic militants. The United States has, however, indicated to Moscow that it is against the use of excessive force against Chechnya.

In their earlier fight for secession, the Chechens were helped by the U.S' allies, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The Islamists, like their counterparts in Afghanistan, owe a lot to the West. But the Chechens' military success in the mid-1990s was to a great extent facilitated by the Russians themselves. The Chechens launched their secessionist bid with the aid of arms left behind by the Russian federal troops who fled from the territory in June 1992. According to the Russian newspaper *Trud* the Russian Army had left behind 42 tanks, 38 infantry vehicles, 14 armoured personnel carriers and as many armoured vehicles of the landing troops, 31,738 assault rifles, 12,813 handguns, 1,021 grenade launchers, several dozen aircraft, and other military hardware.

The Russian media have reported that 50,000 Russian troops are already massed on the borders. However, Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev has said that there are several options and that the final choice will depend on the prevailing situation. "The aim of the ground operation," the Minister said, "is to destroy the bandits and set up a security zone of adequate depth around Chechnya." Defence analysts point out that it will be difficult to maintain 50,000 troops in full fighting order at the border for long. They argue that a full-scale offensive would be less expensive.

The conflict in the northern Caucasus is raising the political temperature in Russia. The maverick politician and former General, Alexander Lebed, has alleged that the explosions in Moscow were masterminded by certain elements in the Kremlin in order to torpedo the coming elections. Lebed, who was responsible for the 1996 peace pact, said that the bombs were planted by bandits and mercenaries (who have no nationality) on orders from Moscow's "federal structures".

Former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, the most popular politician in Russia today, has criticised the offensive. The leader of the Fatherland-All Russian bloc said that such an operation could escalate into a full-scale war. "The Chechnya question is to a large degree a Russian question because the arms which are being used by the fighters and the terrorists are solely Russian weapons," he said.

By early October, 88,000 refugees from Chechnya had fled to Ingushetia to escape the bombing. The exodus is bound to increase as the air raids continue and ground fighting escalates across the borders. ■

A nuclear accident in Japan

A Japanese uranium-reprocessing plant spews radiation after a serious accident.

HOWARD W. FRENCH
JOHN NOBLE WILFORD
MATTHEW L. WALD

UNDER pressure from the management, workers at the nuclear plant in Tokaimura, 140 km northwest of Tokyo, reportedly skipped critical safety steps in order to increase the production of uranium fuel and provoked in the process the worst accident in the country's history of atomic energy in Japan. The accident, which took place on September 30, critically injured three workers and exposed 52 others to radiation.

A report carried by the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* and attributed to police investigators contradicts assertions by officials of JCO Co., a subsidiary of the Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., and the operator of the plant that they had not encouraged production shortcuts. Initial reports appeared to blame negligence by the workers rather than a more systematic, company-driven violation of procedures. The police have indicated that they will pursue criminal charges against the plant's operators. The Chairman of the Nuclear Safety Commission, Kazuo Sato, announced on television that his agency would investigate whether there was "lax supervision by the central government."

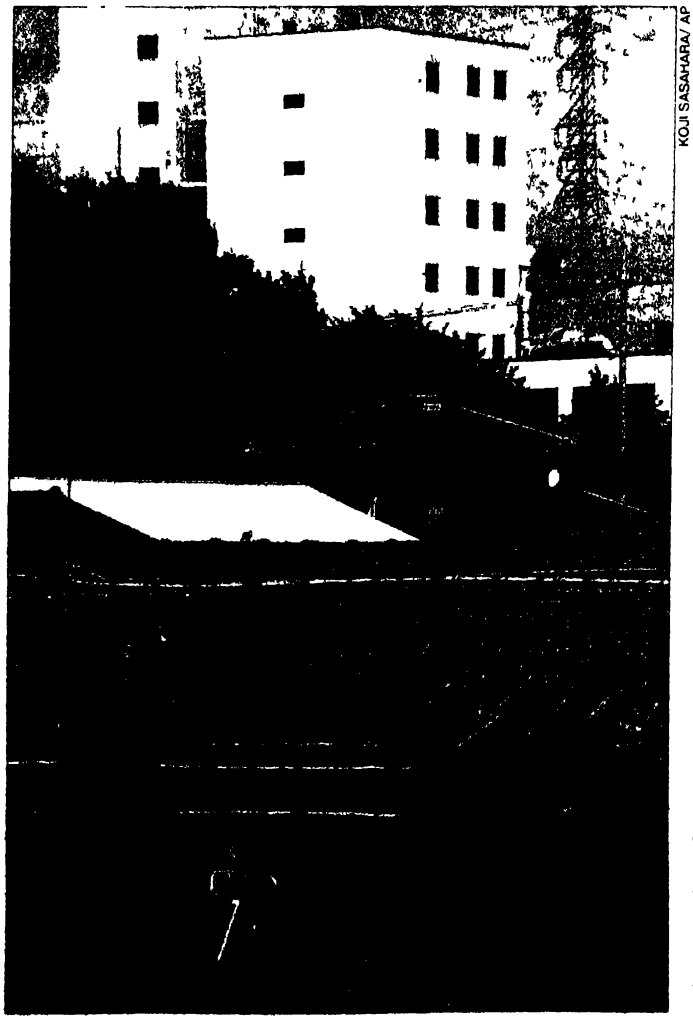
According to *Asahi Shimbun*, police investigators said that "there seemed to be a complication within the company that forced the employees to hasten the production of nuclear fuel." Under normal circumstances, the factory produces 0.77 tonnes of purified, highly enriched uranium trioxide powder a day.

If borne out, this report could add yet another devastating detail to a picture of a plant out of control. When the accident occurred, the workers were not only pouring uranium fuel from steel buckets with their hands rather than with measuring machines, but were using more than three times the appropriate concentration of the radioactive material.

The workers are also known to have poured more than 35 pounds (about 16 kg) of uranium fuel into a nitric acid solution, instead of 5.2 pounds, which is the norm. This excess quantity triggered a chain reaction involving the fission of nuclear materials. It was brought under control on October 1.

The newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* quoted plant officials as saying that the accident occurred after procedures had been ignored for the second consecutive day, suggesting a broader pattern of procedural infractions.

Sumitomo Metal's president was quoted by *Mainichi Shimbun*, another newspaper, as saying that they "never told JCO to increase fuel production." Similarly, JCO officials blamed the accident on "lack of sufficient expertise". They denied that workers were asked to employ shortcuts but admitted that recently the plant faced intense competition from foreign firms, notably from Siemens AG, to supply fuel to Japan's nuclear power plants.

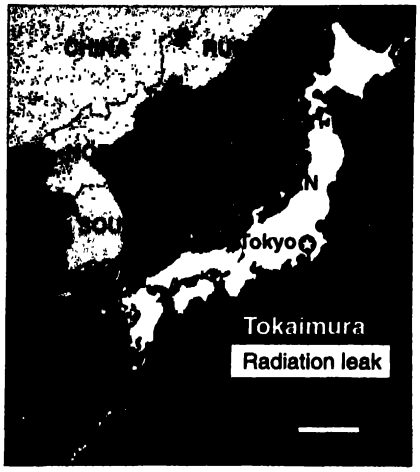


KOJI SASAHARA/ AP

The uranium processing plant at Tokaimura, four days after the accident.

AT the time of the accident, the plant was producing fuel for Japan's controversial Joyo experimental fast-breeder nuclear reactor. Despite accidents, technical setbacks and international expressions of concern about safety and nuclear proliferation, Japan has been developing fast-breeder technology for three decades. Fast-breeder reactors offer the promise of producing more plutonium than they consume, through processes that convert uranium fuel into fissionable plutonium.

Plutonium is the raw material used in most modern nuclear-explosive devices. Although Japan has legally forsworn nuclear weapons, its neighbours – many of which were victims of its aggressive military expansionism earlier in the century – have often expressed opposition to its handling of plutonium tech-





A worker of the nuclear plant being shifted to a hospital in Mito specialising in radiation sickness.

nology, which easily lends itself to weapons building.

There have been worries that such technology could be subject to terrorist attack or theft. An additional concern is that Japan's nuclear industry is dependent on long-range, lightly guarded shipments, mostly to and from Europe, of highly fissionable materials needed for its power industry.

But Japan, which is almost completely dependent on imported oil and uranium for its energy needs, has firmly stayed the course of fast-breeder reactor development. The accident will bring renewed pressure that the country reconsider its nuclear power strategy.

In the past, Japan has compounded nuclear accidents with slow and often misleading information. The confused emergency response has been matched by a political one, with rival agencies alternately seeking to dismiss concerns about the country's vast nuclear energy programme, or calling for a sweeping re-evaluation.

The chief of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency, Hirobumi Kawano, ruled out the idea that an uncontrolled reaction could occur at a nuclear plant in Japan and told reporters that he did not intend to instruct power companies to re-examine their safety measures, the news agency Kyodo reported.

A top official of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, however, said that the accident was serious enough to lead Japan to reconsider its nuclear power policy.

IT is too early to determine what exactly happened at the plant. Hans Meyer, a spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, said that the uranium involved was from ore and was being cleaned in a chemical process.

Some experts said that if, as reported, the tank was filled with uranium in the form of uranyl nitrate, this implied that the uranium came not from the ore but from uranium that was being reprocessed after a prior use.

According to several reports, the uranium that was being reprocessed had been enriched to 19 per cent, meaning that 19 per cent of the atoms were uranium 235, the form that splits readily.

A breeder reactor, a type intended to produce more fuel than it consumes, needs the richer form of uranium. But in most commercial reactors, uranium enrichment levels are 3 per cent to 5 per cent. The higher the enrichment, the less the uranium needed to form a critical mass, the minimum amount needed for a chain reaction.

Dr. Peter Parker, Professor at the Nuclear Structure Laboratory at Yale University, U.S., said that the workers had apparently been mixing too much uranium in a small vessel. "That made the density of the uranium so high that the neutrons didn't get absorbed by the other material around," he said. This led to an out-of-control reaction, according to him.

JAPAN operates about 51 nuclear power plants. Tokaimura, a town of about 33,000 residents, is home to more than a dozen nuclear-type plants. The Tokaimura plant, which was completed in 1973 and which began commercial operations nine years later, is the second Japanese uranium-reprocessing plant to suffer a serious accident. The town was the site of Japan's worst previous nuclear accident, which took place in 1997. In that incident, 37 workers were exposed to radiation after a fire in one of the plants was improperly extinguished it and caused a small explosion. That plant, of the state-run Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation, has been petitioning the government for permission to resume operations. Experts have speculated that as a result of the latest accident, the plant may never reopen.

Japan, which has no crude oil of its own, pushed the development of nuclear energy in the 1970s after a sharp rise in oil prices. The country is now dependent on nuclear power for about one-third of its electricity needs, one of the highest ratios anywhere in the world. The fuel generated at the JCO-operated plant is used in the nuclear reactors nearby.

This familiarity with nuclear power has not helped the country avoid accidents. In July, radiation estimated to be 11,500 times higher than normal levels leaked out of faulty pipes in a reactor in Tsuruga, about 320 km west of Tokyo. Following the accident, a reactor owned by the Japan Atomic Power Company was forced to shut down; it had lost 51 tonnes of its radioactive coolant. The Tsuruga plant remains closed for repairs. ■

New York Times Service

A grand festival in China

Celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China get under way in China.

SETH FAISON
ERIK ECKHOLM

CHINA celebrated the 50th anniversary of Communist rule on October 1 with a nationwide festival of patriotic pride that presented a seamless-looking display of political unity and popular happiness.

With a grand parade rolling into central Beijing, China's leaders put together an event intended to project a jubilant manifestation of national strength and harmony. The parade was cheered on by hundreds of thousands of onlookers.

The celebration was so huge – with 500,000 participants – and was perceived by the authorities as so critically important that it became a significant political event in itself. President Jiang Zemin presided over the festivities, which might as well have been called "Jiang's Show." After months of groundwork, the parade crowned Jiang's efforts to lift himself to the same historical plane as China's two great modern leaders, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.





ZHAO JIANWEI / XINHUA

The grand parade at Tiananmen Square on October 1; (below) President Jiang Zemin (second right) and other top leaders, (from left) Vice-President Hu Jintao, Premier Zhu Rongji and National People's Congress Chairman Li Peng, review the parade.

Among the 90 floats in the parade – a remarkable collection highlighting China's achievements – were separate portraits of Mao, Deng and Jiang, the first time the current leader has been placed on a par with his predecessors in such a public way.

Jiang stood alone in an open-backed limousine that reviewed a miles-long line of military hardware. "Comrades, hello!" Jiang yelled to the assembled troops, who included camouflage-green-clad marines, blue-suited air force officers and militia women in red mini-skirted uniforms. "You are working hard!" Jiang said.

On display at the parade were mobile short- and medium-range ballistic missiles that are nearly impossible to counter effectively. The parade also featured the recently tested DF-31 intercontinental ballistic missile, which is capable of reaching parts of the United States. Unlike China's existing, vulnerable nuclear forces, this one can be moved about, lending it far greater protection from a surprise attack.

"The military parade is intended to show confidence and strength, especially domestically," said Zhang Yunding, director of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. "It's to give the people a sense that we have a new China, to let people feel proud of that."

Jonathan Pollack, a China specialist at the Rand Corporation in California, said: "The leadership wants to signal that it's not standing still and that it can display this prowess – at least as much to its own citizens as to the world at large."

As he stepped to the rostrum at Tiananmen, Jiang was clearly meant to appear firmly in charge. Alone among the top leaders, Jiang wore a Mao suit.

October 1 will long be remembered in China for the day 50 years ago when Mao stood atop Tiananmen – the imperial Gate of Heavenly Peace – and proclaimed that the Chinese people had finally stood up, after decades of civil war and foreign invasion. The previous major October 1 celebration had been staged on the 35th anniversary, in 1984, to celebrate Deng's rule and his programme for economic growth; October 1 was clearly intended to mark Jiang's turn in the top array.

"After 50 years of trials and tribulations, all the people of the country must unite even more tightly around the Party centre with Jiang Zemin as its core," said the Beijing *Youth Daily*.

In China's media, the 50th anniversary has been an occasion to highlight the positive aspects. "The course of 50 years of struggle tells us that only socialism can save China," said the Communist Party newspaper *People's Daily* in an editorial. ■

New York Times Service

In cold blood

After 50 years, the truth about a massacre committed by U.S. troops in Korea seeps out.

CALVIN SIMS

FOR decades, Jeon Eun-yong tried, with no success, to convince the United States and South Korean governments that U.S. soldiers had fired at his wife, young children and hundreds of other civilians in 1950 during the early days of the Korean War.

So when word broke in Seoul on October 1 that in an Associated Press article published that week former U.S. soldiers spoke about the killings, neither his arthritis nor the heavy rains could keep Jeon, a 77-year-old retiree, from attending a demonstration in front of the U.S. Army base at Yongsan, Korea.

"You can't begin to imagine the pain and anger I have felt all these years," Jeon said, addressing a cheering crowd of about 50 protesters who chanted anti-American slogans and carried placards calling for justice.

"Now that the facts have been established, I want an apology," Jeon said. "If America is to live up to its role as leading nation of the world, it must uphold the human rights of the survivors of the massacre as well as the deceased."

Although small in number, the protesters expressed the sentiments of many South Koreans, who sharply criticised the U.S. for long ignoring the claims of massacre survivors and called on their own government to conduct an independent investigation.

The Pentagon announced that it would undertake a new and thorough inquiry into reports that U.S. soldiers killed hundreds of refugees under a bridge near No Gun Ri in South Korea at the start of the war. That new investigation was prompted by the Associated Press article, in which some of the U.S. soldiers at No Gun Ri said they had been ordered to fire on the refugees because their commanders believed that North Korean troops, disguised as peasants, had infiltrated a refugee column and were shooting at the Americans.

Jeon, who became separated from his family as they fled the war's early fighting, said that his son and daughter, aged five and two, were killed by U.S. gunfire as they took cover with his wife under the bridge at No Gun Ri. Although his wife, Park Sun-yong, survived the attack, she was critically wounded. She was not at the protest but said from her home: "Now, some of the burden from 50 years of rage and sadness seems to be easing. Now I can die in peace. You see, my children's lives were taken away so unjustly. They died such vicious deaths – their bodies were ripped apart right in front of my eyes. The U.S. Secretary of Defence can conduct all the investigations he wants to, but he'll find that our memories of the event are still the same."

Park Sun-yong, now 73, said that she harbours no bitterness toward the U.S., noting that after the attack a U.S. medic discovered her bleeding and unconscious and saved her life.

The Rev. Moon Bae-gol, director of a group, the Committee to Stop Crime by the United States Military, called on the U.S. to prosecute the soldiers who took part in the massacre and to compensate the relatives of those who perished. He demanded that the South Korean government and Parliament form a special commission to investigate the incident. Sohn Woo-hyun, a Korean government spokesman, said that the government is currently gathering evidence on the attack.

The protesters at the military base said that violence by U.S. soldiers in South Korea is not just a thing of the past but continues today. They said dozens of crimes, including murder, theft and assaults by U.S. soldiers, had gone unpunished in recent years. There are more than 37,000 U.S. troops based in South Korea. On a wall just outside the gate of the Yongsan Army Base, the protesters hung graphic posters of battered South Koreans that they said were victims of violent crimes by U.S. military personnel.

An Army base official claimed that the incidence of crimes committed by U.S. military personnel in Korea was no higher than in society at large. The official said that the protesters had held a weekly rally in front of the base for many years and that their claims of widespread military violence by U.S. soldiers in Korea were exaggerated. ■

New York Times Service



AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

Relatives of victims gather under the railway bridge near Yongdong where American troops opened fire on South Korean refugees in late July 1950.

Tasks of transformation

The centrality of race in the South African system and society remains even under democratic rule, and a real change on this front will evidently take time.

M.S. PRABHAKARA
in Cape Town

ANY political transition entails both continuity and change. This is so of transitions of the most uncompromisingly revolutionary kind as of those marked by negotiations and deals – not to speak of long-anticipated transitions such as the one from President Nelson Mandela to President Thabo Mbeki in South Africa.

The completion of a hundred days of the Thabo Mbeki presidency has provided the occasion for many analyses, each trying to discover and delineate the points of departure from the policies laid down in the first five years of democratic government in the country. As always, implicit in such analyses is the conviction that the democratic credentials of the new President, who continues to be portrayed in the liberal English language print media as a secretive and vengeful Africanist, in sharp contrast to the supposedly benevolent Mandela, are suspect. In this perspective, the jury is still out on Thabo Mbeki. This, despite the fact that throughout the Mandela presidency, Thabo Mbeki was closely involved in every aspect of the crafting and implementation of the policies of the government and of the African National Congress (ANC).

The fundamental tasks facing the new government remain substantially the same as faced by the first democratic government; and arise out of the same history that the people of South Africa have inherited. In the context of the immediate and urgent needs of the people, these are: reduction in what is oddly described as 'unacceptable levels of crime' – as if there are or ought to be 'acceptable levels of crime', and the related problem of corruption; economic growth and a more equitable distribution of the results thereof; creation of jobs to mitigate the problem of around 30 per cent unemployment, also causally related to the problem of crime; and service delivery – drinking water, electricity, housing, education, primary healthcare, social services. At a more fundamental level, and less easy to measure either in terms of its nature and magnitude or its implementation is the transformation, meaning the genuine deracialisation of South African society, going beyond the legal dismantling of apartheid laws structures; and the entrenchment of a democratic culture.



PETER DEJONG AP

President Thabo Mbeki with Nelson Mandela in June 1999. The fundamental tasks ahead of the Mbeki Government remain substantially the same as were faced by the Mandela administration.

While all these are inter-linked, the most serious task is the control of crime. Even for a society and a state long inured to cruelties and horrors, the recent incident in Bez Valley in Johannesburg where a young woman was gang-raped over two days and, further, had her face disfigured by hot iron, presents moral and administrative challenges with which it appears simply unable to cope. Crime, the one activity that has been totally deracialised, touches all, even the seemingly highly-placed and the powerful. Two Members of Parliament became victims recently. In the first case, the MP was shot in an apparent 'car-jacking' attempt. But he foiled the attempt by shooting back. (It is not uncommon for people to carry a personal weapon.) In the second incident, another MP was a victim of car-jacking. Rape and murder, molestation of children, murders on farms, taxi wars, bank heists, unless involving high-profile victims or very large sums and numbers of victims, have long ceased to be news. White-collar and commercial crime involving millions of rands, too, has ceased to be news.

None of this is new. Nor is the problem in any way related to the onset of the democratic dispensation. However, of late there is a growing perception that the democratic and constitutional order is 'soft on crime'; and that by favouring the criminals it is victimising the victims of crime further. While this perception is widespread among the people, not all of them diehard supporters of the old order, there are other nuances suggesting that some in authority too may share such perceptions.

Indeed, the government appears to have been caught in its own rhetoric of taking the hardest line on crime The new Minister for Safety and Security, admiringly nicknamed by those seeking instant solutions as 'Fix-it' Steve Tshwete, has adopted a no-nonsense, hands-on' approach (the description is borrowed from media coverage of the Minister's initiatives) and take the war to the criminals While such determination is welcome, rather more problematic is the apparent attempt to see links between crime and vagrancy, or crime and street trading, crime and shacks and other necessarily unattractive features of urban life, reinforcing the worst middle class prejudices

One such initiative that is fore doomed to fizzle out is the ongoing 'clean-up' of the pavements of Johannesburg that are crowded by hawkers and vendors, to reclaim them for the use of pedestrians Such exercises are planned for other cities as well There have been such initiatives earlier, with squatters evicted from lands they had illegally occupied protesting with futile rage or mutely watching the destruction of their hovels It is entirely possible that behind such squatters and street traders are organised rackets controlled by criminals But no one seems to consider whether such zealous initiatives which necessarily involve the destruction of the livelihood of many poor people, forcing them to take to crime and add to the already large number of criminals, are a realistic option to solve the very real problem of urban decay, especially in the city centres No one seems even to consider the factors and the motives that initially led to the abandonment of the city centre by business and industry

The approach is integrally related to the broader perspective on economic growth, employment and distribution adopted in mid-1996 – the so-called Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) Although the bitter polemics surrounding Gear between the ANC and its allies in the tripartite alliance, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Cosatu, during the last two years, which were openly manifest both at the ANC's Mafikeng Conference in December 1997 and the SACP's Congress in Johannesburg in June 1998, appear to be now muted, differences on micro-economic policy persist

The recent strike action by 12 public sector unions, not all of them affiliated to Cosatu, protesting against the government's decision to break off negotiations on the annual demand for inflation-linked wage increases, is only one manifestation of such differences The unions demanded an average increase of 7 3 per cent (with an additional one per cent for teachers) while the government would not resile from its offer of a 6 3 per cent increase

However, the dispute goes beyond a difference over a one per cent gap The government simply could not afford to appear to be climbing down to the unions demands because of its conviction that only such a hardline attitude towards the unions would reassure the foreign investors' – that amorphous and indefinable community which, despite all evidence to the contrary, is presumed to be anxious to bring in large investments into the country

Underlying this approach is the conviction that only large foreign investments can ensure Growth, which in turn would generate Employment, which in turn would lead to Redistribution – together forming that near divine triumvirate of the policy anagramatised as Gear This is a perspective with which the unions profoundly disagree both out of political conviction and as a matter of experience of what such a perspective has done to the economies of other countries that have followed such prescriptions

Given its near-total commitment to the orthodoxy of the market, the progressive reduction of fiscal deficit and to the perfectly-balanced budget, it is unlikely that pressures from its allies in the tripartite alliance will lead to any basic changes in this commitment, though Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi has said that Cosatu would throw its weight behind the public sector unions when they launch their strike action in November Equally, given the logic of the tripartite alliance and the fact that its historic necessity is recognised on all sides, these confrontations, howsoever bitter, are unlikely to lead to the break-up of the alliance For the government's macro-economic policy is contested not merely by the Communists and the unions, it is an area of contestation within the ANC as well.

Above all is the complex task of transformation Superficially one sees evidence of transformation all around. Leaving aside Parliament which since it became genuinely representative reflects the ethnic and racial demography of the country, blacks are prominently present in many other structures and institutions, though some sectors such as banking,

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
in Thiruvananthapuram

SEATED under a life-size painting of Mahatma Gandhi in the Durbar Hall of the State Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, Winnie Madikizela Mandela looked very much the survivor that she is today in her own country.

"We know him as a man wearing the English gown. You remember him in the image of a frail old man wearing a loincloth and holding a walking stick. He is ours, as much as he is yours," the unlikely guest in Kerala during this year's Gandhi Jayanti celebrations, was reminding Indians of Mahatma Gandhi.

The setting seemed tailor-made for the South African MP and president of the Women's League of the African National Congress (ANCWL), whose bold and vitriolic leadership had triumphed over years of political and racial harassment, controversy and personal pain to make her a symbol in her own right in the new South Africa.

"South Africa is as much our homeland as it is yours. But there is very few of you there," she said, speaking at a reception hosted by Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar and his Cabinet colleagues and senior State officials at the Secretariat.

In many ways, Winnie Mandela's comments during her three-day visit to Kerala last fortnight, her first to India, to inaugurate the Millennium Festival (a four-month educational and cultural programme organised by the Kerala Children's Film Society), were reflections on the role she played in defiance of the apartheid regime, her fall from the heights of popularity to controversy, censure and criticism, and an indication of the role that she was possibly evolving for herself in the new South Africa, after her divorce from Nelson Mandela.

Winnie Mandela, who was on one occasion at the centre of a virulent controversy over a speech she made supporting "necklacing" (burning suspected government collaborators to death by putting a blazing tyre around their neck) and arguably the most powerful and poignant voice against apartheid during the worst years of the racist regime, said she had no regrets about the violent course the freedom struggle had to take in her country. The South African [illegible]

From South Africa, with feeling

and had great respect for Gandhian principles. But the racist government had tried to deal with it with an iron hand. That was why the country's path to freedom was one of pain and violence. The ANC resorted to violence because peaceful means had taken it nowhere. Violence was the only language that the enemy understood, she said.

Speaking at the local Press Club, she said that South Africa was today reeling under the after-effects of apartheid, which had devastated the economy. "Apartheid was a very expensive system to maintain with its need for separate institutions, schools for example. The new government inherited a legacy of extreme poverty and unemployment. The crisis in the gold market also affected South Africa."

While seemingly conceding that she was not in the political mainstream anymore, Winnie Mandela claimed that she continued to represent the voice of millions of black south Africans who are yet to benefit from the country's transition to democracy. According to her, revolutionary slogans alone could not help the new government bridge the gap between the poor and the rich. "One had to be realistic and practical. The ANC had promised a million homes in five years, free education and health care – but it could not deliver because of the state in which the country's economy found itself in." She said that South Africa was therefore inviting multinationals to improve its economy and to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, to create jobs and improve the lot of its people.

According to her, the legacy of apartheid was a big gulf between races of people in her country and there would be racial tension in South Africa for a long time to come. It was not easy for those who enjoyed privileges to relinquish them. But the government today does not discriminate between its people in terms of language, nationality or race. There is no such thing as South African Indians. There are only people of South Africa."

Winnie Mandela spoke with no bitterness but with deep emotion on some of the controversial chapters of her life – the kidnapping and murder of 14-year-old Stompie Seipei in the months before Nelson Mandela's release from prison, and her divorce from the President. On the killing of Stompie she said that the truth had been established that a police informer had killed the child in order to tarnish the image of the ANC. She said she was not aware of any other allegation against her other than that she had fought the apartheid regime physically and politically, and she was never going to apologise for that.

Winnie said in answer to a question that she would have very much liked to drop her surname 'Mandela', but that the people of South Africa would not let her to do that. "They want me to drop my maiden name instead," she said. She described her relations with Mandela as "good", even though the patriarchal society of which she was part of made women lose their individuality. Women were overshadowed by their husbands. "It occurred to me that I have to be an individual. The political worker that I am today is not Mandela's creation. I am a product of the struggle against apartheid and the ANC. I would love to be me." She said she still respected Mandela as a leader of the freedom struggle, and he was indeed the symbol of the South African struggle. But it was Mandela who should explain why their divorce had come about, she said.

Addressing separate audiences in Thiruvananthapuram, Winnie Mandela expressed her concern for issues of women's empowerment, crimes against women, unemployment, education, housing and the threat of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) as a consequence of the erosion of cultural values. She said that though she was impressed by Kerala's achievements in the matter of empowering women, it was clear that India had a long way to go in this field even after so many years of freedom. She said women all over the world faced similar problems.

At the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations organised by the KCFS and Asianet, she told a gathering of children: "Do you know what racism is? Do you know how lucky you are? You have education. You have freedom. In South Africa, the racist government had denied education to our children. We did not have even the right to sit near a white man. The colour of the skin decided which school you will study in. Children were separated from their mothers. Thousands of mothers were sent to jail. We were not even allowed to walk freely. Before 1990, I was not even allowed to leave the country. The racists had considered me as their enemy. South Africa's history was rewritten by children who had sacrificed their childhood."

She said she was fulfilling a cherished desire by visiting India for the first time. "When Nelson Mandela was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Award, Indira Gandhi had told my friend Fatima Meer how wonderful it would have been if I had come to India to receive the award. But I too was a prisoner then and could not get a passport," she said. ■



C RATHEESH KUMAR

Winnie Mandela in



OBED ZILWA / AP

Members of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, who were absorbed into the South African National Defence Force, carry the coffin of Lt. Sibusiso Madubela at the funeral in Umtata in Eastern Cape on October 2. The massacre at the Tempe military base near Bloemfontein has triggered a soul-wrenching debate over the racial transformation of the SANDF.

advertising, mining and higher research institutions remain racially exclusive, with an insignificant black presence. The financial papers keep mentioning the increasing share of black-run companies in the market capitalisation of shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni, is a veteran of the liberation struggle and a former Minister of Labour in the Mandela government. Society pages in the glossies now routinely carry pictures of black, upwardly mobile professionals of both sexes, glowing with good life and mingling with apparent confidence with whites of their ilk. Black economic empowerment is a shrine at which everyone wants to worship, or at least make a genuflectory gesture. Indeed, the rage now is African Renaissance, an idea and an objective enunciated by Thabo Mbeki and now taken over by others, some genuinely convinced and others simply on to a good thing.

AND yet, in the midst of this flowering of black self-confidence and pride and optimism, an incident like the one that occurred at the Tempe military base of 1 SA Battalion near Bloemfontein on September 16 jolts one to the harsh realities of South Africa. On that day, Lieutenant Sibusiso Madubela of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) shot dead seven of his brother officers and soldiers, as well as a civilian, all white, before he was himself shot dead. Sib[illegible] Madubela, needless to say, was black. He was part of the component of the Azanian People's Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, which had been absorbed into the SANDF. Similarly, components of the Umkhonto weSizwe, the ANC's armed wing, have been absorbed into the SANDF. This process was supposed to be part of the transformation of the old South African Defence Force into the SANDF.

The transformation of the defence forces, given their rigid and ordered culture of discipline and obedience to authority, not to speak of the *esprit de corps*, should have been a relatively smooth affair. The latest incident and, even more so, its aftermath, shows how difficult and problematic the task is. The soldiers he killed were given military burials unless the family preferred otherwise. Madubela, evidently, could not qualify for such honours even though the PAC and his relatives requested for one.

However, when the body was taken to Umtata in Eastern Cape for burial, about 40 fellow-soldiers from Tempe, all black, attended the funeral. They had been permitted to do so by the authorities on condition that they did not wear their uniforms and did not carry weapons. Nevertheless, a salvo of shots was fired there. Present at the funeral was the APLA's former chief of operations, Letlapa Mphahlele, who gave the order for a 'ten shot salute'. Many of those attending the funeral, going by the pictures that have appeared in the media, wore their old APLA uniforms. Madubela may have died in the course of committing a crime (which disentitled him to a military funeral); but for those who attended the funeral, he was 'a soldier, a hero', one who "offered his life in the struggle against the oppression of the black soldiers in 1 SA Battalion". One of the reports on the funeral quoted a relative of Madubela as saying that she wished he had killed more whites.

It would be facile to dismiss such openly expressed hatred and bitterness as an aberration, related to the peculiar history and political pathology of the PAC. Indeed, political and army leaders have underplayed the all-too-evident racial dimensions to the incident. While such caution is, perhaps necessary, the incident only underlines the complexity of the task of transformation. Rumours and inspired leaks that the officer who had overstayed his leave had 'gone berserk' because his salary had been withheld, cannot explain the enormity of the outrage. Only less inadequate are other factors recounted by friends and relatives – that Madubela had been frequently ill-treated and marginalised, that he constantly felt diminished as a person and as a soldier by the dominant culture of the armed forces.

What the incident does show is the centrality of race in South Africa. To argue that this should not be the case 'even five years after the democratic transformation' is to be blind to reality. As in India where decades after caste has been 'abolished' as a category in collection of census data, it remains a crucial social and economic indicator, so in South Africa where despite the dismantling of apartheid laws, race remains a crucial indicator.

What should really disturb those committed to democratic transformation is not the persistent reality of race as a factor affecting every area of economy and society, or an alleged 're-racialisation' of South African society, but that there seems to be a deliberate shift from the perspective of a genuinely non-racial democratic South Africa, a defining feature of the ideology of the liberation movement, to creeping multi-racialism. ■

The Silent Valley story

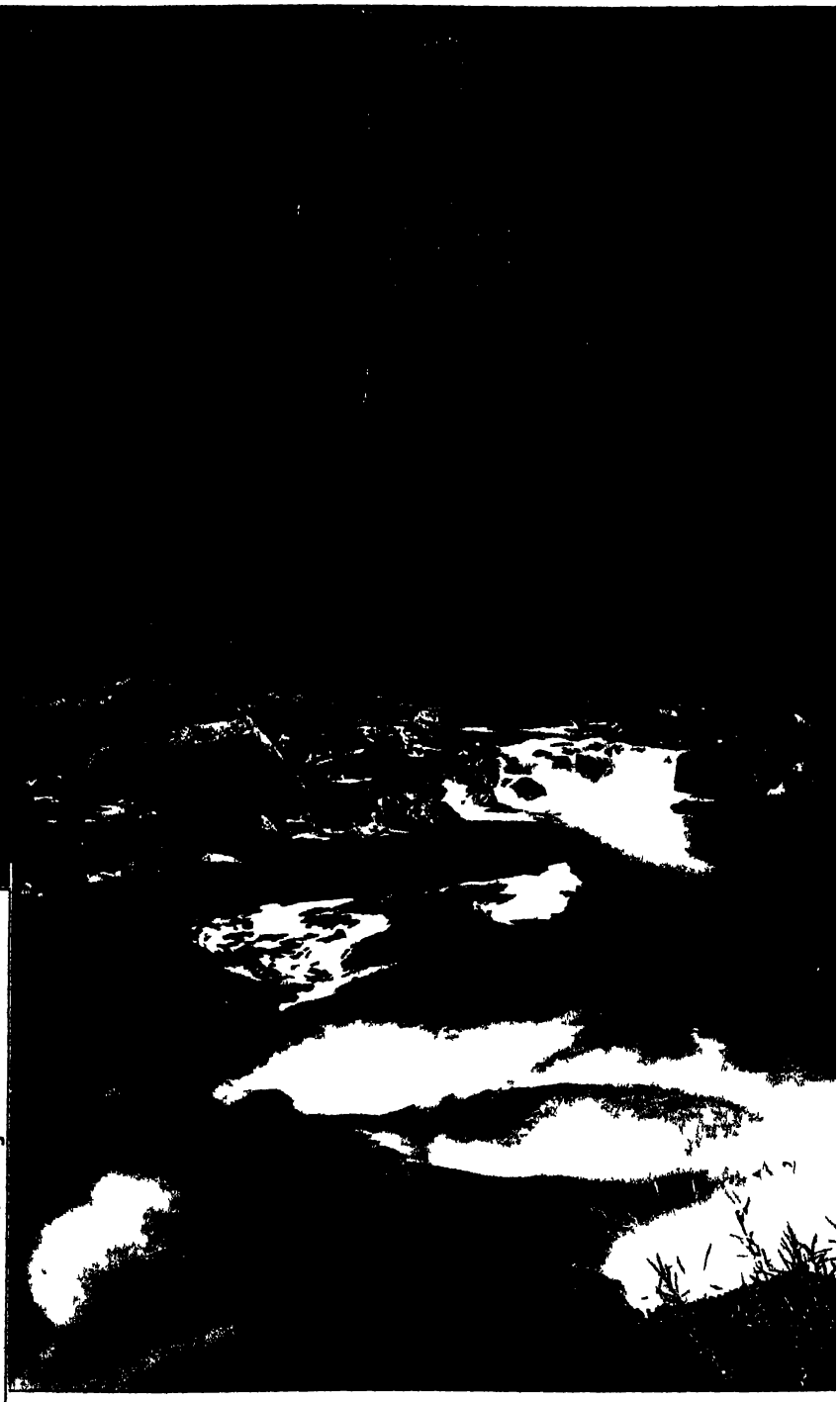
The Kerala Forest Department documents in a lavish commemorative volume the natural wonders of the Silent Valley and the campaigns that helped preserve them.

ANAND PARTHASARATHY

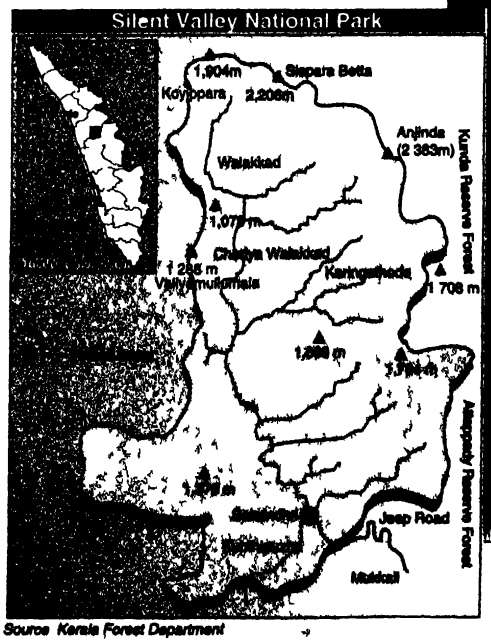
IT is agony, having to leave the warm comfort of the sleeping bag before daybreak and face the damp chill of the forest, but a sharp tap on my shoulder tells me this is no time to tarry Wild Life Warden K V Uthaman is already putting on his jungle boots His local "watcher" has located a nest of the Malabar whistling thrush a few hundred metres from where we are camping at Sairandhri, in the heart of the Silent Valley There is no time to lose

Ever since the science teacher in the upcountry school I attended described the bird, also known as the "idle schoolboy" because of its boyish whistling notes, and pointed out the colour plate in his tattered copy of Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds*, it was my ambition to hear the bird in its natural habitat, the rainforests of Malabar But I have been unlucky on every earlier visit Now, as we slide down the rain-washed rocks to the bed of the Kunthipuzha, the deafening sound of a monsoon waterfall drowns out all conversation The nest is in a crevice

SURESH ELAMON



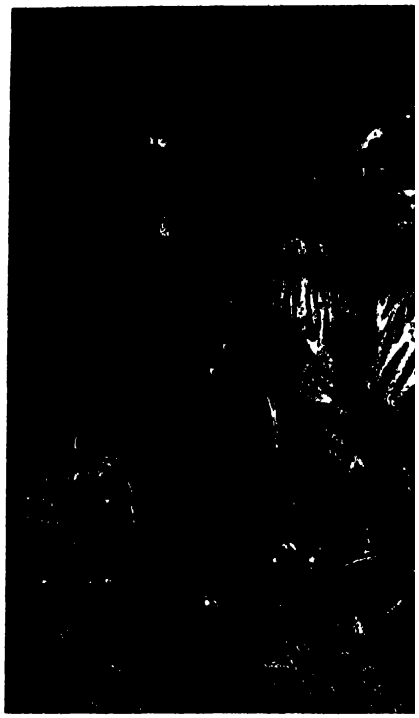
Not-so-silent flows the Kunthipuzha. The river forms the life-line of the Silent Valley, which was the focus of a major environmental campaign for almost a decade until it was notified a national park in 1985.



Source Kerala Forest Department



T.A. JAYAKUMAR



The sheer variety of mammals and arboreal animals present in the Silent Valley is impressive. A bull gaur; a tiger; the lion-tailed macaque; a tusker in musth; a jungle cat.

on a dizzy ledge, overhanging the river bank – and it will take a better climber than I to get anywhere near it.

But I don't have to. Day breaks as we wade along the river bank, and suddenly a loud musical whistling call, astonishingly human-like, pierces the air above the roar of the water. It is a delectable sound, worth waiting half a lifetime to hear, and I am lucky to catch it on my fifth trip in 10 years to the Silent Valley. To cap a glorious day, we see the male thrush, a flash of cobalt blue, as it whizzes out of the nest in quest of food.

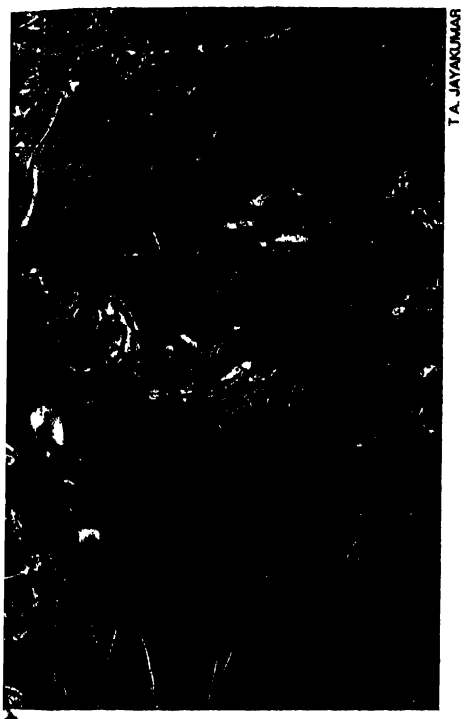
Visitors to the Silent Valley, which possibly represents India's most precious environmental heritage, usually go back with a fund of fond memories. "Snakewallah" Romulus Whitaker remembers a speckled cobra he was trying to photograph dart straight at him, only to slide between his legs into the bushes behind. Naturalists V.S. Vijayan and M. Balakrishnan, who carried out the first systematic scientific survey of the Silent Valley in 1977, said recently that they had less to fear from the forest's four-legged denizens – the wild boar, the leopard, the panther and so on – than from the employees of the Kerala State Electricity Board who are posted to deal with "intruders" when there was considerable conflict between the Board and environmentalists who opposed the proposal to build a hydroelectric project in the Silent Valley. They travelled by day wearing *mundu* and vest, and ate rice gruel, in order to merge with the local population. Suresh Elamon, the wildlife photographer, trekked for weeks on end on the fringes of the Valley, trying to catch a glimpse of the rarest of rare butterflies: the Travancore Evening Brown, which was last sighted in 1930 and is thought to be extinct. Elamon rediscovered the butterfly in 1993 in the Periyar Tiger Reserve. Does it occur in the Silent Valley? He is searching.



SURESH ELAMON

The saga of Silent Valley is made up of such individual quests, which have helped preserve this unique crucible of nature virtually intact. The annals of environment conservation efforts are replete with many a *cause celebre* – harrowing tales of destruction, sometimes prevented. Tehri, Narmada, Kaiga... we have no dearth of them. The truly impressive success story comes but rarely; the Silent Valley is one such.

PROMPTED by the widespread interest shown by conservationists during a seminar organised to mark the first decennial of the Silent Valley National Park in 1995, the Kerala Forest Department brought out in the second



T A. JAYAKUMAR



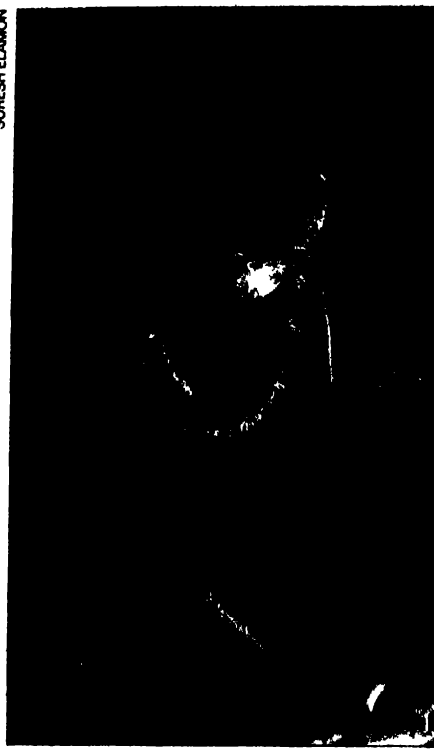


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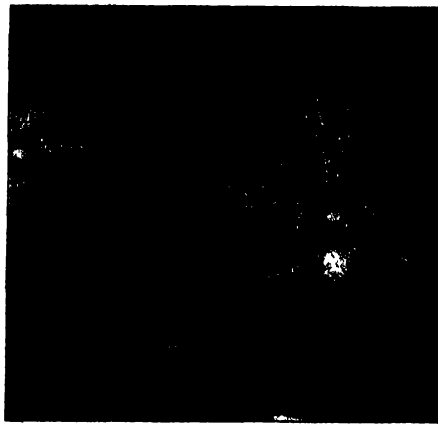
week of October an anthology of 38 articles, which together record the history of the Silent Valley, the struggle by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India and abroad to save it from being overwhelmed by a hydel project, its regeneration in a period of a decade as a protected national park, together with a hard core of authoritative documentation by naturalists and scientists on the Valley's unique flora and fauna. *Silent Valley Whispers of Reason* (Editors. T.M Manoharan, S D Biju, T S. Nayar and P S Easa, published by the Kerala Forest Department, Vazhuthacaud, Thiruvananthapuram; pages 421+XVII, Rs 1,200) also brings together half a dozen Kerala-based photographers whose painstaking work over many treks has helped capture the essence of what the Silent Valley holds, through stunning portfolios of colour photographs. Its sponsorship by the State Government notwithstanding, it is no mere *sarkari* tome: the editors wisely recognise that the core contributions to knowledge about the Silent Valley have come from "outsiders" and have invited them to narrate their experiences The mix of the anecdotal and the coldly scientific in the same volume might appear odd but it works because the subject is all-encompassing. The clinically exact documentation of every sub-species of wildlife will be useful to naturalists, while the more personal reminiscences of those who were involved in the "Monkeys or Man" debate concerning the valley will provide the human touch for more casual readers.



SURESH ELAMON

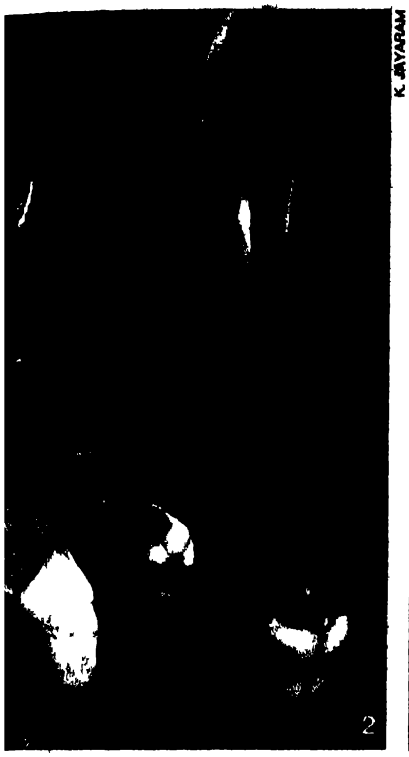


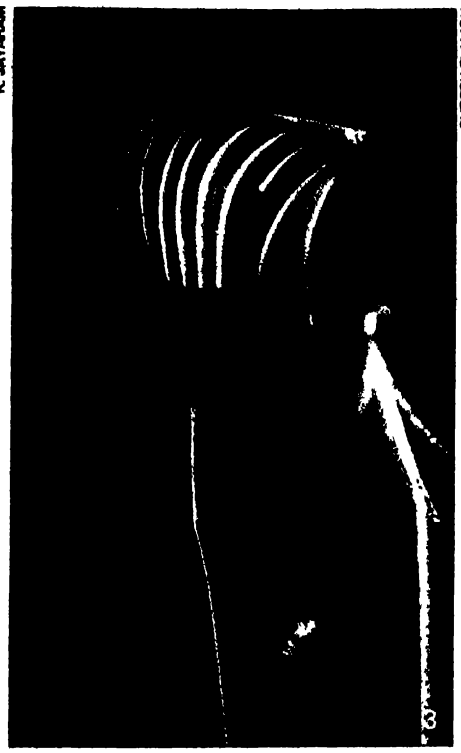
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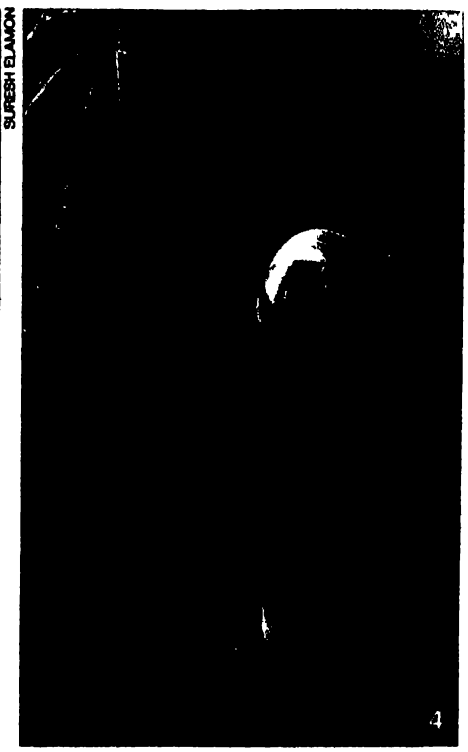


An evergreen patch. A total of 124 species of vascular epiphytes, which include ferns and fern allies and orchids, have been observed at the Silent Valley.

EVEN with a major hydel scheme like Idukki already committed, Kerala's northern districts faced a bleak power scenario in the late 1960s. The gorge of the Kunthipuzha as it tumbled down the Western Ghats to Mannarkkad, before joining the Bharathapuzha, seemed an ideal location for a dam. The Silent Valley was a dense tableland of tropical evergreen forest, approximately 90 square kilometres in area and hemmed in on all

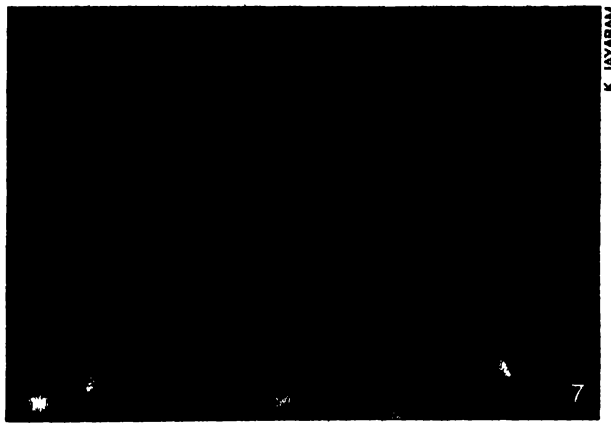








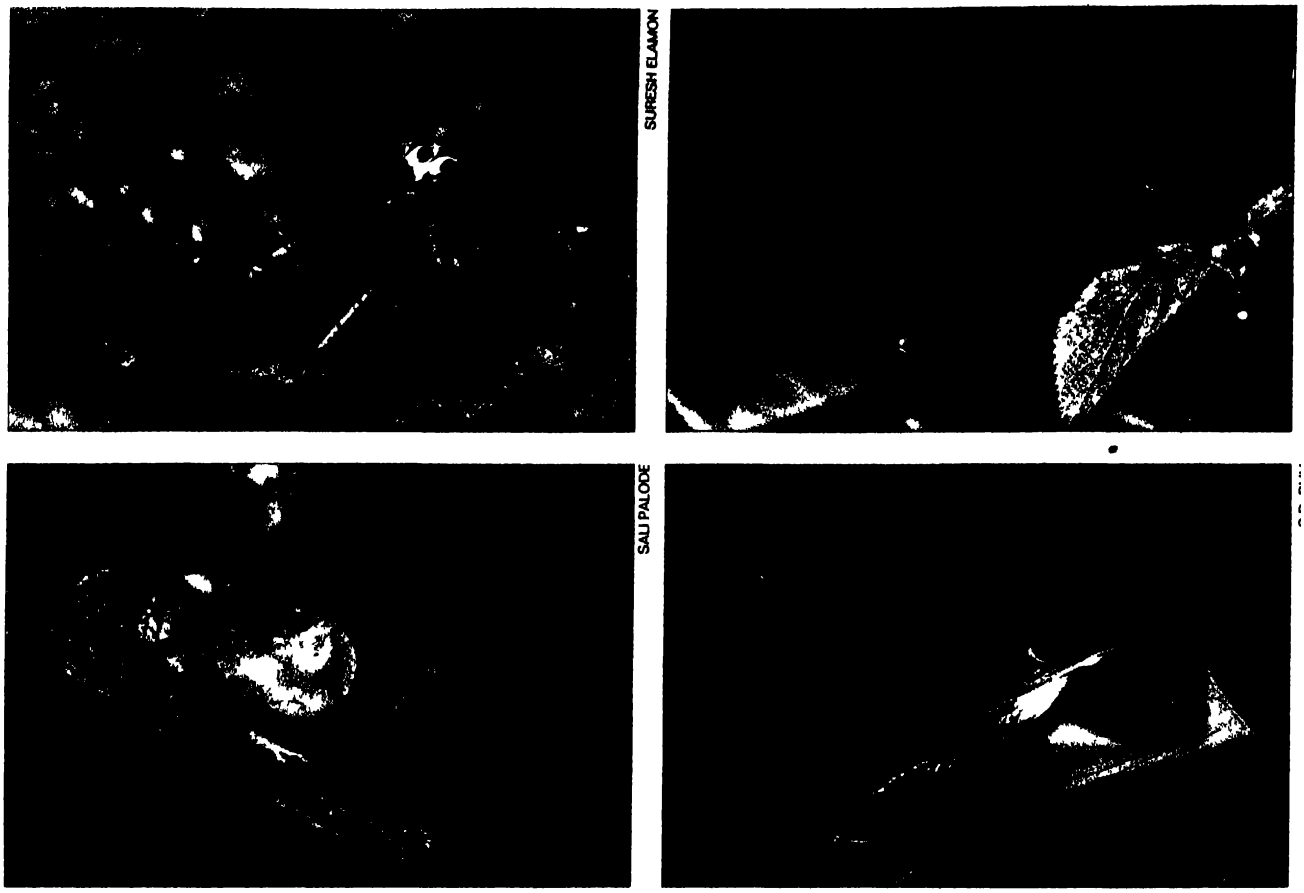




1. ***Impatiens munronii.*** **The presence of this rare plant here was recorded as early as in 1845.**
2. ***Acanthephiplum bicolor.*** **This orchid, which flowers in May-June, is found elsewhere only in South India and Sri Lanka.**
3,4. **The Araceae family, an important natural group of the mono cotyledons, is well represented in the Silent Valley.** ***Arisaema leschenaultii*** **(inflorescence with white and green-striped spathe) and** ***Arisaema leschenaultii*** **(inflorescence with white and purple striped spathe) are endemic to the Western Ghats.**
5. ***Dendrobium aqueum.*** **Some 17 species and two subspecies of this genus occur in the Western Ghats.**
6. ***Arisaema tortuosum,*** **yet another flowering plant.**
7. **The leaves of Osbeckia, green when tender, red when mature.**
8. ***Amorphophallus bulbifer.*** **The genera of Araceae, the Arum family, is well represented in the Silent Valley.**



sides by the steep hills of the Nilgiri ranges. The Kunthipuzha traversed it from north to south, descending 1,500 metres in the process. It rained here almost throughout the year, often recording over 3,000 mm of annual rainfall, with nearly 900 mm in July alone when the south-west monsoon is at its peak. Temperatures were rarely above the lower 20s, and 6° or 7° C in the winter months was quite common. The sheer inaccessibility of the valley preserved it from human incursion for over half a century

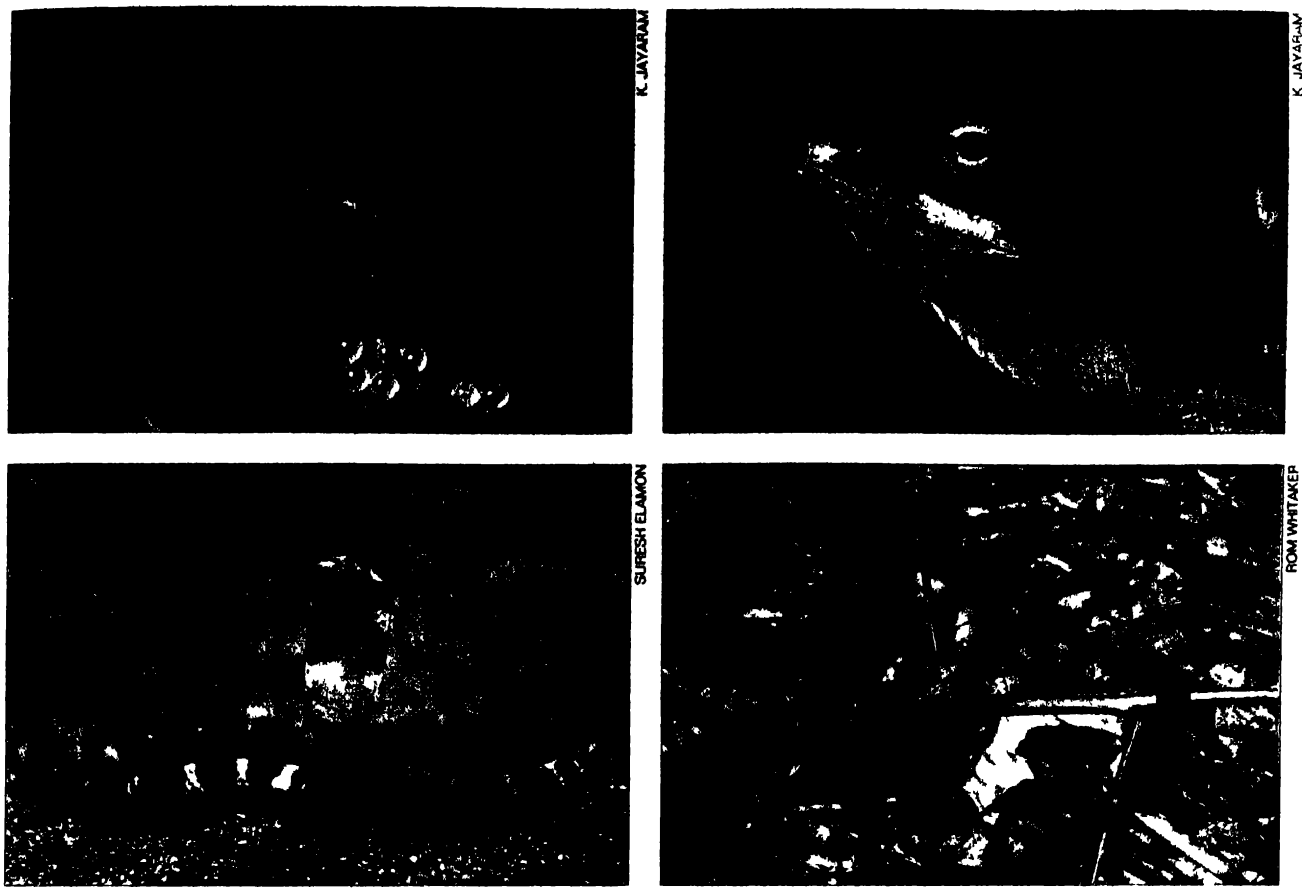


A blue mormon, the second largest butterfly in South India, sharing a meal at a dropping site with a blue bottle; a damselfly male; the tinkling frog; the Malabar gliding frog, whose goggle eyes bulge out at night for better sight.

after the British rulers of Malabar notified it as a reserve forest in 1914. The suitability of the valley for a hydel project was one of the worst kept secrets of British India – but survey parties penetrated the jungle only in the 1950s. Finally, in February 1973, the Planning Commission approved a 240 MW Silent Valley Hydro Electric Project, with an initial outlay of Rs.25 crores. Those were days of ecological naivete: it was only a year since Indira Gandhi had articulated at the Stockholm Conference the developing world's special concern for the environment.

But if government agencies were ignorant of what the Silent Valley held, individual naturalists, especially botanists and zoologists from colleges in northern Kerala, who had been trekking the valley for years in search of rare specimens, were appalled at the developments. Around them grew the spontaneous moves to 'Save the Silent Valley'. M.K. Prasad, a botany lecturer in Kozhikode, as the convener of the Environmental Brigade of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), brought the organisation into the campaign. Dr. S. Sathis Chandran Nair and Prof. M.P. Parameswaran carried the message across the State's borders to scientific societies in Chennai. Malayalam poet Sugathakumari, inspired by some of the KSSP's pamphlets, led a parallel movement among Kerala's literati, which soon attracted well-known figures including writers such as Vaikkom Mohammed Basheer, O.N.V. Kurup, N.V. Krishna Warrior and Dr. Sukumar Azhikode. As both Prasad and Sugathakumari recall in their contributions, the Silent Valley '*samrakshana*' (protection) campaign spread rapidly largely owing to the involvement of an academic-literary combine. Meanwhile, nature-lovers outside the State were networked – Dr. Salim Ali and Dr. Zafar Futehally from Mumbai, Dr. Madhav Gadgil; and M.A. Parthasarathy of the World Wide Fund for Nature-India (WWF-I) from Bangalore, and Romulus Whitaker from Chennai. They helped add a national (and soon afterwards international) dimension to the issue. Flooded with telegrams from nature-lovers and international organisations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the WWF, and buoyed by a helpful on-the-spot study by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Indira Gandhi took the political route out of this potential development versus environment crisis: she appointed a committee, headed by Prof. M.G.K. Menon, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, to carry out an appraisal of the issues involved.

Whispers of Reason includes the reminiscences of both Swaminathan and M.G.K. Menon and describes the nebulous fate of the valley following the swift political changes in New Delhi (the governments of Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Indira Gandhi, which came in quick succession, had to take decisions on the valley in less than two years). T.M. Manoharan, the book's main editor, who is the Managing Director of the Kerala Forest Development Corporation, was the Divisional Forest Officer in charge of the area that encompassed the valley during those troubled days. He was known to be sympathetic to all efforts at saving the valley, though the Forest



A pentatomid bug with burnished gold armour and pearly eggs; a scale-by-scale portrait of a southern green lizard; a young King cobra with its distinctive yellowish-white bands on a dark body, and a large-eyed bronzeback tree snake.

Department's stance was officially neutral.

Meanwhile, the Save Silent Valley campaigners took their struggle to the courts (arguing the landmark suit filed by Joseph John on behalf of the Kochi-based "Friends of Trees" was K. Sukumaran, now a retired judge of the Kerala and Bombay High Courts). The legal route, however, failed.

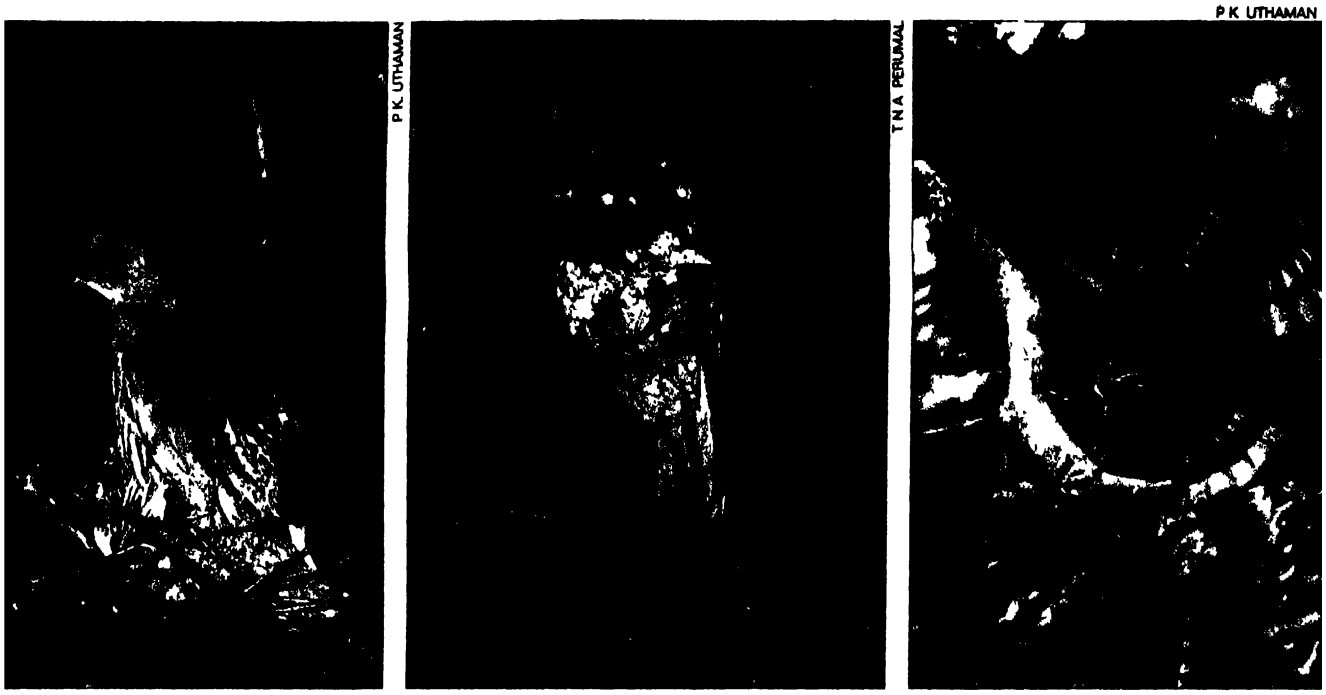
Indira Gandhi chose to read in the M.G.K. Menon Report, which was presented in 1983, a clear message against the hydel scheme. In a swift order, the State Government was asked to call off the project and declare the valley a national park. Indira Gandhi, who took the crucial administrative decision, did not live to see the latter part of the order implemented. The national park was formally inaugurated by Rajiv Gandhi in September 1985. Like the multiple accounts of the same crime in Kurosawa's *Rashoman*, the recollections of these events by those who helped make them are sometimes self-seeking and the dates and other factual details are often repetitive or at variance with one another. The editors explain that they chose to retain these angularities in order that the book would reflect authentic documentation.

AFTER the 'Storm over the Silent Valley' had blown over, a decade of intensive stock-taking was launched. Many institutions led by the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) got down to documenting the heritage of the valley in detail. In the process, they help debunk many myths:

★ Contrary to the belief that the Indian peninsula is poor in orchid wealth, with only a couple of dozen varieties, botanist K.S. Manilal says that the Silent Valley harbours at least 108 varieties, many of them spectacularly large. In his article on 'Orchids of the Silent Valley', C. Sathish Kumar of the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI) near Thiruvananthapuram lists every one of these species. Some, like the bicolour Acanthephippium, are found only in South India and Sri Lanka.

★ That Silent Valley is a repository of medicinal plants is brought out in the review by Sathish Kumar alongwith P. Pushpangadan, Director of the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) in Lucknow. Nearly 80 per cent of the drugs listed in standard pharmacopoeias and 66 per cent of the spices and aromatic plants used the world over are found in India. The Silent Valley is a valuable source of some important genetic variants. At least 21 flowering plants discovered in the valley are new to science, the authors report. The TBGRI is currently using tissue culture techniques to multiply some hybrid orchid varieties.

The 21 plants unique to the Silent Valley are described and illustrated by S.D. Biju (who is the production editor of the book). His search took him back in time over a century, to accounts by Robert Wight, surgeon and botanist, who was the first foreigner to traverse the valley. Between 1840 and 1853, Wight published six volumes of his records, entitled *Icones plantarum Indiae orientalis*, documented in over 2,000 plates drawn by two Indian artists. Others who recorded the unique flora included W.G. McIvor (he created the Ooty Botanical Gardens). After Independence, the Botanical Survey of India led efforts to collate information on the valley. Several people, including



A total of 211 species of birds have been recorded in the Valley. Thirty of them are rare. The elusive tiger (Malay) bittern and Ceylon frogmouth are two such; the crested serpent eagle.

Professors B.K. Nayar and K.S. Manilal of Calicut University, helped publish detailed documents on the flora. Biju's paper provides an interesting account of his discovery: his search took him to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London. There he found Wight's original sample of the rare *Impatiens munronii*. The plant was not seen thereafter, not until Biju located it in 1997 in all its blazing pink at Sispara, on the northern edge of the valley, where Wight had first sighted it in 1883.

Another interesting fact revealed in the book is the existence in the valley of wild varieties of nearly 120 crops. Sheltered from pesticides, fertilizers and other artificial substances, these varieties have evolved new and robust strains, say K.S. Velayudhan and his colleagues from the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources. They have made a special study of the valley's "wild relatives" of pepper and plead for the establishment of a gene sanctuary for these wild strains here, just as the Garo Hills in northeastern India have been declared a gene sanctuary for citrus.

REGULAR surveys by the Forest Department and some of its sponsored students have established that the valley's animal population has thrived in the years since it was notified as a national park. The valley's most famous resident, the lion-tailed macaque, according to the KFRI estimates, now have around 275 members spread out in 14 troops (1996 figures), and an abundance of their favourite food, the fruit of the *Cullenia exarillata* tree, has ensured that they do not migrate.

Larger mammals – the elephant, the tiger, the leopard, the sloth bear and the wild boar – are also reported on the fringes and in the adjacent forests. The dense vegetation does not support many of these animals in the core of the valley, where lesser carnivores such as the civet, the jungle cat and the mongoose thrive.



When it comes to birds, the book dramatises the wonder that is the valley, by allowing P.K. Uthaman, Field Publicity Officer by job title and ornithologist by inclination, to recall his special connection with the valley. With the aid of a set of stunning photographs Uthaman describes his quest to capture the nesting of the rare Malay bittern, the shy Peninsular bay owl resting among reeds, the crested serpent eagle on a deadly diving mission... Mere listing of species cannot substitute such painstaking efforts. But R. Sugathan's precise listing of the valley's avifauna, 211 bird species and their current status, is a valuable record and reflects years of research. George Mathew's study of the butterflies and moths, admits that his records, detailed as they are, only scratch the surface.

Census results such as these give the book value and weight. They also highlight one fact: the Silent Valley holds on to its own. In its cool dark embrace, a variety of wildlife thrive unseen and often unknown to humankind. Some animals are so small or so scarce that the only evidence of their occurrence is the presence of traces of their droppings.

Will the Travancore Evening Brown flutter again? Does the valley shelter that rare owl, the Ceylon frogmouth? Is this the last home of the Malabar civet? One does not know, but one hopes that they will be rediscovered in the silence of the valley. ■

An anatomical point

WILLIAM SAFIRE

A FULL-PAGE colour advertisement in respectable newspapers for the movie *American Beauty* zeroed in on a female abdomen. Staring out at the reader, like the inescapable single eye of a Cyclops, was the model's *umbilicus*.

Showing that portion of the anatomy was not in bad taste because *umbilici* are omnipresent these days. Fashion models sashay down the midway with the smooth flesh of their flat stomachs proudly exposed, and nubile shoppers parade through malls with breezes causing goose bumps on their midsections. And at the centre of attention is the rounded depression, or the sometimes slight protuberance, the dialectical synonymy of which we examine today.

We're talking *bellybuttons*, the focus of fashion at the *fin de millenaire*. A post-monokini shock was needed. If the display of nipples no longer titillated, designers asked one another, could the showing of bottoms be far behind? But when even the thong lost its shock value, fashion's eye landed on the centre of it all.

"Between the emotion and the response," wrote the poet, "Falls the Shadow." Between the *halter* and the *hip-hugger*, or between the *cropped top* and the *low-slung pants*, Falls the *Navel*.

The Romans called the point at which the cord connecting the foetus with the placenta was cut and tied off the *umbilicus*, from *umbo*, "knob, projection." Speakers of Old High German and Old English preferred a Greek root, *omphalos*, which led to *nabalo* and *nafela*, and then popped up in Shakespeare as "he unseamed him from the *naue* to the chops," and developed into Sir Thomas Browne's 1646 observation, "The use of the *Navell* is to continue the infant into the mother." From there to James Russell Lowell's 1873 poetry: "He lifted not his eyes from off his *navel*'s mystic knot."

That notion of self-absorption was picked up by the playwright Eugene O'Neill: "I had a mental view of him regarding his *navel* frenziedly by the hour," and by the BBC's *Listener* in 1966: "One sits in a New York traffic jam, contemplating, as it were, the city's *navel*." Those who do this religiously are called omphalopsychic, from a sect of quietists who induced hypnotic trances by gazing at their navels.

TODAY, many continue the introspective study. "*Bellybuttons* – there are two kinds," said a character in the 1973 *Odd Couple*, "the kind that go in and the kind that go out. I want an *outie*! No, no! I want an *innie*!" But today, many more of us are contemplating the navels of other people, forcing synonymists to consider the varied nomenclature.

Bellybutton was first noted by John Bartlett in the 1877 edition of his Dictionary of Americanisms. Rudyard Kipling liked that noun in 1934, scorning fights with those "who do not come up to your *bellybutton*."

Although Aldous Huxley preferred *tummy-button*, J.B. Priestley in 1946 minted a nice trope with this sign of stomach-tightened nervousness: "with your *bellybutton* knockin' against your backbone." (It's two words in Merriam-Webster, one word in Webster's New World. I go with the analogy of *bellyache*, not *belly dancer*.)

Dialect-delighting Americans, however, have worked out a variety of names for the same anatomical place. Thanks to the editors of the Dictionary of American Regional English (now hard at work at the University of Wisconsin at Madison on their fourth volume, covering the letters P to S), we can examine a few answers to their Question X34/1, "What are some other names and nicknames for the *navel*?"

One-eyed Mabel was one response, probably derived from the popular *nabel*, a variant of *navel* recalling the Old High German *nabalo*. *Button* and *buttonhole* were frequent choices, and a fair sampling called it a *belly-hole*. *Chicken butt* and *chicken peck* were noted. Those interested in content preferred *lint-catcher*, *lint-getter* and *lint-strainer*. Perhaps a Greek influence can be found in one respondent's *oompalikis* and several *piko* answers. The midriff midrash includes the Yiddish *pupik*.

Many responses to DARE's survey began with the word *where*. In the South, it was *where the Yankee shot you*; in the West, *where the Indians shot you*, and across the country, *where I got shot in the war*. Two interviewees eschewed the violent gunfire-bullet-hole metaphor and replied with the less bellicose *where you got hit with a pick*.

AUTHORS of historical fiction worry about anachronism. "And now the clock strikes one," says Dromio of Syracuse, but it was a Shakespearean comedy of error. Mechanical clocks, not invented until the 14th century, were not available in ancient Ephesus.

I had the same problem writing a novel set in Federal period, and wondered what phrase a man of that era would have used for what we now call *hush money*. (Turns out Thomas Jefferson used the words *hush money* in a letter, nearly a century after Steele and Swift.)

Thus it was when I came to the word *Chicom* in Seymour Topping's *Peking Letter*, a riveting novel of the Chinese civil war, I wondered: was that word – a portmanteau of "Chinese Communist" – in use in the late 1940s?

The earliest citation in the OED is 1966; the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang found a 1964 use by Robin Moore in his novel *The Green Berets*. So I called Top, a longtime *New York Times* colleague and now administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, and put it to him. He was the Associated Press correspondent in Peking (now spelled Beijing) reporting on that war; was the word in use at the time?

"You bet it was, and it was no derogation," he recalled. "The truce teams of our Military Advisory Group referred to the Nationalist Chinese as the *Nats* and the Communist Chinese as the *Chicoms*. I can hear it now – 'The *Chicoms* took Mukden, and the *Nats* didn't put up much of a fight.'"

Such is the value to political etymology of the historical novel. Years from now, our descendants will be reading dramas about the struggle between today's *Chicoms* and their rivals on politically free Taiwan, the *Chidems*. ■

New York Times Service

Reforms as ideology

C. T. KURIEN

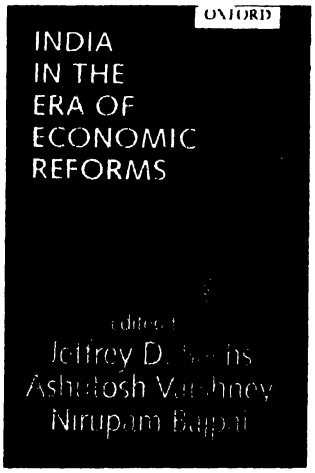
India in the Era of Economic Reforms edited by Jeffrey D. Sachs, Ashutosh Varshney and Nirupam Bajpai; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999; pages 312, Rs. 525.

THIS volume is based on the deliberations of a conference on India's economic reforms held at Harvard University in December 1996. While there have been many assessments of the reforms by Indian and foreign scholars during the past few years, practically all of them have concentrated on the economic aspects. This book's attempt to go beyond economics and to relate the reforms to the political processes makes it of special interest.

For this reason, I shall only briefly comment on the economic issues dealt with in the volume although five of the eight chapters (including the Introduction) are on economic aspects. Montek S. Ahluwalia's chapter making an overall appraisal of the reforms is quite comprehensive. So is the chapter on fiscal policy by Nirupam Bajpai and Jeffrey Sachs. There is some overlapping in these two chapters dealing primarily with macro-economic aspects. Ashok Kotwal and Bharat Ramaswami consider the impact of the reforms on agriculture and the rural economy. The central argument is that liberalisation of trade can lead to diversification of the rural economy and to an increase in the demand for labour and thus to raising of rural incomes. The chapter on labour gives an account of the structure of the labour market but relies on the experiences of other countries to speculate on what is likely to happen in India.

The chapter on exports deserves special mention because it deals with three of India's leading export industries – diamond cutting, garments and software. In the case of diamond cutting and polishing, the paper shows how the industry is coming under the grip of the international diamond cartel, De Beers, and its common marketing agency, the Central Selling Organisation that control the supply of gems. India's many small diamond-polishing establishments have to deal with these global giants. Garment exports come under the Multi-Fibre Agreement which restricts garment imports by quotas in the U.S., Canadian and West European markets. And the software industry has to reckon with the fact that while its performance has been very satisfactory, its export performance depends on the fact that the skilled labour it requires is much cheaper in India than in the countries it is exporting to, but it is likely to be outdone by Russia and China where skilled labour is even cheaper. These cases show some of the parameters on which actual market performance depends.

While the papers on the economic facets of reform deal with many aspects (most of them quite familiar by now), some issues that they do not touch may be worth noting. Practically all the papers admit that the proximate background to the reforms was the balance of payments crisis of 1991. It is shown that the opening up of the economy and the flow of foreign capital that followed resolved the crisis fairly soon, but there is no discussion of the manner in which the external crisis is linked to the internal reform measures insisted upon, such as the reduction in the fiscal deficit. Second, while it is clearly shown that the reduction in the fiscal deficit when it was achieved was done by drastically reducing the government's *capital* expenditure, there is virtually no discussion about the impact of this measure on the development of infrastructure on which market performance critically depends. Third, the papers written before 1996 did not anticipate the industrial recession that set in fairly soon afterwards, and even Ahluwalia's paper written after 1996 and dealing with statistical material up to 1998-99 does not deal with that problem, a rather uncomfortable one to those who are mainly interested in pushing the reforms.



NOW on the two papers dealing with politics. The late Myron Weiner examines the role of State governments in the implementation of the economic reforms. Overlooking the fact that when the reforms were launched in 1991 it was a decision taken entirely by the central government and that many crucial aspects of reforms were thus suddenly thrust upon the State governments, the author provides three reasons for the tardiness of the States in implementing the reforms. One reason is that State political leaders have short time horizons and in the debate on reforms the short-term drawbacks and losses of reforms get greater attention than the long-term advantages. Secondly, many organised interests opposed to one or other aspect of economic reforms have considerable clout at the State level. And thirdly, politicians and officials in the States are more reluctant than others to give up the patronage and rents that are acquired through the regulatory system.

What I consider the lead paper in the volume, Ashutosh Varshney's examination of "elite politics" and "mass politics" in the context of economic reforms, deals more elaborately with the role of politics and ideology in the implementation of reforms. The macro aspects of reforms – devaluation of the currency, restructuring of public finance and capital markets, liberalisation of the trade regime and so on – are elitist in nature. According to the author, the discussions on these aspects are "confined to the English language newspapers, the country's graduates, the discourses on the Internet, the Bombay stock market and Delhi's India International Centre and its economic ministries". They hardly enter into mass politics where the issues are either emotional ones such as religion, caste and ethnicity or down-to-earth matters such as prices, employment and job security. The issue of economic reforms hardly ever penetrates mass politics.

Varshney is of the view that the peripheral role of reforms in mass politics

can go to the advantage of reformers. He uses this observation to explain one of the paradoxes in the recent Indian political scene in relation to economic reforms. How did P. V. Narasimha Rao, heading a minority government, succeed in putting through radical economic reform, while Rajiv Gandhi, with a massive majority in Parliament, was forced to go slow with his modest reform programme? And the answer? "Economic liberalisation became a victim of its splendid solitude on the political agenda in 1985-86. In 1991, economic reforms were crowded out of mass politics by issues that aroused greater passion and anxiety about the nation. Because they were crowded out, reforms could go as far as they did."

It would appear that between the time Varshney wrote his paper for the Harvard conference and became a member of the team that wrote the Introduction to the conference volume, there was something of a change in perception. In the paper the position was that where mass politics is concerned with emotive issues, elitist bureaucrats can successfully implement economic reforms; a rather different position is taken in the Introduction. "There has been an absence of ideological thrust in India's reform programme, which is arguably one of the causes behind the moderate speed of post -1991 reforms ... Political leaders and parties are implementing reforms, but not making clear ideological arguments in favour of reforms ... Economic reforms are yet to be boldly presented on the ideological platform of political parties. They are yet to be made into the centrepiece of electoral campaigns."

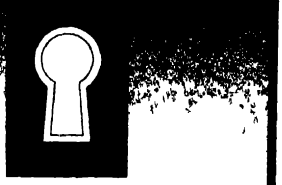
WHAT accounts for this change in perception? It may be recalled that (most of) the papers for the Harvard conference were prepared while the economic reforms of the Narasimha Rao government were making progress, and the Introduction was prepared perhaps early in 1999, by which time there was concern that the reforms were beginning to stall. The cheer leaders of reform, therefore, must adapt themselves to the new reality. They are concerned that in the parliamentary elections of 1996 and 1998 economic reforms did not receive adequate attention and the ideological support they deserve. The Congress party, they say, did not turn its economic policy breakthrough into a theme for electoral campaigns in 1996 and 1998. And the BJP, in spite of its traditional support for freer internal business and trade, also failed to canvass for a more market-driven economy. This theme had become the new slogan for the authors that they boldly state: "In the 1998 election manifestos of the BJP and Congress considerable space was given to economic policy but the electoral battle was over whether Sonia Gandhi, the ace campaigner of the Congress party, was an Italian or an Indian ..."

That Sonia Gandhi played a relatively minor role in the parliamentary elections of 1998 (and that the question of her nationality was not a major issue then) would have made no difference to the argument because the approach of the authors to economic reforms is essentially ideological. They are convinced that a greater role for the market in an economy will lead to more competition, more efficiency and more growth and that these will be beneficial to all, at least in the long run. That the restructuring of the economy in this manner will adversely affect the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, those least likely to be able to face such problems, appears to be of no concern to the authors.

True, they concede that "deeper and quicker reforms in India will require not only assuming, but also demonstrating, that they are positively linked to mass welfare." If they had taken this seriously, though, the themes discussed in the book and the facts assembled and analysed would have been different. They would have also noticed that the masses are not ignorant of and indifferent to reforms. They would have noticed too that while the masses do not enter into academic discussions about economic reforms, they do react to how the reforms are being implemented. They would have observed that in the elections to the State Assemblies held in 1994-95 and in the parliamentary elections of 1996 the masses punished the Congress party for the adverse effect the reforms had on them though the reforms had opened up a richer and more varied life to the elites. And that even the BJP faced the wrath of the masses in the Assembly elections of late 1998 because that party's economic policies had resulted in an exceptionally high price of onions!

The fact is that economic reforms have entered very much into the real politics of India, but perhaps in a manner that elites and ideologues do not approve of because they do not understand the logic and language of the masses. ■

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Biography or historical fiction?

CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan by Edmund Morris; Random House, September 1999; pages 874, $35.

IT comes as a shock at first, on page nine of Edmund Morris' long-awaited *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* you read, in a chapter called "The Land of Lost Things", that the author was born in the American Midwest on August 9, 1912.

This would make him 87, which does not square with the Edmund Morris we know from the book's publicity material, who is much younger, was born in South Africa and could therefore not have had the American parents he gives himself in the text, even footnoting them as being cited in several reference works.

On closer inspection you realise that Morris is coyly telling you that he is fabricating, when he writes of his birth that it "more or less coincided with the archeological furore over Piltdown Man, while other scientists were finding that genes could be lined up along a chromosome." He continues: "Who knows, the latter discovery may prove as fraudulent as the former. The past is delusion, the future illusion; one locates one's centre where one can. (Or in cases such as that of Reagan's, where one wishes.)"

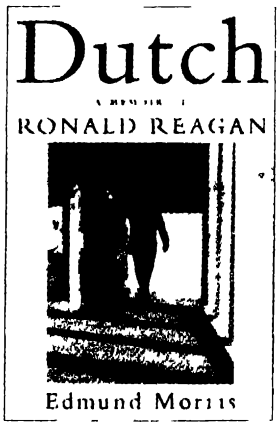
So why, you find yourself asking, should you believe any previously unreported details in this authorised biography, the first one ever written by someone invited to observe a sitting President? What is the difference between Dutch and, say, Oliver Stone's film *J.F.K.* or Joe McGinniss' *The Last Brother*, a biography of Senator Edward M. Kennedy? Why should Morris' memoir not be treated as historical fiction?

But as you read on – and such is the force and fascination of Morris' narrative that you cannot help reading on – you begin to see the benefits of his highly unorthodox technique, which turns out to be a conjoining of invention and reality.

Since Morris' partly fictional persona was born only a year later than Reagan and crossed paths with him at various points in their early careers, the author can make use of directly contemporaneous commentary instead of having to resort to speculative "must haves" and "may wells".

The fluidity of the resulting viewpoints frees Morris to liven up his narrative with the devices of oral and documentary history, employing dialogues, interviews, film scenarios, epistolary sections and so forth.

For instance, as a schoolmate of Reagan's at Eureka College, he reviews his subject's first known stage role, the shepherd Thyrsis in Edna St. Vincent Millay's verse drama *Aria da Capo*, which, prophetically, centres on the building of an artificial wall between two friends, although not until 57 years later would President Reagan say, in Berlin, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."



FINALLY, Morris' inventions lend at least the first half of Dutch a faint air of make-believe, which seems entirely fitting for Reagan's rise to prominence. (In a brilliant description of his first film role, as the radio broadcaster Andy McCaine in *Love Is on the Air*, it is difficult to tell for a while whether what he is describing is the movie or Reagan's experience.)

One might of course dismiss Morris' technique as committing the fallacy of imitative form, matching an artificial narrative with an unauthentic subject. But some would argue that Reagan's rise to fame was the contradiction of that fallacy.

Above all Morris seems at pains to animate a life that in an earlier treatment, that of Reagan's autobiography, *An American Life*, produced what Morris himself calls "the most boring book of its kind since Herbert Hoover's *Challenge to Liberty*."

Certainly *Dutch* is very far from boring. As gossip it hypnotises: Morris has come up with the ultimate "Hi, I'm Ronald Reagan, who are you?" anecdote when he tells how Reagan failed to recognise his own son Michael at his high school commencement. Treating such delicate issues as Reagan's shift to the right politically, his conduct during the Red-hunting era in Hollywood, his relations with his wives, Jane Wyman and Nancy Davis, and the dating of his decline into senescence, the book manages to be both balanced and sensitive.

In its coverage of the Reagan presidency it makes an often-told tale exciting and at times even inspiring, particularly in its vivid accounts of the various summit conferences with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Couldn't all this have been accomplished without Morris' narrative abracadabra? Perhaps, but I can think of few conventional political biographies that bring their subjects' pasts so richly alive

Had Morris used a more conventional form, one finds it hard to imagine how he could have so effectively evolved his narrative voice from the wise-cracking irreverence of the narrator's youth to the stunned admiration of his maturer years. (Here he undetectably slows his aging process, turns himself into the middle-aged Edmund Morris we recognise from the voice of his prize-winning biography, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, and thereby provides internal evidence of his deception, which he nowhere mentions overtly.)

IS *Dutch* then finally flawed by Morris' technique? To judge from the book's extensive notes, it in no way distorts the record of Reagan's life, only the viewpoint from which it is told. It is difficult to approve the technique in theory; in less skilled hands it will doubtless prove a disaster. But it certainly succeeds in this case. So call *Dutch* a literary work instead of a biography. But does *Dutch* finally penetrate the mystery of Ronald Reagan, explain the calculated spontaneity, the cold warmth, the absent presence? No, yet in passage after passage it certainly captures the paradoxes he comprised. Just one example of many. ■

New York Times Service

On work as human condition

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

The Oxford Book of Work edited by Keith Thomas; Oxford University Press, 1999; pages 618, $35.

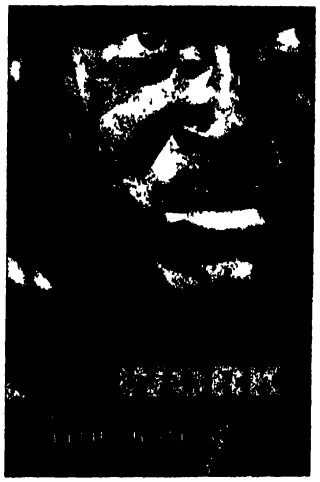
THE word for "work" in French – *travail* – is derived from the Latin *trepalium*, an instrument of torture. And is there any doubt that in the course of the nasty, brutish and short lives of humankind, work has often been indistinguishable from torture? But the word "labour" derives from the Old French word *labeur*, meaning "ploughing", an activity that, however difficult, is also a declaration of victory over natural forces. Ploughing cultivates; it reflects a plan; it organises both time and space; it creates culture. And is there any doubt, that work also has this quality? If work is, as we now commonly say, "dehumanising", it is also distinctly and deeply human.

There may be no reconciliation between work as torture and work as cultivation, judging from *The Oxford Book of Work*, a massive anthology of writings compiled by Keith Thomas, the president of Corpus Christi College of Oxford. "What a dreary subject!" he recalls his friends saying when he announced his ambitions to gather literary and historical material on the theme of work. But also, in all its contradictions and variety, what an astonishing one.

Once the subject is unleashed, it seems to have no bounds. Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer teases his friends into trading their most cherished trinkets for the right to whitewash his fence. Tolstoy's Levin, beginning to doubt the foundations of his urban life, works with the peasants in the fields. A professional sword swallower in 1850 recalls how he began at his trade, forcing the first stick down his throat into his stomach. possible to grow rich."

Labour also regularly inspires advice. An Egyptian homily from the 14th century B.C. warns the reader about the host of tribulations facing the mason, the gardener, the weaver and the bird-catcher, only to offer a rather questionable occupational recommendation: "See, there's no profession without a boss,/Except for the scribe; he is the boss." A more realistic homily of corporate efficiency appears in the familiar law formulated by C. Northcote Parkinson in 1958: "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion."

It also expands under contemplation. In 1980, the British government listed 23,000 different occupations. Walt Whitman celebrated manual labour in cascading lists: "Leather-dressing, coach-making, boiler-making, rope-twisting, distilling, sign-painting, lime-burning, cotton-picking... " But there are also the horrors of such manual labours as those of the "fur-pullers" of London.



SO what is one to make of this anthology's phantasmagoric mixture of wit and witness? Some attempt is made to organise the selections in grand thematic categories, like "The Primal Curse," "Compensations and Rewards," or "Women's Work and Child Labour." But the organisation is often arbitrary, and within each category the sequence is neither chronological nor clearly thematic. And why should the reader have to do the work of turning the pages to find its author and date when that information should precede each selection? It also would have been helpful to limit the number of repetitious examples in favour of more expansive selections from Dickens, Dreiser, Hardy or Zola. It might even have been useful to have a section on the history of labour unions, or one on the philosophy of work, in which Hobbes, Marx and more recent economists and political thinkers could have outlined contrasting interpretations of labour and its discontents.

But in his brief introduction, Thomas provides some hints about what sort of shape might be given to a history of work, a subject that has inspired a small academic industry in recent years. The abstract concept of work, he points out, is a modern one. In the pre-modern world, slaves and prisoners often made up the bulk of workers; labour was also associated with particular classes. Until labour became a "commodity", as Hobbes put it, and was traded for wages, it hardly seemed worth analysing in itself. It was simply a condition of life, having all the natural force of God's punishment of Adam in Eden.

THE anthology's selections show, though, just how important a transformation took place in the 19th century. Factories and coal mines are horrifically described in novels; the hypocrisies of the office are skewered. Marx placed the experience of work at the centre of human consciousness; Engels considered labour an evolutionary shaper of the body as well as the mind. This may not have been because the workplaces themselves were more brutal than any ever constructed (they probably were not), but because, perhaps for the first time in history, it was possible to imagine that things could be different. Work could create a surplus, so why could not the surplus alleviate work? On a wide scale, work began to promise the possibility of non-work. Labour offered the prospect of leisure.

So it may be that the reform of the workplace, the transformation of the household, the beginnings of labour laws and the formation of unions were in part reflections of this change, not just causes of it. Marx wrote that labour "produces culture, but also imbecility and cretinism for the worker". The question some future anthologist might think about is what happens when work's tortuous claims weaken and when the goal of work is to make non-work possible – the welcome situation now for many in the Western world. Is culture then also remade, in the image not of cultivated labour but of pleasurable leisure? It sometimes seems so. ■

New York Times Service

A growing concern

The State of the World Population Report 1999 presents an alarming account of burgeoning numbers, but does not adequately emphasise the causes of such population growth.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI

FOR demographers, October 12, 1999, was a date of special significance as the world's population was expected to have reached the six billion mark on that day. A billion people were added to the planet's population in the last 12 years, according to the latest report of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) on the state of the world's population. Every report on population has acted as a reminder that more than 95 per cent of the population growth takes place in the developing countries – a significant one of which is India.

The report, which is the outcome of a painstaking "head counting" exercise, shows that population growth has slowed in Europe, North America and Japan. The United States is the only industrialised country that still registers significant increases in population, and that is, largely as a result of immigration.



The State of the World Population Report 1999 reviews the early experience of the 20-year-long programme of action launched in 1994 as part of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The ICPD spelt out the resources needed for a basic package of reproductive health and population programmes and also indicated that investment should flow towards schemes that empowered women, reduced mortality rates and provided basic education, particularly to girls and women.

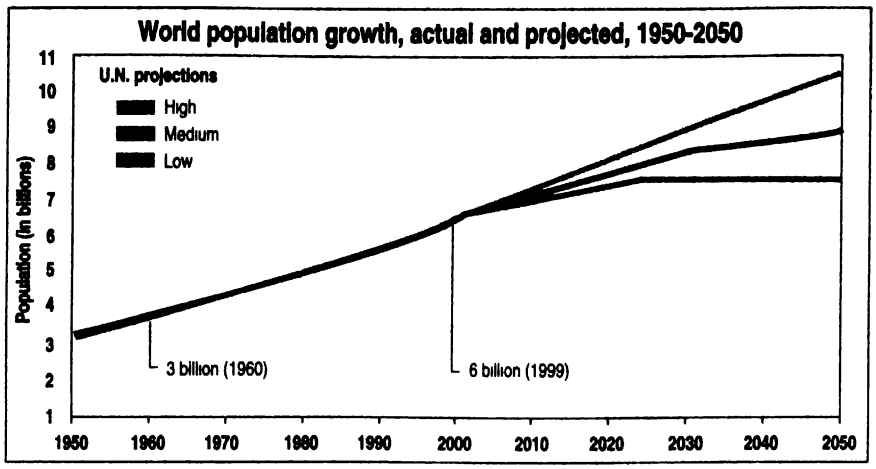
It is alarming that developed countries such as the U.S. and Germany have not met the international target for development assistance, which is currently set at 0.7 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while most Scandinavian countries meet this target. In human terms, any shortfall in international development assistance would affect the poor in developing countries, particularly women. The report mentions that international assistance for development has fallen from a peak of $61 billion in 1992 to $48 billion in 1997.

A population report, or more specifically a population and development report, has to go beyond presenting an alarming account of burgeoning numbers. The UNFPA report is fair in parts, particularly when it cites socio-economic and political reasons for the increasing numbers, but often it relies on truisms to make a point. It also rules out a "tight statistical link" between development indicators and fertility rates, which in effect dilutes the role of the "development pill". While development is still considered an important factor, it remains unclear why fertility transitions occur earlier in some places than others, states the report. The pace of development does not appear to affect the initiation or the rate of fertility transition though once a transition has begun, fertility declines more rapidly in countries with higher levels of development. It is evident that when there is unequal development or when the benefits of such development are not available to most people, fertility decline will be slower and other related problems will emerge.

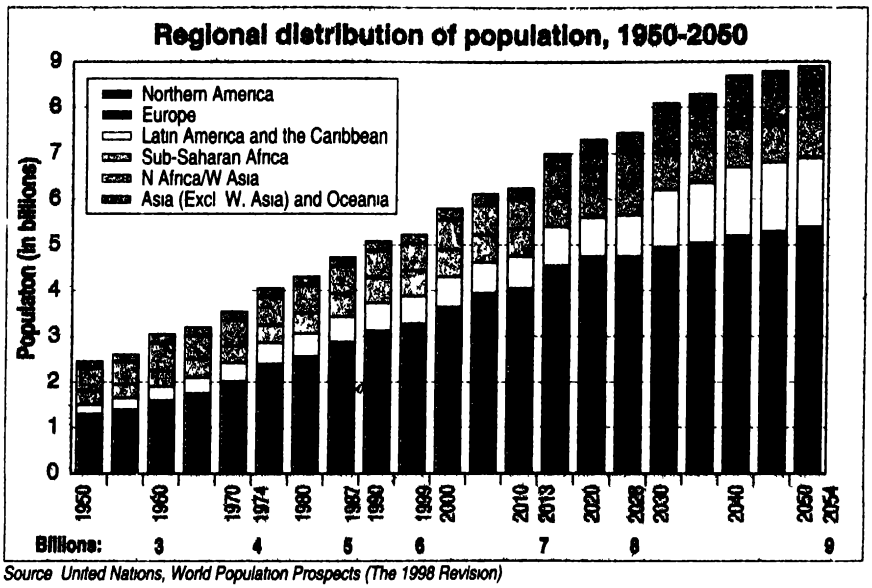
The report establishes a link between economic crises or insecurity and development progress and studies its impact on reproductive health and migration patterns. A telling point is the South-East Asian crisis, which began in 1997 and as a consequence of which there has been an increase in poverty and unemployment, lower educational participation and reduced funding for social programmes, including programmes for population control and reproductive health. Evidence suggests that the region's remarkable development gains over three decades have been reversed, and this affected mostly women and children. Falling real incomes and rising food prices have stepped up the incidence of malnutrition among infants and young children in parts of Indonesia. The commercial sex industry has seen a boom as rising poverty forces women to enter this sector. Reproductive health programmes continue to suffer as budgets give priority to alleviating hunger and poverty and tackling unemployment and social disruption.

The facts are stark but make little impact when stated out of a socio-economic context. For instance, the report states that the poorest countries often have the highest population growth rates. It also says that they have the worst reproductive health, the highest rates of maternal mortality and the lowest implementation rates for family planning methods – often under 15 per cent, a level the average developed country had reached by 1969. Indicators such as low status for women and income inequalities, which determine access to the state's resources, are not given adequate priority. Even the issue of the gradual withdrawal of the state from the social sector has not been emphasised enough.

The report states categorically that the slowing of population growth is not inevitable and that it is dependent on the choices made and the action taken in the next 10 years. It will depend on the success of population and development policies, in particular the right to health, including reproductive health. That this goal is still a distant one is evident from statistics relating to limited access to modern, safe and acceptable methods of family planning, setbacks to health due to complications related to pregnancy and disorders, deaths resulting from pregnancy and abortions, the growing vulnerability of women to the



Source United Nations, World Population Prospects (The 1998 Revision)



Source United Nations, World Population Prospects (The 1998 Revision)

human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and so on.

The dramatic increase in the demands of peace-keeping and emergencies, the pressures of globalisation, the widening gaps between wealthy and poor nations, and between the rich and the poor within nations and the retreat of donors from development assistance are some of the new realities that find a place towards the end of the report. The last chapter, titled "Finding the resources", focusses on economic and financial crises and sweeping "structural adjustment" in developing countries that have had an impact on public expenditure, especially on education and health.

The report cautions that food security will be a critical issue in the coming years. Since 1987, when the world population crossed the five-billion mark, wasteful and unbalanced consumption patterns along with growing numbers had affected the global climate, the report states. Whether this unbalanced consumption affects the quality of life of the disadvantaged people or merely affects the global climate, as stated, reflects a bias in perception. Rapid population growth is only one among many concerns, but it contributes to environmental damage, pressure on land and water resources and political instability, notes the report.

Demographic trends indicate that population is growing at the fastest rate in the poorest countries, those that are the least able to provide for basic needs and create opportunities. Within countries, the poorest families also tend to be the largest ones, but poverty of choices may be as important as poverty of means in determining family size. To say that poverty of means is what determines all choices, including that of family size, may not be entirely correct. The low status of women in hierarchical and patriarchal societies as a determining factor in choices, such as that of family size, is understated. This is not to say that the report has completely glossed over the role of developed countries. Shorter life spans and rising death rates have affected the population profile of countries facing the AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) epidemic. They too have become heavily dependent on external aid to combat the epidemic.

The report touches upon migration patterns in many countries and regions and their impact on the environment and on service delivery systems. But it fails to discuss the issues at length. The reasons for migration are many and developing countries have limited employment opportunities and offer fewer choices for livelihood. A serious question that arises is whether migrating populations have a right to basic survival or whether they should sacrifice their existence to prevent environmental stress. Besides, several environmental stress factors can be traced to the wealthiest one-fifth of the world's population, which consumes more than 66 times the materials and resources of the poorest one-fifth. The report mentions these figures but does not apportion responsibility on the affluent sections within nations or on the affluent nations However, it does state that economic development raises prices as well as incomes. The last to benefit from these are the poorest, who spend most of their incomes on essentials such as food and housing and depend the most on public services, especially in matters such as health, education and transport.

Access to family planning has increased dramatically in some countries, including Nepal and Bhutan, the report states; it also mentions that studies in some eight countries have revealed that the side-effects of certain contraceptive methods were more of a problem for women than had been realised. A sustained campaign by public health activists and experts drew attention to the issue. Also, a survey in Nepal found that the decision to seek care for pregnant or postpartum women was made often by husbands, followed by mothers-in-law; the women themselves were seldom involved in the decision. Evidently, access to family planning services is not the only issue. Apart from prevalent trends, the causes for demographic transitions as well as the consequences of such transitions need to be highlighted. The cure, it would appear, should be found in the causes and not in the consequences. ■

Another indictment of communalism

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

AMONG the many recommendations that the New York-based advocacy group, Human Rights Watch, makes in a recent report on violence against Christians, one is particularly worthy of note. The impunity that the perpetrators of violence against minorities have so far enjoyed, it demands, should end. This means among other things the prosecution and punishment of "all those responsible for murder, rape, assault, and destruction of property during the post-Ayodhya violence of December 1992 and January 1993".

The suggestion is interesting in that it reaffirms a point that has been made by successive inquiries since violence against minorities became a problem in India as far back as the mid-1960s. The Raghubar Dayal Commission, after concluding a prolonged study of the communal violence that rocked Ranchi, Rourkela, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad in the second half of the 1960s, proposed energetic enforcement of the provisions of the law as a credible deterrent against rioters.

Since this perfectly sensible suggestion has remained unimplemented for well over three decades, there clearly is no reason to expect a change of heart today. It may be far more rewarding to enquire into the sources of the impunity that the agents of communal violence have come to enjoy – how the state has, over time, ceded its monopoly over legitimate violence to elements that periodically tear the fabric of communal peace.

A useful conceptual distinction has been worked out by political scientists to differentiate the "pragmatic communalism" of successive Congress regimes from the "programmatic communalism" that the Bharatiya Janata Party embodies. Measures to deter violence can only follow a credible official investigation. Targeting a minority community is often a useful political device in consolidating a sense of majority communal identity. When a party's pursuit of political power is premised on this manner of communal mobilisation, it may prove both incapable and unwilling, once it is in authority, to check the forces that it has itself unleashed.

Politics By Other Means is the title of the HRW report on the violence against Christians. And the basic diagnosis is sharply stated: the causes underlying the attacks on the small and vulnerable religious minority "are the same as those promoting violence against Muslims, Dalits and other marginalised groups in the country – political and economic power struggles linked rhetorically to the creation of a Hindu nation". The violence against Christians is, in other words, "part of a concerted campaign of right-wing Hindu organisations, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar, to promote and exploit communal tensions to stay in power".

HRW documents how the ten-day long rampage in Dangs district of Gujarat, beginning on Christmas day last year, met with little effort at restraint by the district administration. The December 1998 attacks, it concludes, "were at least a year in the making". The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and affiliated bodies like the Hindu Jagaran Manch and the Bajrang Dal had begun a series of public meetings and rallies in Dangs, Bharuch, Valsad and Surat districts on Christmas Day, 1997. Each such gathering featured public announcements and invitations which spoke darkly of the threat to Hindu culture and civilisation from Christian proselytisation.

PRIOR to the December 1998 rally, HRW records, a number of representations had been made to the local authorities warning of a serious breach of peace. The Dangs District Collector did not act, except to state that "appropriate arrangements" would be made to ensure that no untoward incident took place. Ominously, the top police official in the district had been placed under the direct supervision of the Superintendent of Police from a neighbouring district just prior to the rally.

Official connivance at the local level was, in HRW's reading, considerably aggravated by an attitude of benign neglect at the national level and a tendency by State-level leaders to blame the victims. Keshubhai Patel, the BJP Chief Minister of Gujarat, blamed the violence on an "international conspiracy" and claimed that it only began when participants in the Dangs rally were attacked. VHP spokesmen were even more brazen in their response.

HRW also turns its attention to the callous official response to the rape of four nuns in Madhya Pradesh and the manifest infirmities of the Wadhwa Commission of Inquiry into the Graham Staines murder in Orissa. For reasons related to its almost obsessive concern for human rights to the exclusion of other considerations, HRW has never been the most popular institution among official circles in India. But there is no denying that the context for the HRW intervention in this particular case has been created by a virtual abdication of responsibility by the government.

HRW records a rather neat summation of the nature of the linkages within the Sangh Parivar, as provided by a former activist of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh: "The RSS is the soul. The BJP is the body and the Bajrang Dal is the hand that administers the punishment to those who threaten Hinduism." Given these intimate and organic relationships, it may be futile to expect a government headed by the BJP to implement the detailed recommendations of the HRW report. The global signals though are acquiring an unmistakably threatening character.

On September 9, the U.S. State Department released its annual report on religious freedom, criticising the BJP and its ideological fraternity for fostering an environment of fear and insecurity for minorities (*Frontline*, October 8, 1999).

HRW has urged India's donors and trading partners to "pressure the Indian government to implement the recommendations of the Srikrishna Commission on the 1992-93 Bombay riots, and the recommendations of the National Commission for Minorities on attacks against Christians." This recommendation will undoubtedly rankle. But a government that disregards the authority of statutory institutions and threatens the delicate system of countervailing powers on which a democracy rests, clearly cannot invoke arguments of sovereignty to fend off global scrutiny. ■

The genius of Goethe

Wolfgang Goethe's 250th birth anniversary is being celebrated this year.

LOTHAR EHRLICH

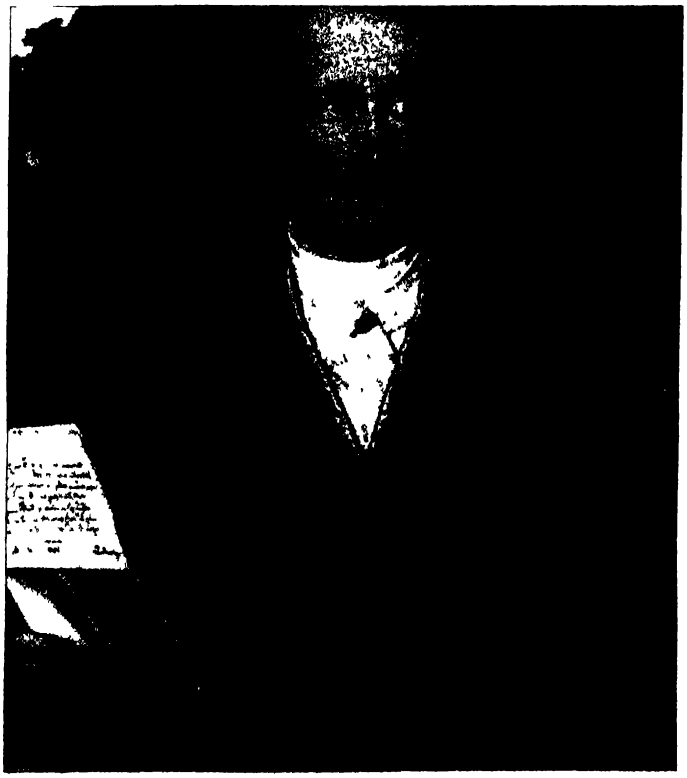
THE 250th birth anniversary of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is being celebrated world over this year. The intercultural endeavours of the poet, who in the context of his communicative concept of universal literature had engaged himself intensively with Indian literature and art, have been in focus, among other things, on this occasion. In Chennai, for instance, international conferences in connection with the event were held at the end of September 1999. These conferences were conducted by the Goethe Society of India and the Goethe Institute (Max Mueller Bhavan) in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service(DAAD).

This is a special moment in Goethe's rich literary and scientific creations. Goethe did not consider himself just a German author; he considered himself a European and above all a Universal Citizen and he actively engaged himself in the cultural and political events that took place in the world around him. His constantly developing attitude towards world events was alive to important universal tendencies, and it was confined not just to Europe but to Asia and America. Goethe's works can be studied from a universal cultural horizon: for example, Goethe's reception of Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* illustrated his pronounced interest in the East and his holistic understanding of nature.

Goethe was born in Frankfurt on the Main in 1749. From 1775 until his death in 1832, Goethe lived in Weimar, now considered the cultural city of Europe. He studied at the universities of Leipzig and Strasbourg. Goethe received universal training in the sense that he learnt several languages and read the important works in world literature – works of ancient authors as well as Italian, French and English writers. Greek tragedies as well as the works of Shakespeare impressed him deeply. His first novel, *Sufferings of Young Werther*, was translated into many languages immediately after it was published. This was because the novel touched the younger generation in Europe of that time and its awareness of life. This work of literature has remained successful to this day. Even the nature and love poems of his "Storm and Stress period" (until 1775) brought a new tone to the literature of his times. Goethe became totally committed to the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe which, following the period of the Renaissance, opened further avenues for individual development. Intellect became the decisive factor in the social existence and development of the human being.

What one now knows as the Weimar classic was a universal cultural attempt, at the centre of which was Goethe. An attempt was made to realise the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment through pedagogic, artistic, scientific and political creativity. During the first ten years of his stay in Weimar, Goethe as a friend of the ruling prince even held the post of a minister. In the subsequent decades many cultural, scientific and artistic works were conceived, though these endeavours could not be realised owing to social constraints. These works established and determined the fame of classical German literature. One should not forget the fact that during this time authors such as Wieland and Herder were also actively pursuing their literary careers in Weimar.

Owing to Goethe's multifaceted political engagements, not many literary works were created during this decade. In the autumn of 1786 he set out for Italy to reflect on his personal ambitions. Italy provided for Goethe the most decisive of his educational experiences. He remained there for two years, studied intensively the art of the classical Greek antiquity and the Renaissance, experienced the landscape, drew from it, and above all completed wrote the plays *Egmont*, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, *Torquato Tasso* and *Faust*. Thereafter the ancient culture acquired an intrinsic meaning for the Weimar classic as a plan for the development and education of the human mind in the spirit of the Age of the Enlightenment.



On his return to Weimar in 1788, Goethe, who was responsible for the scientific and cultural institutions of the Duchy (its university, theatre and so on), concentrated on the long-term improvement of its people and States through aesthetic experiences which literature, art and theatre could offer. Goethe therefore rejected the French Revolution of 1789 and the

subsequent military disputes; he considered them repulsive as they stood in contrast to his progressive intentions for the gradual advancement of humanity, in particular, of the middle class. Along with poet Friedrich Schiller (until the latter's death in 1805) Goethe unfolded through his poetic and scientific works his universal and evolutionary concept of education. The demands of world history – upto the French Revolution of July 1830 – forced him to examine critically again his experiences, which he constantly reflected upon. During moments of resignation Goethe felt that European history, which in his view was predominantly chaotic, would ultimately take a humane course.

It was therefore not a coincidence that during the European war of Independence against Napoleon (1812 - 1815) Goethe started taking an interest in the history and culture of the East – from Persia to India, China and Japan. The experience of the unknown "was to revive the known, and thereby become a vehicle of communication between the East and the West as also the Old (Europe) and the New (America)". This idea was developed upon and poetically translated. From 1814, stimulated by a translation of the Persian poet Hafis Divan, many excellent poems were written, which linked the strange and the known elements with one another. These poems were published as *West-Ostlicher Divan* (Divan of the West and the East) and was supplemented by Notes and Treatises for a better understanding, which exemplified the applied synthetic experience of transmitting various cultures past as well as contemporary. In the 1820s,

Goethe developed on the idea of an integrated and communicative world literature, which he translated into reality both in his home (through the numerous visitors from all over the world) and in his poems. He expounded on European and non-European literature, and made attempts also to translate some of the works. The horizon of his poetic and thought process transcended Europe completely, and this resulted in a form of universal literature.

In later years, some of the most important works – in the context of the vision of universal literature – were created by him. Among them mention must be made of the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* or the *Renunciants* (1821/1829), the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Complete Art Work); *Faust, The Tragedy, Part II*(1832); his autobiography Poetry and Truth as well as his works on natural sciences and arts, Maxims and Reflections about nature and the universe, about philosophy, art and literature.

Goethe's works depict a style that is original, symbolical and allegorically interpretative. This style symbolises the acquired universal spirit and globality in an extraordinarily, poetically complex manner. Goethe's creative methods rule out rigidity. He dwelt upon the unresolved and inscrutable contradictions of the history of the human race which is nevertheless influenced by religion and

The real and the make-believe

JAN OTAKAR FISCHER

POSTCARDS of the most famous building in Weimar look different this year. The little pale-blue cottage is still depicted in its verdant setting in Ilm Park, but an identical twin structure is featured in some images. A provocative bit of text appears, too: "Echt?" ("Real?")

The building is Goethe's Garden House, a national shrine in Germany. Weimar has been enjoying a year as the European Union's "cultural capital," a designation prompted by Goethe's 250th birth anniversary, in August. Rather than simply polish up the city's many landmarks, the organisers challenged their visitors with an experimental conjuring trick. They built an exact copy of the Garden House some 100 metres from the original.

The project was the brainchild of Lorenz Engell, dean of media studies at Bauhaus University and a man eager to provoke essential questions about authenticity. The intricacies of determining what is "real" have particular relevance in this post-War landscape, where great tracts of the German national heritage were destroyed and have had to be rebuilt.

Engell persuaded the organisers that a second Garden House would be a valuable challenge to the cult of the original. The resulting architectural *pas de deux* has forced everyone – Weimar residents, tourists and intellectuals alike – to ponder modernist issues of reproduction and originality. Some have been bruised.

GOETHE was a man of tremendous energy, curiosity and engagement, not only the spur of German humanism, creator of the epic drama *Faust* and unsurpassed poet of his age, but also government minister, botanist, geologist, painter, designer and philosopher. Almost from the moment he arrived in Weimar in 1776 until his death in 1832, his favourite place was his modest house by a bend in the Ilm River, a short stroll from the centre of what was then a tranquil provincial capital with 5,000 inhabitants. For Germans, the Garden House represents the blossoming and pure spirit of German classicism, its simplicity and intimacy accessible even to those who have never heard of *Egmont*.

The writer was 26 and already famous when he was summoned to the court of Grand Duke Carl August, who immediately raised him to a peerage, made him a minister and bought him a temporary house to live in, at a cost of 600 taler (about Rs. 43,000 now). The house dated back at least to the end of the 16th century, when it served as a wine shed.

Goethe engaged 26 workers for the renovation, including the Duke's own cabinetmaker, J.M. Mieding. The paved rooms of the ground floor included a foyer, a kitchen, a dining room and servants' quarters, while the upper floor became Goethe's private realm – a tiny suite of library, writing room, parlour and bedroom. Goethe was most interested in the garden, a labour of love that engaged him until the end of his life. What was a tangle of weeds and brush became a charming network of terraces, pebbled pathways, lanes of vegetables and flower beds rife with hollyhocks, violets and roses.

Many years later, Goethe moved into a sprawling mustard-coloured mansion with its own garden on the Frauenplan. But he kept his Garden House. There, embedded in nature, he heard the muse most clearly, and he arranged his writing room just so, to hear her call. Improbably perched high on a suede saddle chair of his own design, his feet dangling and his back to a conical sheet metal stove, he wrote

many of his finest works.

In the garden he pondered whether there might have been a primal plant from which all others evolved. In the dining room he talked theatre with Schiller and philosophy with Herder. In the parlour he received his friend the Grand Duke and discussed the advent of Napoleon, and in the bedroom he found unexpected passion with Christiane Vulpius, a young woman with whom he lived for 18 years before they were married.

WEIMAR'S cultural events are not all devoted to the writer, of course; the highs and lows of the 20th century are also being deeply scrutinised. But Goethe's second Garden House may be the most quietly subversive provocation of the year.

Volker Laier, its planner and construction manager, reproduced everything, including the patina and traces of use, "from the threshold to the roof ridge," he said recently. The second house has the same pale-blue plastered walls, narrow shuttered windows and weathered gray shingles. The beige sandstone paving of the foyer and dining room looks scuffed and pitted. On the threshold of Goethe's dining room, the doors have scratched minute concentric circles into the stone during centuries of pivoting. The same circles are under the impostor's hinges.

Laier explained that the second Garden House was designed in 73 prefabricated sections. "You can take it on tour," he said. "It all fits into containers." The precision is uncanny. The wooden staircase and the wide floorboards look raw and rounded, as if pounded by the boots of four generations. The plain interior is replicated down to Goethe's rostrum writing table, smoothed by a waxy polish that might have come from the poet's own sweaty palms. The wear and tear of 200 years is, impossibly, everywhere evident: 200-year-old grime was simulated in nooks and crannies with green umber pigment and linseed oil.

Even the most hurried tourist will notice the only two major differences: the second Garden House has no guards and no garden. Everything can be touched. You can sit on Goethe's copy saddle and see if you are inspired. But nature is harder to reproduce. Wooden gates, pebble mosaics and benches are there, but none of the glorious flora that give the house its name.

Laier now believes that "the copy has become an original," a critical folly outside the bounds of history. To Engell, paradoxically, the original is itself a copy, since it represents only the way people understand the house at this point in time. Authenticity is always open to interpretation; the various restorations and re-restorations of the Garden House – imperial, communist, democratic – is evidence enough for academics. But judging the real is no esoteric matter in Germany.

Few other countries have such expertise in reconstruction. Gutted ruins like the Charlottenburg Palace in Berlin and the Wuerzburg Palace were immaculately restored to glory, as if the bombing had never happened. Dresden is turning the blackened rubble that was once the Frauenkirche into a reassembled phoenix. There are proposals to rebuild Berlin's Royal Palace, whose ruins were demolished by the Communists in 1950. Aside from questions about the cost, some have asked whether the resulting palace would still be the palace. To what extent would visitors feel the "aura", as the German philosopher Walter Benjamin famously described the emanation of reality, while visiting what they know to be a fraud?

And this line of questioning extends to the darkest focus of reproduction restoration: Buchenwald, whose rusting gates are almost visible from the window of Goethe's writing room. Is there not an irony involved in the retrieval of history with a simulation? Is memory served at a concentration camp when the very methods used to preserve it inevitably lead to the diminution of the "real"?

The people of Weimar, surprisingly, have embraced the replica of their chief cult object in the same way that federal politicians eventually decided that Christo's wrapping of the Reichstag was not so bad an idea after all. Seventy per cent of Weimar citizens want to keep it after the birthday year is over. At least half the nearly 1,000 people who visit the second Garden House daily know that it is a copy and are eager to see just how precise it is. The unsuspecting other half pay their 5 marks (about Rs. 115) for a quick tour and leave, feeling the perhaps false glow of a brush with the German bard. Others are confused or angry upon suddenly seeing the original house across the way, with its garden and 4 marks' admission. They too have been an essential part of the experiment.

Most of Weimar will soon nestle under the comforting blanket of a World Heritage Site designation. But the Sparkasse bank has not decided what to do with the second Garden House when it is removed at the end of October. Perhaps it will tour the world, as Laier designed it to do, a floating signifier without a context, a shrine in search of new pilgrims.

Most people seem satisfied that, come what may, the appeal of the original will remain mysteriously palpable. As Walter Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction becomes digital and genetic, it is no wonder that many crave the intimacy and peace of identity, the smell of leather and creak of wood, the nearness to something that happened long ago and only once. As a German woman clutching two wriggling children prepared to leave the custom-built sleight of hand, she discovered that she had been conned.

"What do you mean 'copy'?" she barked at a man behind the desk. "I want the real thing!" Laier just smiled and patted the lintel on his way out. ■

New York Times Service

traditions, belief, love and hope as well as usefulness and efficiency. One cannot overlook the irony and scepticism in them. His later works offer plenty of scope for reflection. Their modernity has been universally established and could be an incentive for reading. This is particularly true of the Mephistophelian problems that limit humanity and yet carry beyond the dialectic of good and bad. This is captured in *Wilhelm Meister* or in *Faust II* in a paradoxical triumph of true humanitarianism.

Goethe has presented a problem that will necessarily assume greater topicality, in "Reflections in the Spirit of the Wanderers" in *Wilhelm Meister*. He writes as follows: "I consider it the greatest misfortune of our time, which lets nothing mature, that people consume the moment that has just gone in, the one that is just coming(...), everything at great speed. This is a problem not only in the West but also in the East." ■

'Empower gram panchayats'

Interview with Arthur Bonner, author and journalist.

Seventy-six-year-old **Arthur Sebastian Bonner**, who has spent much of his life writing or talking about India, introduces himself as "a self-taught journalist". Bonner started his career in journalism with the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) when he was 19, after dropping out from school. Since then he has accumulated vast experience in radio, television and the print media. Over the last five decades, his main interest has been studying social movements and the institution of democracy in the United States, India and some other countries.

Bonner, who considers himself a Gandhian, has been a vegetarian since he came to India first in 1953 as a foreign correspondent for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and lived on in the country for eight years. His love for India was so great that he decided to return to the country in 1986 after retiring from NBC. Such is his family's bonding with India that one of his two sons (both were born in India) was named Rahul. Rahul is doing research work in Sanskrit.

Recently in Chennai to collect material for his proposed seventh book, to be titled "Deconstructing India", which deals with the changing caste system, Arthur Bonner spoke to **Asha Krishnakumar** about his perceptions of India over the last five decades and reminisced about the India of the 1950s. Excerpts from the interview:

► *What has been the nature of your relationship with India?*

I came to India first in 1953 as a radio and television correspondent for CBS. I was always interested in coming to India and I took the first opportunity I got. Unfortunately, I landed here a few years after Gandhiji died but was lucky enough to tour the country with Jawaharlal Nehru. Being also a photographer, I went with him to cover many important places and events. I was there when (E.M.S.) Namboodiripad was sworn in the first elected Communist Chief Minister of Kerala, and when major dams were commissioned, and Nehru gave the famous speech of how 'Dams are the temples of modern India'. I walked with Vinoba Bhave across the country. That was a truely revealing experience. I saw India first hand, at the grassroots level.

In the 1950s, there were a large number of foreign correspondents in India. Maybe over 20 – six Americans, six Englishmen, a Japanese, Germans, French and so on – practically every nation was represented. This was largely because Nehru was an international personality. He was always glad to meet the press.

The 1950s was the period of "Nehruvian consensus". The whole nation was represented in Nehru's Cabinet. It was not a coalition, but all States were well represented. And any Cabinet member could pick up the telephone and speak to Nehru. So too could J.K. Galbraith or Daniel Patrick Moynihan (both were U.S. Ambassadors in India). Nehru was very approachable and scholarly.

The problem with Nehru was that though he preached secularism and socialism, he never really concretised them. The failure to have a clear policy on many issues, such as on secularism, has led to the problems that India is facing now. Thus, even at that time opinion was divided on Nehru. Some compared him to Stalin while others spoke of him as Charlemagne, the great, brave king of medieval Europe.

I was in India from 1953 to 1961. Then for about a year I worked with a television network in New York and came back to India in 1962 to cover the India-China war for NBC. But the battle was over by the time we went there.

For 20 years I worked for NBC, covering events in the U.S. I also worked as a television producer. I took early retirement when I was 62. At that time I met *The New York Times* editor A.N. Rosenberg and told him that I would like to be a foreign correspondent. He said: "You dare become a foreign correspondent at 62." But I said I would go where nobody else would, to Afghanistan. He said: "We can't send anybody there as we fear they would be killed". But I insisted and he let me go. Then I went to Afghanistan several times between 1984 and 1986, each trip lasting six to seven weeks. I did detailed coverage of how th majority of the people there lived. I als wrote a book, *Among the Afghans* (Centra Asia Book Series; Duke University Press 1987). This was my second book. (Th first was on *Evangelism, Jerry McAula and His Mission*, revised in 1990).

I came to India on my own, with m retirement funds, in 1986 to study socia movements in different parts. I wanderec all over India and studied the emergence working and significance of the loca social movements:

One started by a man, whose name forget, in a match factory in Tami Nadu's Sivakasi area. He strived tc release, educate and rehabilitate workin children;

A movement started by J.P. Ryan tc help the fishing community in an Utta Pradesh village along the Ganga, where owing to the drastic fall in the catch women were turning to prostitution tc eke out a living;

A movement to rehabilitate tribal people in south Mumbai;

An education movement in a remote rural Andhra Pradesh village, started by an American, who set up a school with community help. This was really fantastic. Everyone pitched in, each with Rs.5 or Rs.10;

SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in Gujarat, which worked for women's development.

Contrary to my expectation, Gandhism was dead in all these places. They all had the spirit of Gandhiji in them – simple living, humility, non-violence and so on – but they denied it. This is because while they liked Gandhiji's humane nature, they did not like his religious or political approach.

The major factor about Gandhiji, and the thousands of people of his generation who died for the nation in the 1930s and the 1940s, was that they were not politicians who fought on the basis of caste or class, but for principles. I found some of that spirit in these people. So I thought there was some hope. But, then, these people need to be empowered. Grassroots democracy is crucial, especially at a time like this when there is political instability.

My experiences of the social movements in India led to my third book, *Averting the Apocalypse: Social Movements in India Today* (Duke University Press; 1990). It discusses 30 social movements in India. I concluded the book saying that these experiences are not widespread but need to be projected on a large scale for them to become broad-based and real.

▶ *You came to India in 1986 after a gap of 25 years and have been in touch with the country since then. Do you see many changes?*

Certainly. Inequalities – economic and social – among the people have increased and basic infrastructural facilities such as education and health have become inaccessible to most. That is why I feel that India needs more broad-based social movements of the kinds I described.

I also felt that the idea of euologising India as the biggest democracy in the world was a myth. This concern led me on to edit a book, *Democracy in India: A Hollow Shell*, along with Kancha Ilaiah and Suranjit Kumar Saha (American University Press; 1994). This book exposes Indian democracy. It has contributions from Asgar Ali Engineer on secularism and Kancha Ilaiah on the Dalit movement in Hyderabad. There are also articles on RSS' activities in Madhya Pradesh, the growth of the BJP, the growth of the Dalit movement over the years and a comparison of racism in the U.S. and casteism in India. There is also an article on the anti-liquor movement by the women of Andhra Pradesh.

▶ *Why do you say democracy is a hollow shell in India?*

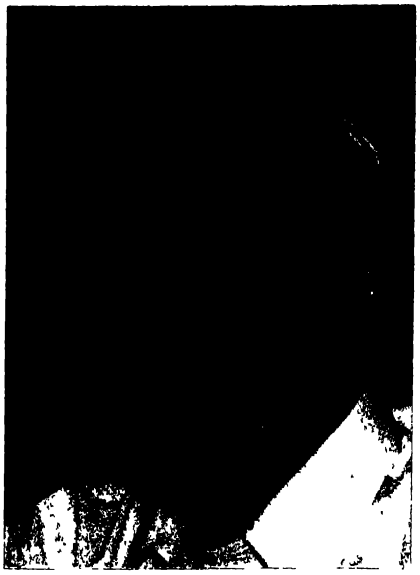
Because caste masks it. Most people, academics in particular, deny what I believe is the reality. It is caste that determines everything in India. And that is a real bane.

▶ *What are you now working on?*

I am working on a book that I have named "Deconstructing India". India is changing so rapidly, especially in terms of caste hierarchy, that its leadership is unable to keep pace. Democracy is used as a mask by the leaders to cover up many things. They talk about democracy all the time. Democracy in India cannot copy the European system. There has to emerge a democratic structure that is *sui-generis* – that which suits India.

▶ *How would you describe the sui-generis system for India?*

That is where I would bring in the role of all the social movements. There is a big difference now. A caste awakening



N BALAJI

has happened. You can see this in the increasing number of caste clashes in southern Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and in several northern States. Empowering gram panchayats is very important. People should be given the power. Only then would they see to it that everyone goes to school, that teachers get paid. There should be someone people can go to if they do not have drinking water, or a school within one kilometre of their village. So the panchayats should be empowered. It is precisely this that the politicians do not want to do because they do not want to give up their power.

Talking to many people across the board, my perception is that the solution to most of India's problems lies in giving power to the people... to the panchayats. And you need to have women in them. I realised this when I was working on the book, *Averting the Apocalypse*. All the people who spearheaded the social movements were willing to sacrifice their lives. For instance, this woman in Mumbai who was working with the people engaged in charcoal-making had decided not to have a child so that she could dedicate her life for these people. These are the people who need to be empowered. This kind of dedication and sacrifice is what I was referring to when I said the spirit of Gandhiji was still alive.

▶ *What is the role of the government in these kinds of social movements?*

It is important. But I do not know anything about how it works because I have not studied it in any detail. But what I see now is that in Indian villages if people have problems – of drinking water, of schools, of getting minimum wages and so on – they go to the people who spearhead social movements. Politicians are by and large busy with other things – they do not have time for the people. It is their (the politicians') work that some selfless people are doing. This is the change I see in India now.

▶ *Would you say that the emergence of these social movements in large numbers is the change you see now?*

There were social groups even then. But what I now see is their greater acceptance by intellectuals. They now feel that there need to be panchayats. You may ask when you would see proof of this change. Unfortunately, you have crooks breaking down governments (excuse me for using the word 'crooks'). You have a situation in Bihar where the wife is made the Chief Minister. This is not democracy. So, it may take longer than necessary for these kinds of changes (brought about by social movements) to make a difference to the common people.

▶ *What do you think of the future of India?*

I am not really sure. But I think there must be much greater autonomy for the States – never separation, but greater autonomy. This is one of the many errors Nehru committed. There should have been greater autonomy for States such as Punjab, Assam and (Jammu and) Kashmir. But Nehru suppressed all of them. Its price we are paying now. We no longer have people who came from the national freedom movement, but we have those working for a regional cause.

▶ *What are your other interests, apart from studying India?*

I have worked on many social issues in the U.S. My primary interests have been studying racism, the tribal people and the lives of the downtrodden and vulnerable in general. I have written a book on the history of the Chinese in New York (*Alas! What Brought Thee Hither?: The Chinese in New York - 1800-1950*; Fairlaigh Dickinson University Press; 1996), which is an examination of racism in the U.S. The Chinese (there) have been tremendously hit by racism.

I am also interested in Mexico. Recently I studied the tribal people of southern Mexico who converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. The plight of the tribal people in Mexico is similar to such people in India – they speak their own languages and are isolated from the mainstream. I studied why they got converted and what difference it made to their lives. Based on this study, I wrote a book, *We Will Not Be Stopped: Evangelical Persecution, Catholicism and Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico*; Upublish.Com; 1999. ■

Novel cyclotron ventures

Scientists at two pioneering institutions are working to build the country's first medical cyclotron and a superconducting cyclotron. They will also be involved in a unique nuclear science experiment in Geneva.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
recently at Bidhan Nagar

FOR scientists at the Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) and the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP) at Bidhan Nagar in Salt Lake, a suburb of Calcutta, the months ahead promise to be eventful. The two institutions, which come under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), will be partners in building India's first medical cyclotron and a superconducting cyclotron; they have also been chosen, against stiff global competition, to participate in the world's largest and most sophisticated nuclear science experiment to build a Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Geneva. The VECC and the SINP will provide trained manpower and equipment valued at $25 million for the LHC project, to be implemented by the European Centre for Nuclear Research or CERN, the world's largest laboratory for nuclear research, using accelerators.

According to Dr. Bikash Sinha, Director of the VECC and the SINP, the medical cyclotron will help produce radio isotopes, which are used to diagnose and fight various kinds of cancers and heart diseases. The process of land acquisition had begun and the facility would be commissioned in 18 months, he said.

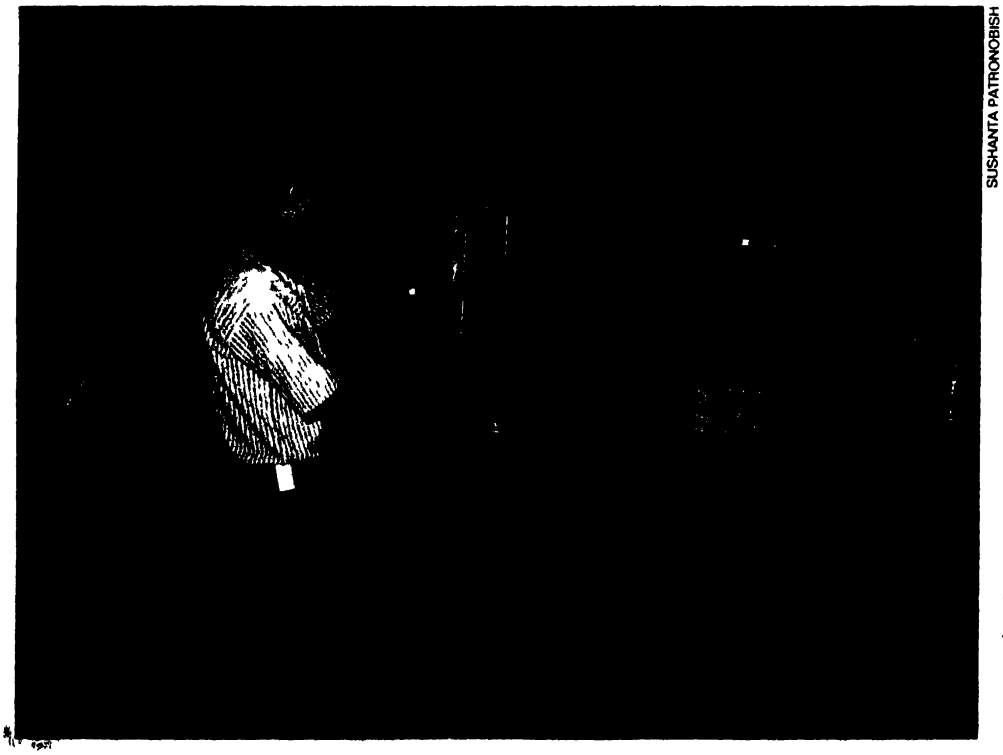
The superconducting cyclotron, which will be built on the campus of the VECC/SINP, will signal a quantum leap in basic and applied research. Apart from its use in basic sciences, it will find applications in cryogenic technology, radiation damage related to reactor materials, and storage of surplus power, among other things.

Officials at the SINP are also preparing for the golden jubilee celebrations of the institute in January 2000. The Institute of Nuclear Physics, as it was originally called, was founded by the pioneering scientist Meghnad Saha; in 1958 it was named after Saha, who died in 1956.

MUCH of man's knowledge of nuclear physics has accrued from research done using cyclic accelerators called cyclotrons. These are huge devices in which the energy levels of charged particles are boosted under the combined action of crossed electric and magnetic fields. The velocities attained by the accelerated particles correspond to energies from kiloelectron volts (keV) to millions of electron volts (meV). These highly energised particles – protons, deutrons, alphas and heavy ions – are then used to bombard various nuclei to produce nuclear reactions.

One of the uses of cyclotrons is in the production of radio isotopes. Radio pharmaceuticals are the diagnostic tools of the atomic age, and the active ingredient in a radio pharmaceutical is a radioactive isotope. The new discipline of nuclear medicine deals with the use of radio pharmaceuticals and radiation for diagnosis and treatment of various diseases. Primary radio isotopes are produced by irradiating suitable materials, known as targets, either in a nuclear reactor or in a cyclotron.

A company, the West Bengal Radio Pharmaceuticals Ltd, has been formed to execute the Rs.42-crore medical cyclotron project. It is a joint venture of Ion Beam Applications (IBA), Belgium, the world's leading manufacturer of cyclotrons; banks; and the Science and Technology Departments of the Union Government and the West Bengal Government.



SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

The variable energy cyclotron at the Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre at Bidhan Nagar, Salt Lake, near Calcutta.

A landmark in cryogenic technology

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

THE project to build a superconducting cyclotron, a sophisticated accelerator, is one of the most important ventures that the Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) has on hand. The project will bring into play advanced technology in cryogenics and other areas. West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu laid the foundation stone for the building to house the project on June 18, 1997.

According to Dr. Bikash Sinha, Director of the VECC and the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics (SINP), "It will be a landmark in the country's progress in advanced cryogenic technology."

There are only five superconducting cyclotrons in the world: at Chalk River, Canada; at Michigan State University and East College Station, Texas, both in the United States; at Groningen, the Netherlands; and at Catania, Italy.

Dr. Rakesh K. Bhandari, Project Manager, Superconducting Cyclotron, said the device would be installed at a cost of Rs.55 crores. "The design is from the U.S., but we shall set it up ourselves. Work on assembling it will start in a year," Bhandari said.

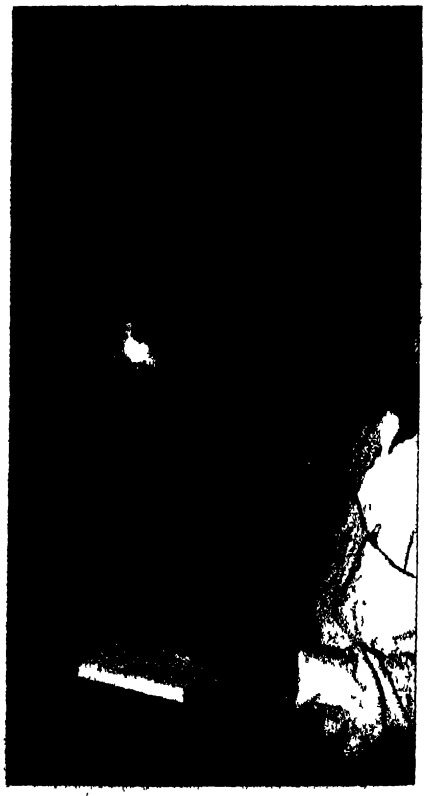
The cyclotron's operation would extend from 30 million electron volts (MeV)/nucleon to 200 MeV/nucleon. Sinha said it would usher in a new era in experimental nuclear science and technology, facilitating a quantum leap in basic and applied research. The technological spin-offs would be immense and would provide Indian scientists with expertise in, among other things, fusion research, superconducting magnets for medical diagnosis and storage of surplus power, he said.

The fabrication of the mechanical structure of the radio frequency system has been taken up by the central workshop, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Trombay, Mumbai. An exclusive programme for computer simulation has been initiated at the VECC. The massive magnet, weighing 262 tonnes, will be made by the Heavy Engineering Corporation Ltd, Ranchi. The 42,000-km-long superconducting coil will be immersed in 300 litres of helium inside a cryostat, which will be manufactured in the country.

Another development that has excited engineers and scientists of the VECC, the SINP, and other institutions is the Department of Atomic Energy's (DAE) participation in the project to build a Large Hadron Collider (LHC) near Geneva.

The largest of CERN's existing accelerators, the Large Electron Positron Collider (LEP), is circular, with a circumferance of 27 km; it accelerates electrons and positrons to energies of 45 gigavolts (GeV). The LHC will be even larger and will make it possible to research some fundamental issues in physics such as the definitive signatures of quark-glucon plasma (QGP).

On March 29, 1996, a protocol to an earlier agreement was signed by CERN and the DAE for India's participation in the project. Since then, the Centre for Advanced Technology (CAT), Indore; BARC, Mumbai; Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai; and the VECC and the SINP have been interacting with CERN.



A model of the superconducting cyclotron that is being built at the VECC, and Dr. Rakesh K. Bhandari, Project Manager, Superconducting Cyclotron.

Under the protocol, India will make a contribution, valued at $25 million, in terms of manpower and supply of hardware and software. Of this, CAT will supply two 50,000-litre liquid nitorogen storage tanks, high-technology items such as six prototypes of superconducting sextupole corrector magnets, various other types of magnets and manpower to conduct magnetic measurement tests.

According to Dr. Ashok Mohan, Technical Adviser (International Relations) to the Atomic Energy Commission Chairman, the LHC is being built underground across the France-Switzerland border, and visitors to the facility will require visas from both countries.

According to VECC scientists, collision of two heavy nuclei, like that of gold, moving at speeds close to that of light may create conditions of sufficiently high temperature and density for hadrons to dissolve into a plasma of quarks and gluons, very much like the state that existed in the early universe a microsecond after the Big Bang. The study of this "mini bang" in the laboratory is one of the most important fields of research for nuclear and particle physicists, astrophysicists, and cosmologists all over the world.

In a breakthrough, Sinha, Dr. Janee-Alam, senior scientist, VECC, and Prof. Sibaji Raha, senior nuclear scientist, J.C. Bose Institute, have found the answer to one of the most mystifying scientific questions: what comprises the cold, dark matter that survived the Big

found the theoretical answer, the three scientists are now attempting to provide evidence of these "strangelets" or the dark matter. Success on this front will not only point to how galaxies were formed but help find new sources of safe nuclear energy. Sinha said their findings had excited scientists participating in the recent International Conference on Quark Matter, Torino, Italy. ■

According to Sinha, Belgium has provided the Indian Government an interest-free loan of Rs.15.6 crores for the medical cyclotron project; the DAE has given the SINP Rs.3.2 crores, and the Union Government's Department of Science and Technology (DST) has provided a loan of Rs.3 crores. The Department of Science and Technology, West Bengal, has contributed Rs.10 lakhs. The West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) has provided two acres (0.8 hectare) of land nearby. The IBA will instal the medical cyclotron, which will cost Rs.31 crores.

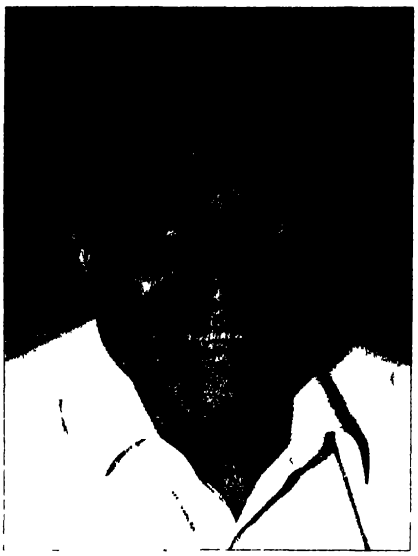
Sinha said, "Earlier, we used to produce radio isotopes from reactors. All over the world cyclotron-produced isotopes are abundantly used. They are much cheaper."

THE medical cyclotron, named Cyclone-30, is a compact machine of advanced design, producing an intense beam of 30 MeV protons. By bombarding various targets, different radioactive isotopes are created. Some of these isotopes are invaluable in the treatment of serious diseases. Thallous chloride, made out of an isotope of thallium, is used in the diagnosis of heart diseases. This is now imported from the United Kingdom, and hence costly. Sinha said:"The medical cyclotron will make advanced diagnosis more accessible to the common man."

In cancer treatment, precise diagnosis is vital: determining the exact location of the tumour is important, as otherwise healthy cells will be killed. Sinha said that an isotope called palladium "is a sure cure for prostate cancer, if diagnosed early." Palladium radio isotope is a "biological bullet: it seeks out cancerous cells and kills them," Sinha said.

It took 10 years for the project to become a reality. Sinha said that several Indian enterprises were asked to take up the commercial aspect of the cyclotron venture, including the product distribution, but none of them wanted to participate in the project. The radio isotopes produced will be sold to hospitals in the country and will also be exported to China, South Asia and West Asia. An all-India survey of possible buyers showed it would be a commercially viable venture.

The VECC has set up a Regional Radiation Medicine Centre (RRMC) at Thakurpukur, West Bengal, in collaboration with the Cancer Centre Welfare Home. It uses gamma cameras and radio immuno assay for the diagnosis of diseases and a 4 MeV medical linear accelerator for cancer therapy. Every day about 200 patients from the eastern and north-eastern regions visit the RRMC.



SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

Dr. Bikash Sinha, Director of the VECC and the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics.

According to Sinha, the variable energy cyclotron at the VECC is unique. In 1964, Homi Jehangir Bhabha, the architect of India's nuclear energy programme, decided to set up a cyclotron. The project was sanctioned in August 1969 and work began three months later. Fabrication of the key component, a massive magnet weighing 262 tonnes, began at the Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi, Bihar, in August 1970 and was completed five years later. On June 16, 1977, the first internal beam of alpha particles was obtained from the cyclotron.

According to Dr. Rakesh K. Bhandari, head of the Accelerator Physics Group and Project Manager of Superconducting Cyclotron, the basic purpose of a cyclotron is to study the structure of the nucleus. The world's first cyclotron was installed at Berkeley, U.S., in 1937. Its inventor, E.O. Lawrence, won the Nobel Prize.

Bhandari said the variable energy cyclotron was so called because "we can vary the energy of the proton beam from six million electron volts to 60 million electron volts. This will enable scientists to do experiments at different energies."

In a cyclotron, the aim is to energise charged particles such as protons and alpha particles to high velocity, as much as half the velocity of light. When these energised particles are used to hit a target, the nucleus breaks, a nuclear reaction takes place, and scientists study the structure of the nucleus, that is, the structure of matter in general. While the magnetic field in a cyclotron makes the particles go in a circular path, the electric field imparts a high velocity.

Bhandari explained: "When we accelerate them from low energy to high energy, they must be in a vacuum... The charged particles are just like light beams. The magnets act as lenses. With the help of the magnets, we can bend the charged particles. Particles themselves are used for doing experiments. Once they hit a particular target, they are lost."

Scientists at the VECC are excited also by the prospect of working on the Radioactive Ion Beam (RIB) project in collaboration with SINP. The technology needed to develop an RIB facility is very complex. RIBs will support experiments in nuclear astrophysics and material sciences and basic and applied research in condensed matter physics, biology, chemistry and medicine.

ADJACENT to the VECC is the SINP, which was founded by Saha and which focusses on fundamental research. In 1938, when Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassman discovered nuclear fission, Saha, who at that time held the Palit Chair of the Physics Department of Calcutta University, sensed the urgency of initiating nuclear research in India. He secured from Sir Dorabji Tata Rs.40,000 for the founding of the Institute of Nuclear Physics, which came up around a baby cyclotron, which was indigenously built, on the Rajabazar campus. Madame Joliot-Curie formally inaugurated the Institute on January 11, 1950. From January 1, 1972, it became a unit of the DAE, and in the 1980s it moved to its present location.

According to Sinha, the SINP now has one of the largest nuclear science groups in the country and a string of laboratories with state-of-the-art equipment. Besides nuclear physics, the SINP carries on research in fields as varied as string theory, protein structure, high temperature super conductivity, high intensity magnetic field, quark gluon plasma, surface physics, astrophysics, biology and cosmology.

Important experiments are being done on protein engineering in the protein crystallography laboratory. These are directed at deciphering the structural and functional relationship of medicinally important proteins, especially enzymes and their inhibitors. ■

AIDS and some concerns

As international agencies pour in funds for AIDS programmes in India, doubts are raised in some quarters about the priorities.

LYLA BAVADAM
in Mumbai

MAHARASHTRA has the highest reported incidence of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) cases among the States of India. As of August 31, 1998, according to the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), 417,844 persons were screened in the State and 45,864 of them were confirmed sero-positive or infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, and 3,251 had full-blown AIDS. The State also has the only known cases of infection by HIV-II, a mutated form of HIV, of which there are only two other reported cases in South Asia – in Sri Lanka. According to a 1997 World Health Organisation (WHO) report, the estimated number of people infected with HIV in India are 2.5 million.

On September 28, Maharashtra received $41.5 million from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for an AIDS control project to be implemented by NACO in collaboration with the State government. The project, which will receive the USAID funding over a period of seven years, seeks to increase the use of effective and sustainable means to reduce the rate of transmission and mitigate the impact of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and related infectious diseases in the State.

While NACO will implement the project, many more agencies will be involved in the field work. The donor agencies will work closely with the Maharashtra AIDS Society, the Mumbai District AIDS Society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private health care providers, municipal authorities and community-based groups. A Health Department official said: "The role of NGOs is crucial because they can operate more freely than government agencies and I admit that they also have better credibility than government medical bodies."

Pramod Nigudkar, Deputy Director of the Mumbai District AIDS Society, said. "We will be the facilitators and provide both technical and financial support." Nigudkar believes that AIDS control is possible only through a multi-sectoral response from society since AIDS has to be treated primarily as a social rather than a medical problem, especially considering the fact that there was no known cure for the syndrome.



In the red light district in Mumbai.

There are three known routes by which HIV spreads and the project would look into all three. The commonest route is sexual intercourse, homosexual and heterosexual. A WHO publication has said that the nature of the virus makes women more vulnerable than men to AIDS because the transmission of HIV from male to female is more efficient than from female to male. Women are more vulnerable also because of their low status in society which limits their choices. It has been noticed that persons suffering from STIs were susceptible to HIV infection. In Maharashtra, STIs figured among the top five diseases for which adults sought medical help. The project planned to vigorously target this group.

The second route of HIV transmission is through infected blood and blood products and contaminated needles and syringes, including those used by injecting drug users (IDUs). The rate of HIV transmission is highest in the northeastern States.

The third route is from an infected mother to a child during pregnancy, at birth or after birth. The possibility of HIV transmission at these stages is believed to be 30 per cent. The trend seen in many countries is that the virus spreads quickly to the general population. Women are increasingly infected, and the number of instances of pregnant women passing on the infection to babies has risen. The programme aims to treat pregnant women. This would involve the use of anti-retroviral drugs – as yet an expensive and controversial method of treatment.

Nigudkar outlined the main target groups of the project as long-distance truck drivers, migrant workers, street youth, commercial sex workers (CSWs) and their children, patients with STIs and IDUs. In essence, the programme will follow the IEC

strategy – Information, Education and Communication – propounded about 12 years ago when the first phase of the battle against AIDS in India was taken up with funding from the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAID) and the World Bank. Although the programme projected the goal of AIDS control, it was generally known that the initial seven-year period was one of learning rather than implementation. "Now we will put into practice what we learnt between 1992 and 1999," said Nigudkar.

Government agencies and NGOs agree that the most effective way to control AIDS is to influence sexual behaviour. "The only way we can do this is by educating them and by implementing complementary programmes to ensure the detection and cure of STIs and tuberculosis (TB), safe blood transfusion procedures and safe injecting behaviour," said Nigudkar.

One success story of the IEC approach is the NACO-WHO project implemented at Sonagachi in Calcutta's red light district in 1992 (Frontline, December 29, 1995). The project initiated an STI-HIV intervention programme for CSWs. The baseline survey revealed a high percentage of women with STIs. A clinic was established in the area. After a year another survey showed that the number of STI cases had dropped by 30 per cent and the awareness on STI and HIV increased by almost 100 per cent.

FOREIGN funding was increasingly becoming a source of controversy in the field of AIDS control and care. Earlier this year the World Bank sanctioned funds totalling $250,000 for the second phase of another all-India AIDS control programme. For the first phase, from 1992 to 1997, the Bank had allotted $84 million. And UNAID is expected to release an as yet unstated amount for the same programme soon.

Many social workers have objected to the estimates on AIDS cases in India. Requesting anonymity, a worker with an organisation that has received foreign funding insisted: "There is no AIDS pandemic. This is just a big scare." Another social worker described the vast foreign funding as "a dollar-driven agenda with the final goal of using people with AIDS in India as guinea pigs for vaccine trials. Just look at the figures these funding agencies throw at us. Four million! Elleven million! It is unrealistic to put a number on AIDS or HIV-infected cases."

The 1997 UNAIDS Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the World Health Organisation said: "In India, infection rates, at under 1 per cent of the total adult population, are still low by the standards of many countries, although it is well over 10 times higher than in neighbouring China. Surveillance is patchy, but all indications are that between 3 and 5 million people in India are living with HIV. Even at the bottom of that range, India is the country with the largest number of HIV-infected people in the world. Testing on pregnant women in Mumbai showed infection rates of around 2.4 per cent in 1996."

On a global scale, the same report estimated that 30.6 million people lived with AIDS at the end of 1997, of whom six million were in South Asia and South-East Asia. The report also said: "Nine out of 10 infected people in the world do not know their HIV status. At current estimates, that would suggest there are over 27 million people in the world today who have no idea that they are infected."

In April this year in New Delhi, the parliamentary Standing Committee on Dreaded Diseases said in its report that one in four HIV-positive persons worldwide is in India.

Another common complaint is that funds should be spent for the control of TB and malaria, diseases for which there are cures rather than spending on what one social worker called "a lost hope". Social workers allege that the figures of TB are inverted and projected as possible AIDS figures and that the blood samples that are taken into account are largely from people who practised high-risk behaviour, such as CSWs and truck drivers, and the test results projected as being representative of the general population.

Workers spoke of the desperate need to change the attitude of the medical profession towards AIDS patients, both in terms of doctors turning away AIDS-affected people and families being informed of person's status *vis-a vis* AIDS without the consent of that person.

Some social workers feel that funding is not sufficiently oriented towards care and relief of AIDS patients. "The need of the moment is relief from AIDS. We have seen women who were thrown out of their homes because their families suspected they had AIDS. People have lost their jobs because of social stigma and fear. What about this segment of people?" asked a social worker who says that hardly any funds have been spent to provide relief to AIDS patients.

Health activists and workers say that any AIDS control programme should extend its reach to encompass safe management of blood and sperm banks, management of hospital waste, precautionary measures in hospitals, availability of drugs, provision of counselling and terminal care services and sensitisation of the medical profession. ■

A complex case

LYLA BAVADAM

THE Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a complex one which rapidly changes its structure. This is a reason why it has been difficult to find a cure or develop a vaccine for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). HIV is part of a closely related group of viruses known as retroviruses. As the name suggests, this group goes against the natural order of things: instead of following the biological rule in which genetic commandments flow from the master molecule deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) to ribonucleic acid (RNA), retroviruses reverse the process. The effect of the reversal of genetic hierarchy is catastrophic. Simply put, it enables HIV to incapacitate the white blood cells to fight disease.

It is important to distinguish between full-blown AIDS cases and an HIV infection. People infected with HIV may take between seven and ten years to develop AIDS. Other factors such as malnutrition and poor health could speed up the progression of the disease.

Tuberculosis (TB) and HIV form a deadly duo with the latter riding piggyback on the passive TB bacterium. The bacterium is supposed to be present in one-third of the world's population but it gets activated only if the immune system is weak. The presence of HIV not only severely affects a TB carrier but results in the mutation of the bacterium, which becomes resistant to known TB cures. The prevalence of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) is worldwide. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the rate of MDR-TB in India is on the increase, especially in Mumbai, where HIV infection rates among [illegible] is estimated to be above 40 per cent. ■

Roadblocks in Asia

Unstable governments, insurgency, border conflicts and similar factors prove to be roadblocks to the development of the 90,000 km-long Asian Highway network.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

FORTY years after the Asian Highway Project (AHP) was conceived, the network, which would stretch over 90,000 km between Istanbul in the west and Beijing in the east and connect 25 countries, remains on paper. Although internal highway networks in most of these countries are already in place and what remains to be done is only the upgradation of this network to international standards and the opening of national borders to provide connectivity to passenger and freight traffic, realpolitik has rendered the exercise formidable. Thus the idea of free flow of trade and tourists across geographical and political boundaries has been hit by ground realities – unstable political regime, insurgencies, tensions on the borders, not to mention the growth and spread of drug trafficking in the entire region.

Originally the project was aided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Now the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) coordinates and monitors ITS implementation. At its 48th session held in 1992, ESCAP endorsed the integrated Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project comprising the AHP and the Trans-Asian Railway Project. Of the 90,000-km-long AHP, five international routes comprise 40,000 km and 37 subregional routes, 50,000 km. The highway will cover the whole of Asia from Turkey to China, except Bhutan, the Korean Peninsula and the Russian Federation.

The basic principle behind the network is to make the most of existing infrastructure. The route criteria emphasise capital-to-capital links for international transport and connection to main industrial and agricultural centres, "growth triangle zones", major sea and river ports, and inland container terminals and depots.

A pre-requisite for the operationalisation of the highway network is harmonised transport facilitation measures at the national and international levels. For this, the ESCAP session recommended that the member-nations accede to seven international conventions. These include the Convention on Road Traffic, 1968; the Convention on Road Signs and Signals, 1968; the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets, 1975; the Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Commercial Road Vehicles, 1956; the Customs Convention on Containers, 1972; the International Convention on the Harmonisation of Frontier Control of Goods, 1982; and the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road, 1956. The two international transit conventions that ESCAP wants member-nations to accede to include the Convention and Statutes of Freedom of Transit, Barcelona, 1921 and the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States, New York, 1965.

J.B. Mathur, Chief Engineer in the roads development wing of the Ministry of Surface Transport, told *Frontline* that in addition to these conventions, protocols relating to contraband, especially those related to checking for arms at land borders, would have to be finalised before the project could be implemented. According to him, the progress of the project has been rather slow mainly because of the reluctance of nations to open up their borders to traffic, especially in these times of heightened border tensions. After the Kargil war the prospects for the smooth flow of traffic through the Indo-Pakistan border have receded. Although the New Delhi-Lahore bus service, which was opened following Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's initiative, remains operational, only non-Pakistanis are allowed access into and passage through India from the Pakistan border. Myanmar and Afghanistan, both with unstable political regimes, are perceived to be major stumbling blocks to operationalising the highway network in the South Asian region.

INDIA, one of the initiators of the project, has consistently called for the cooperation of the countries of the region in the development of land transport infrastructure and facilitation of international transport and travel, in order to promote regional trade and tourism. After the 48th session of ESCAP, the Asian Highway routes in India underwent some changes. The project now envisages a road length of 11,662 km providing international connectivity – at Atari to Pakistan, at Banbasa to Nepal, at Barhi to Bangladesh, at Imphal to Myanmar and at Dhanushkodi to Sri Lanka.

Two priority routes pass through India – A1 and A2.

According to Prafulla Kumar, Director-General, Roads Development, and Additional Secretary to the Government of India, major works of development and improvement on A1 are over. Of the total length of 1,995 km, 722 km is already four-lane and the rest will be upgraded similarly during the next few years. A 375-km stretch of A2 passes through India. Upgrading has been completed in the last of the 28-km stretch from Delhi and the work on the remaining part is on. On the other routes, the Bangalore-Hosur, Anakapalli-Bhubaneshwar and Indore-Tumkur sections have been made four-lane.

The government has decided to undertake major improvement work along four major corridors linking the metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta and aggregating a length of 5,000 km. The National Highways Authority of India has initiated feasibility studies and construction activities along this corridor, which will cover a major portion of the Asian Highway network.

India will present a status report on its efforts to implement the project at the World Roads Congress to be held at Kuala Lumpur this month. Officials in the Ministry of Surface Transport are of the view that despite all the obstacles, the completion of the network, which will form the lifeline of the region, is unstoppable. ■

Double-talk on subsidies

The case of agricultural subsidies in global trade negotiations.

BIPLAB DASGUPTA

ONE of the paradoxes of world trade is that the richest and the most industrialised countries, which enjoy no comparative advantage in agriculture, dominate the world export market for wheat and several other primary products. Given their relative labour situation and natural endowments, one would expect, on purely economic grounds, that they would specialise in the production and export of industrial goods, leaving to the poor agricultural countries the production and export of agricultural goods. But the fact is that despite the high costs of labour and machine, they supply wheat to the world market at a price that is lower than that quoted by Third World exporters.[1]

The paradox is quite easy to resolve. The rich countries have succeeded in "creating" comparative advantage for their agricultural exports by way of subsidies to their very small number of agriculturists. The subsidy is of such an unimaginable scale that it has turned what is costly and non-viable and should not be produced in developed countries into one of their most lucrative export items. The "cheap" wheat is used both to make agriculture a profitable business for the farmers of the United States and West Europe and to attain the diplomatic goals of their governments. From the days of PL 480, food diplomacy has been one of the major components of the foreign and defence strategies of the U.S.[2] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (taking the European Community, or E.C., the U.S. and others together) account for 80 per cent of the world cereal trade; more than 55 per cent of these cereals are sold to less developed countries.[3]

While the high subsidy, coupled with rigorous import control and high tariff, helps to explain this paradox – of highly industrialised countries capturing the world agricultural market – this in turn gives rise to yet another paradox. How countries that advocate a "no subsidy" world trade order and pressure poor countries to withdraw agricultural subsidies in all forms – including those given to the Public Distribution System (PDS) and for price support and export – could give subsidy to their own agriculturists? Again, this paradox can be explained easily:

TOWARDS SEATTLE

because they dominate the world politically, militarily and economically and frame the rules for world trade in their own interest. These rules allow them to continue, even after the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement, with their own large subsidies, *albeit* in some diluted form, while the markets of the poor countries are forced open and flooded with subsidised "cheap" wheat exports from the rich countries. Defying economic logic and their own market-based theology, both the U.S. and western Europe, the greatest champions of an open-house policy, continue to protect and subsidise their own agriculture and, by all accounts, will do so for many years to come. "Do what I say, don't do what I do" seems to be their motto.

How large a subsidy do they give their less-than-10-million agriculturists? Compared with the equivalent of $1 billion that India gives its 600 million agriculturists, the U.S. Government provided farm subsidy to the tune of $32 billion even in 1989 according to one calculation while the corresponding figures for western Europe and Japan were $53 billion and $33 billion.[4] The total subsidy given annually by OECD countries to their agricultural producers reached a staggering figure of $240 billion.[5] One OECD study in the early 1990s estimated production subsidy equivalents (in percentage of producer prices) in 1991 at 66 per cent for Japan, 49 per cent for the countries of the E.C., and 30 per cent for the U.S.[6] There cannot be the slightest doubt that if such subsidies and import control are withdrawn by the E.C. and the U.S., the direction of trade would radically change overnight. These markets would be flooded by wheat exports from the Third World. In that changed world scenario, not a single grain of their wheat would be exported, not to speak of their exports dominating the world wheat market. These subsidies have artificially kept world wheat prices at a level that is between 8 per cent and 17 per cent lower than what would have been the case otherwise, and this has deprived agriculturists in the Third World of their due share from trade.[7]

The issue of agricultural subsidy, which exposes the double-talk of the rich world more than on any other subject and explodes the myth of world wheat prices being rational and objective, will come up for discussion in the four-day Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle from November 30. According to a 1993 estimate, a reduction by 30 per cent in the average level of protection in the OECD

1 Biplab Dasgupta, *Structural Adjustment, Global Trade and the New Political Economy of Development*, Sage (Delhi), Zed Books (London), 1998, Chapter 4.

2 Theodore H. Cohn, *The Changing Role of the United States in the Global Agricultural Trade Regime*, Chapter 2, in William P. Avery (ed), World Agriculture and the GATT, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder & London, 1993, p.22.

3 OECD, The Technology/ Economy Programme, *Technology and the Economy* – The Key Relationship, OECD, Paris, 1992, p. 13.

4 Jimmye S. Hillman, *The U.S. Perspective*, in K.A. Ingersent, A J. Rayner and R. C. Hine (eds), *Agriculture in the Uruguay Round*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, p. 46.

5 Kevin Watkins, *Fixing the Rules: North South Issues in International Trade and GATT Uruguay Round*, Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1992, p. 70).

6 Development Committee, 44th meeting, September 1992, World Bank, Washington D.C., 1992, p. 94.

7 Michael Atkin, *The International Grain Trade*, 2nd edition, Woodhead Publishing Ltd., Cambridge, 1995, p. 50).

countries would produce a gain of $195 billion for the world economy, which is greater than the entire income of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. Of this, about $90 billion would accrue to less developed countries, an amount that is twice the annual quantum of official development assistance given to these countries. Complete abolition of protection would entail a global welfare gain of $475 billion, according to this estimate.[8]

We must do what all countries of the world, rich or poor, large or small, socialist or capitalist, usually do – to examine carefully cases where subsidy and control are necessary to augment domestic production and seek self-sufficiency.

Historically, until the Uruguay Round, U.S. government policy on agriculture had been highly protectionist. It began with the objective of import substitution, which arose from a concern for national security and the consequent urge for self-reliance in food. But this is grossly overdone. In time, the astronomical level of subsidies catapulted the country to its present position as the leading exporter in the world. Along with subsidies, a ridiculously large agricultural administration has come into being in the U.S. It is difficult to believe but true that there is now one bureaucrat for every five farmers and the budget of the U.S. Department of Agriculture exceeds the net income of all farmers.[9]

In western Europe, a food-deficit region until the 1970s, the subsidy is given under what is known as the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) of the Common Market, which has been operating since 1962 as a component of an import substitution strategy. Under CAP, high support prices are maintained for major crops, and a *variable levy system*, which ensures that foreign agricultural goods are always priced higher than their local counterparts, is imposed. Further, export subsidies (referred to as *export refunds* or *restitution*) are given to agricultural producers to dispose of their surplus. The massive subsidies, under what is known as the Export Enhancement Programme (EEP), radically transformed the agrarian economy of essentially food-deficit Europe. In 1970 the E.C. imported agricultural goods but, thanks to the subsidies, by 1980 it was self-sufficient in food, and by 1986 its agricultural exports – cereals, beef, sugar, and dairy products – surpassed those from the U.S.

Naturally, both the U.S. and western Europe were opposed to making agriculture a major item of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations until the Uruguay Round, as their agricultural policies were clearly at variance with known GATT prescriptions. In 1955, in an extraordinary manner, again defying all sense of fair play, the U.S. was given a waiver from normal GATT prescriptions, and this allowed it to continue with high levels of protection for its agriculture.[10] In Europe's case, the justification for the protection and subsidy was that CAP was an essential element needed to bind its members together and without this Europe would lose its political cohesion.[11] So much for the principles of free trade and the "fundamental" economic principle of unhindered flow of goods and services across international borders.

However, over time, as a consequence of ever-increasing pressure from various lobbies, agricultural subsidies, continued to rise steeply, even faster than what even the richest countries could afford. Sixty to seventy per cent of the E.C's common fund was spent on subsidies, leaving lesser and lesser funds for other equally demanding needs. The E.C. budgetary support for agriculture rose from 4.7 billion ecu out of the 6.2-billion ecu overall budget in 1975 to 46.3 billion ecu out of the 58.4 billion budget in 1991.[12]

The level of agricultural subsidies proved too high even for an economic giant like the U.S., particularly when the U.S. budget showed enormous deficits,[13] thereby seriously threatening the country's macroeconomic balance. In 1986, U.S. agricultural exports slumped to $26 billion, but the government handout to farmers, at $30 billion, exceeded the export earnings. In this situation, one alternative actively promoted by the U.S. government to reduce production prompted by subsidy, ridiculous though it may appear in the global context, was to induce farmers to leave the land fallow, for which they were rewarded with subsidy. Thus the farmers were paid not to produce in a desperate bid to reduce the scale of subsidy.[14]

Once the U.S. Government, facing chronic budget and balance of payment deficits, decided to reduce its own level of subsidy, it was in its own interest to make the rest of the world conform to its policies. This explains the 180-degree turn in the policy of the U.S. on agriculture, its advocacy of lower agricultural subsidies, and its pushing of agriculture as a major item for trade negotiations in the Uruguay Round.

However, the U.S. did not propose complete elimination of producer subsidy in the Uruguay Round discussions; it wanted only the part of subsidy tied to output-increasing incentives to go. The U.S. safety regulations in relation to internal food supply were not sacrificed. In the Marrakesh Agreement on agriculture, under *reduction commitments*, members were expected to reduce from 1986-90 levels their budgetary outlay on agricultural subsidies, by 36 per cent and their volume by 21 per cent, over a period of six years. For the less developed countries, a 24 per cent cut in value and a 14 per cent cut in volume in 10 equal annual instalments were ordained. It is important to notice that subsidies were only subjected to proportionate cuts, not to any absolute ceiling, or per-agriculturist or per-beneficiary ceiling. Given that subsidy levels were already high in the U.S. and western Europe, even after such percentage reductions, the actual levels of subsidy given to their agriculturists remain extraordinarily high, compared

8 Michael Atkin, *Snouts in the Trough: European Farmers, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Public Purse*, Woodhead Publishing Ltd, Cambridge, 1993, p. 117.
9 Atkin, 1995, op.cit., pp. 26-28; C. Folmer, M. A. Keyzer, M. D. Merbis, H. J. J. Stolwijk and P. J. J Veenendaal, *The Common Agricultural Policy Beyond the Machsherry Reform*, North Holland, Amsterdam, 1995.
10 Patrick Low, *Trading Free – the GATT and the U.S. Trade Policy*, A Twentieth Century Fund Book, New York, 1995, p.24.
11 Cohn, op.cit., p.25.
12 Atkin, 1993, op.cit., p.85.
13 Cohn, pp. 27-30.
14 Hillman, op. cit., pp. 32-33, p.46.

with those in less developed countries. It will take generations for this to be whittled down to the levels of subsidy in India.[15]

The very high subsidies given by rich governments were to be cut as a percentage of their steep levels, but, by a suitable manipulation of definition, they managed to take most of their subsidies out of the way of these cuts. This they managed to do by classifying subsidies into "goodies" and "baddies", so to say, and made only the "trade-distorting subsidies" illegal. However, what is trade distorting in its effect on production and what is not is a matter of judgment. The rich countries, which frame the rules, decided that most of their own subsidies had no trade-distorting effect on production and, therefore, were not subjected to cuts. The *deficiency payments* of the U.S. and *compensation payments* of the European Union were exempted, as also a long list of their other subsidy programmes.[16]

WHILE the provisions in the Marrakesh Agreement are grossly unfair, the attitude of successive Indian governments since 1991 on this question has been despicable and demeaning. In their servile attempt to please the rich countries they have withdrawn more subsidy than was necessary. Although no new export subsidy on products is permitted, the GATT-permitted Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS) by the state to its agriculture is calculated in value terms as a global measure and not as specific to products, and is expected to be reduced by 20 per cent in six years, at an aggregate level, allowing flexibility in shifting support between products. Further, a *de minimis* provision allowed a country to exclude from the AMS calculation any support that did not exceed 5 per cent of the value of production of that commodity, and for non-product-specific support where it did not exceed 5 per cent of the value of the country's total agricultural production. For the less developed countries, *de minimis* level was fixed at 10 per cent, and specified agricultural input subsidies were excluded from the AMS.[17]

For every individual product the Marrakesh Agreement requires a minimum of 15 per cent reduction in tariff, but for the less developed countries the figure is 24 per cent. It also permits *special safeguards* to allow temporary duties during the six-year period, when sudden movements, above trigger levels, in prices and the volume of imports make that necessary. However, any such subsidies and duties are subjected to a minimum amount of access to be given to foreign competitors – of 3 per cent initially, rising to 5 per cent in six years.[18] These provisions were not used to protect our subsidies, nearly all of which were well within the limits prescribed by the Marrakesh Agreement on Agriculture. The Government of India, however, went out of its way to reduce subsidies to levels that were not strictly warranted under the Marrakesh Agreement.

Moreover, the Marrakesh Agreement allows import control for some specific purposes, for example sanitary and phytosanitary measures in order to "protect human, animal or plant life or health". It has been left to the country concerned to work out its own acceptable level of risk, but the controls are to be used on a non-discriminatory basis. In fact the E.U. used this provision to ban the import of hormone-fed beef from the U.S.[19] In India's case, rather than the country using this provision favourably, it has been used from time to time by the European countries to impose bans on shrimp exports from India.

The very generous implementation of the GATT subsidy rules in India has adversely affected Indian agriculture and has led to a decline, compared with the figure for 1991 when the reform was initiated, in per capita food availability and in the rate of growth of agricultural output. This was despite the very unusual favourable occurrence of 11 successive good monsoons, a significant increase in the flow of capital to agriculture via cooperatives, substantially higher support prices and a highly supportive adjustment programme. The main reasons for the poor performance of agriculture were a drastic curtailment in public investment in agricultural infrastructure, and an increase in the prices of potassic and phosphatic fertilizers, following subsidy reduction, with a consequent disporportionate increase in the consumption of nitrogenous fertilizers.[20] The decline in public sector investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure, particularly in irrigation and power, has not been compensated by a corresponding rise in private investment that was expected by the International Monetary Fund-World Bank establishment. The idea that the public sector was "crowding out" the latter and that the withdrawal of the public sector would create space for the private sector for investment has been completely discredited in India and other poor countries.

Furthermore, despite generous state support since 1991, agricultural exports from India have not made any significant impact either domestically or in the world as a whole. To give an example, according to Fund-Bank theology, if shrimp is tradeable and rice is not, it would make sense to bring saline water to paddyfields and discard paddy production in favour of export-oriented shrimp farming. However, experience with shrimp production and exports shows how vulnerable it can be to cyclical diseases, to cheaper and better production possibilities in other countries from the point of view of multinational companies (MNCs) controlling agri-business, to periodic bans and the rigorous imposition of hygiene standards, to various trade restrictions that are characteristic to developed country economies particularly in the field of agriculture, to the whims and caprices of developed countries' administrators, and to the rise and fall in world demand and supply on which India's indigenous producers have no control.

It cannot be that India would allow the free import of subsidised foreign agricultural goods and invite the destruction of domestic agricultural producers who cannot be subsidied, or subsidised to that level, while the rich countries would continue to follow protectionist policies in support of their own high-cost producers, accounting for a very high proportion of their public expenditure. There cannot be one set of rules for them because they are rich and powerful and another for those who are poor and weak.

15 UNCTAD, T*he Outcome of the Uruguay Round: An Initial Assessment*, Geneva, 1994, p.101.

16 Watkins, op.cit, p.122.

17 UNCTAD, op.cit, pp. 98-102

18 Jeffrey J. Schott, 1994, assisted by Johanna W. Buurman, The Uruguay Round, Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., 1994, pp.50-51.

19 Schott, ibid, pp. 52-53.

20 Biplab Dasgupta, 1997b, "Indian Agriculture in the Global Context and under Structural Adjustment", in G.K. Chaddha and Aloke N. Sharma, *Growth, Employment and Poverty in Rural India: Change and Continuity*, Allied Publishers, Delhi, 1997.

That the Marrakesh trade rules, now implemented by the WTO in the name of globalisation, have been framed to favour western MNC interests is recognised by the highly researched literature emanating from institutional sources in rich countries themselves. The following is an interesting quote from an important OECD document on technology and globalisation, which was published in 1992.[21]

"Globalisation represents a new phase in the process of internationalisation and the spread of international production. It refers to a set of emerging conditions in which value and wealth are increasingly being produced and distributed within worldwide corporate networks. Large multinational firms operating in concentrated supply structures are at the hub of these conditions."

As for the consequences, this document states categorically: "The first concerns the marginalisation of developing countries within the globalisation process. The second concerns concentration as a world process and whether a global competition policy is needed and how it might be implemented. The third relates to the problems posed by support given by governments to firms engaged in global competition and the need for new rules and codes of behaviour. The fourth relates to standards and norms in a context of rapid and pervasive technological change, corporate concentration and globalisation."

UNFORTUNATELY, documents such as these are not read by the policy makers in India, or, if read, are immediately swept under the carpet. Subsidies of all kinds – on procurement, the PDS, export, interest on agricultural loans, and so on – are seen by the Indian government as distortions that make production inefficient and misallocate the resources according to optimality rules. According to this view, the prices of inputs, whether fertilizers, water or power or what have you, should fully recover their costs. This new approach is also manifested in the policies adopted in other areas. For instance, the Narasimhan Committee on the financial sector, which recommends doing away with priority area lending and subsidised interest rate and the pruning of non-profit making branches of banks in remote and backward rural areas. The fiscal policy backs the acquisition of wealth, and hence that of land in the rural areas, and does not favour taxes on these. While the new fiscal policy, based on the recommendations of the Raja Chelliah Committee, attempts to widen the tax base, rural wealth tax is not on its agenda. The new industrial policy frowns at the location of industries in backward agricultural areas, and the general policy thrust is opposed to such and other measures that aim at reducing inter-regional disparities.

The GATT opposition to subsidies is based on the view that a project or economic activity should cover its costs and provide returns within a given timeframe. A broad social cost-benefit analysis, recognising the linkages of projects with the rest of the economy and taking a long-time horizon into account, would go beyond such time-bound and project-bound framework. A subsidy can be treated as an investment for creating viability at a future date, or even as a measure that protects the interests of the future generation or of the environment. Optimality rules deployed by the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, the global trinity that rules the poor countries, to justify their theology hold for full and free global integration, not for the partial and piecemeal ones noticed in world trade today. If integration is less than total and free, the optimality rules break down. Subsidies can be justified on many grounds, even using the analogy of the functioning of the MNCs and other non-government organisations that subsidise many of their activities from the profits made from other activities. In many cases such subsidy or short-term loss is in the nature of an investment with a long-term profit goal. For example, foreign insurance companies planning to enter the Indian market are prepared to make losses for six years before their balance sheet would turn white. A government can take a wider view – for example, that loss-making branches of banks are creating more social benefits than costs despite conventional losses, compared to private companies which are motivated only by profit can, by providing an alternative to money sharks, by augmenting agricultural production and thus reducing food imports, by helping to mobilise saving, and by inculcating the saving habit.

"Crop insurance" is not an area where any private insurance company, Indian or foreign, would be interested, but the government can go beyond the concern for profitability in the insurance business and subsidise crop insurance in order to stabilise agricultural earnings and make investment in agriculture less risky and more attractive. Similarly, no private electricity company would be even remotely interested in distributing power to widely diffused rural settlements. This is a task that only a state enterprise would undertake, maybe at a loss initially, and with a generous subsidy; but if it helps the local economy to bloom, maybe in the long run, it will help make profit. There is also the question of the interests of future generations. A private company motivated only by profit and discounting the present value of future earnings at the current rate of interest, would not see anything beyond 15 years, as the present value of earnings beyond that period would be nearly zero. Only the government can protect the interests of future generations and save the environment from degradation that is not discernible at one point of time but accumulates over decades – for example, the depletion of the ozone shield.

This is not to argue for mindless subsidies or controls to keep foreign competition away forever. This is simply to suggest that we do what all countries of the world, rich or poor, large or small, socialist or capitalist, usually do – to examine carefully cases where such subsidy and control are necessary to augment domestic production and seek self-sufficiency. One should note that the call by the global trinity to abandon self-sufficiency in food and to attain "food security via the global market" has been dismissed with contempt by the Japanese, who can buy anything from anywhere at any price, who are determined to maintain food self-sufficiency no matter what the cost is.

One of the first things that the Indian delegation should do in Seattle is to raise at least some of the issues discussed here. The main thrust of its argument should be why the rich countries would be allowed to subsidise their agriculture on such a big scale and continue with rigorous import control on Third World agricultural exports when, going by their own rules based on comparative advantage, agricultural production and export should be left with the poor countries. ■

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21 OECD, op.cit, p. 209.

CONSTANCE L. HAYS

AS Coca-Cola's share price dropped below $48 in trading in the last week of September, from a high of over $88 last year, investors were wondering: Can it get any worse?

It is pretty bad, and not just for Coke, whose recent track record was described during that week as "the most significant underperformance versus the S&P 500 in the history of the company" by Andrew J. Conway, an analyst at Morgan Stanley Dean Witter.

Pepsico's share price was languishing at $31.375, well below the company's 52-week high of $42.563. And Cadbury Schweppes, trading as American depository receipts, was at $27.4375, down from a high of $35.0625 within the last year. Bottlers such as Pepsi Bottling Group, the Whitman Corp. and Coca-Cola Enterprises were getting clobbered, too.

What has happened to the soft-drink stocks? The answer is part global cautionary tale, part facts of life in the consumer products business.

MUCH of the downturn can be traced to the state of affairs at Coke, which began a sharp decline 14 months ago. "It starts at the top," said Caroline Levy, an analyst for Schroder & Co. "If Coke is weak, it's very hard for Pepsi as well as the bottlers."

Coke's frailty is rooted in macroeconomic conditions around the world that have gnawed at profits in a system designed when emerging markets were booming. In countries such as Germany, Japan and Brazil, Coca-Cola's sales have been flat or falling for several years, largely because consumers in those countries do not feel they have the money to spend on what they perceive as a relatively expensive American product.

So second-tier brands have been cutting into Coke's market share. In the United States, volume fell when bottlers raised prices by 5 per cent to 6 per cent earlier this year. The idea was to regain profits lost during the last three years, when Coke and Pepsi waged a price war in the supermarket aisles.

"Now, rather than having the stimulus of lower prices, we're going to have the drag of higher prices," said Marc Cohen, an analyst at Goldman Sachs. Sales of store-brand soda have been creeping higher, too

Some of the investor retreat from Coke's stock can be attributed to concern over the profitability of the two engines behind the Coca-Cola system. Coke's return on invested capital – 35 per cent – is far higher than that of its biggest bottler, Coca-Cola Enterprises, which is about 5.2 per cent. But even Coke's return on invested capital has been falling lately.

"We think, in the long run, it's a great company with great management, a great franchise and a great business model," said David Garza, an analyst at Roxbury Capital Management, which has sold most of its two million Coca-Cola shares since the beginning of the year. "The issue is the economics in the short run." He added, "Earnings growth is the worst it has been in decades." Coca-Cola's recall of 17 million cases of its products in France and Belgium some months ago has had more extensive repercussions than the company publicly anticipated. Sales are still shaky in Italy, Germany and Poland as a result of the recall, several analysts said. There are also worries about the effects of currency devaluations in some countries. And the company halted its share-repurchase programme earlier this year.

Coke has said that it will increase volume next year by 7 per cent to 8 per cent worldwide, and increase its earnings by 15 per cent to 20 per cent. But analysts – who are assiduously coached by Coke, but have been burned in recent months as the company has failed to meet its own earnings targets – say that is an unreasonable expectation. They believe volume will grow 6 to 6.5 per cent, and earnings per share will be up 13 per cent.

Coke's once-hallowed executive suite is also coming in for criticism. "What people are worried about is why they are missing their numbers," Levy said. "The question is, is that global economies? Or is that management?" The falling stock price reflects worry about whether Coke and other global consumer products giants will ever again post the kind of profit growth they did through most of the 1990s.

"The emperor has fewer clothes now than I thought," said Daniel Peris, an analyst for Argus Research. He predicts that Coke's share price will return to a more traditional valuation, closer to the 71 per cent premium to the S&P 500 price-to-earnings multiple that it averaged over the last seven years. In 1997, the premium was 96 per cent, and in 1998, it rose to 106 per cent. So far this year, the premium is about 83 per cent, he said.

IN the case of Pepsico, management difficulties in the soft-drink division are one cause of the stock's slide. But analysts say some investors' worries may be exaggerated, since the bulk of Pepsico's earnings are generated by its snack-food business. "Frito-Lay is easily one of the strongest consumer packaged-goods companies that can be found," Cohen said.

The unexpected departure in September of Philip A. Marineau, the former chief executive of Pepsi-Cola North America, sapped confidence in Pepsico and its recently spun-off bottler, Pepsi Bottling Group, analysts say. "Part of PBG's selling proposition to Wall Street was that Pepsi-Cola was under more solid management," Cohen said. "And the management decided to leave."

The bottling company opened at $23 on March 31, rose to $25.25 in early July and was trading at $17.4375 on October 1. Whitman, a major Pepsi bottler based outside Chicago, is down by 44.5 per cent for the year. It hit a 52-week low on October 1, trading at $14 a share.

Cadbury Schweppes has fared better, but is still down 20.6 per cent for the year.

The soft-drink sector has experienced what Conway calls "a mini-implosion" in recent weeks. "The question is," he said, "when will volumes return?" ■

New York Times Service

One more upturn?

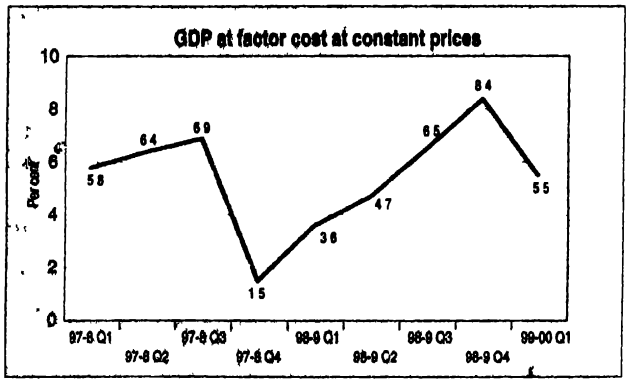
If at all there has been a turnaround in the economy, it is not because of the successful implementation of the reform programme but because of the failure to implement fiscal stabilisation.

C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

THE Indian economy, it is being argued, is on the mend. The most recent evidence quoted in support of this view is the Central Statistical Organisation's (CSO) estimate of GDP growth during the first quarter (April-June) of 1999-2000. According to the CSO, though agriculture grew at just 2.8 per cent during April-June as compared with the corresponding period of the previous year, robust growth rates in manufacturing (6.2 per cent), construction (6.7 per cent) and various services (7.8 per cent), have helped raise the overall rate of GDP growth from 3.6 per cent during the first quarter of 1998-99 to 5.5 per cent during the first quarter of financial year 1999-2000. Encouraged by these figures, observers have declared that the Indian economy is witnessing a turnaround.

The CSO's practice of issuing quarterly figures of GDP is, of course, recent. It started with the release of figures for the fourth quarter (January-March) of 1998-99 in June. But at that time, for purposes of comparison, figures for all quarters of financial years 1996-97 to 1998-99 were also issued. Any judgments relating to the first quarter of 1999-2000 must therefore be based on such a comparison. The accompanying chart presents the quarterly rates of GDP growth since the first quarter of 1997-98. As should be clear, after having registered creditable rates of quarterly growth of between 5.8 and 6.9 per cent between April and December 1997, growth slumped to 1.5 per cent in the first quarter (January to March) of calendar year 1998. This was not so much a consequence of the South-East Asian crisis as it was of a collapse in the rate of agricultural growth. GDP generated in agriculture fell by 7.4 per cent during that quarter. However, as agriculture recovered in the subsequent months, the quarterly rate of GDP growth rose continuously from a low of 1.5 per cent to 8.4 per cent during the fourth quarter of 1998-99.

Seen in the context of that performance, growth during the most recent quarter for which figures are available is indeed disappointing. The consistent recovery during 1998-99 was in fact reversed during the first quarter of 1999-2000, when growth stood at 5.5 per cent. The tendency on the part of many commentators to ignore this and focus instead on the fact that growth during April-June 1999 was higher than during the corresponding months of the previous year is indeed surprising.



One reason could be that manufacturing seems particularly buoyant, having notched up a quarterly growth rate of 6.2 per cent. But even this is merely a return to a rate of growth which prevailed a year back after what, on the basis of the CSO's figures, appears to be a minor dip in production. In fact, an indication that all is not well in the manufacturing sector is the trend in non-oil imports, which registered a fall of 4.07 per cent during the first five months (April-August) of the current fiscal year.

Given this background, the tendency to make much of the recent GDP growth figures appears to be a peculiar instance where the oft-discussed "feel good" factor applies not to how economic agents behave but how economic analysts read reality. With the post-reform boom during the years 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 having petered out, especially in the manufacturing sector, advocates of reform are desperately in search of indicators which can be taken to suggest that liberalisation and reform have indeed delivered their promised results. The current mood, illustrated by periodic surveys of an ostensibly upbeat business leadership whose expectations rarely materialise, seems to be that if you cannot find those indicators you could invent them.

THE most recent effort based on the CSO's quarterly GDP estimates is, however, the last straw. Making much of those figures is particularly pathetic, given the trends in a range of other variables. For example, though it is eight years since India's economic reforms programme began, exports are virtually stagnant. Exports in dollar terms registered a growth of just 4.4 per cent during the first five months of fiscal 1999-2000. While this is an improvement on the negative growth rates reported a few months back, it is still inadequate to provide the stimulus to growth that exports were expected to deliver in the wake of liberalisation. On the other hand, with the reversal in the collapse of international oil prices, India's oil imports rose by 56.5 per cent during these months. Hence, but for the sluggishness in non-oil imports, India's trade and current account deficits would have widened substantially.

It is not just that exports are doing badly. There are indications that foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, which, rightly or wrongly, were seen as a major trigger for growth in the wake of liberalisation, are also drying up. According to the World Investment Report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in 1998 FDI flows into India fell from $3.35 billion in 1997 to $2.26 billion. More recent figures released by the Reserve Bank of India indicate that during April-June 1999, inflows stood at $454 million. If inflows remain at this level over the rest of the fiscal year, the annual inflow

would be around $1.8 billion. These figures compare with India's FDI inflow target of $10 billion a year and an actual inflow of $45.46 billion into China in 1998, up from $44.23 billion in 1997. All of this has not told on India's reserves position partly because of large remittance inflows and partly because of a growing external debt.

India embarked on an accelerated programme of reform in 1991 in response to a balance of payments crisis. The principal benefit of reform was to be a process of balance of payments adjustment. Such adjustment was to be ensured through an improvement in exports facilitated in part by relocative foreign investment which was expected to use India as a production source for world markets. Eight years later, it is clear that liberalisation has not delivered on that front.

Nor has it for that matter ensured the fiscal adjustment which was the other area of emphasis in the reform programme. Failure on the fiscal front has been the result of tax reductions and concessions associated with reform. To quote the Annual Report of the Reserve Bank of India: "The large shortfall in tax collections during 1998-99 needs to be viewed against a decline of over 1 percentage point in the ratio of the Centre's gross tax revenue to GDP between 1991-92 and 1997-98 (from 10 per cent to 8.9 per cent). Excluding trade taxes, revenue from domestic taxes as a percentage of GDP fell by 0.4 percentage point during this period. This trend has been reinforced in 1998-99, with the overall tax GDP ratio declining further to 8.5 per cent and domestic tax-GDP ratio to 6.0 per cent."

This shrinking tax base has meant that even with modest increases in expenditure the fiscal deficit on the Centre's budget rose to 5.7 per cent of GDP in 1997-98 and 5.9 per cent in 1998-99. Expectations are that this would further rise substantially this financial year, partly because of the expenditures associated with the Kargil War. It is this persistence and increase in recent times of the fiscal deficit that accounts for the buoyancy in domestic demand and the growth, however moderate, in manufacturing. Thus, if at all there has been a turnaround in the Indian economy, it is not because of the successful implementation of the reform programme but because of the failure to implement what was considered its crucial plank, namely, fiscal stabilisation.

But for advocates of reform desperately in search of indicators of success, these details do not matter. Any positive sign, however weak and transient, is swooped upon to herald what now seems the indefensible. ■

COLUMN

Universities and the law

The decision by the authorities of a major national university to go to court against its own student body raises a number of issues.

THE Oxford English Dictionary defines a university as "the whole body of teachers and students pursuing, at a particular place, the higher branches of learning; such persons associated together as a society or corporate body, having the power of conferring degrees and other privileges, and forming an institution for the promotion of education in the higher branches of learning." The use of the word 'corporate' in this definition should not be misunderstood; it is used in the more traditional sense of guild or community.

Indeed, the fact that it is a community, rather than just any association of people for a common purpose, may be one of the more important defining characteristics of a university. In India, as in many other countries, universities are set up by Acts of Parliament (or Legislative Assemblies). These Acts lay down a framework for the functioning of the university not only academically but also in terms of community life and the relations between its various constituents. The basic purpose of this is to make it clear that a university, being a community, should be in a position to sort out its matters internally, and so a legal framework exists for this.

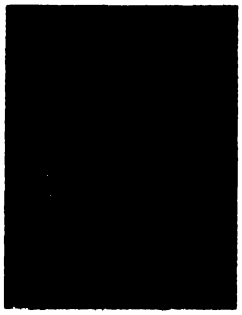
But a university is not just any old community – it is a very special community, and enlightened citizens have known over several centuries that maintaining the special character of such institutions is essential for a healthy and vibrant society. As Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledged, "a university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for the adventure of ideas and the search for truth... If the universities discharge their duties adequately, then it is well with the nation and the people."

What makes universities so special is that, ideally, they provide time and space for both research and reflection; they become a means, therefore, for society to reflect upon itself. For such reflection to occur and to be productive, it is necessary that it takes place in an environment that allows not only discussion but indeed fierce debate, where disagreements are encouraged because they can be fruitful in terms of generating new ideas. But it is also necessary that such debate takes place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and in the absence of intimidation or outside interference.

GIVEN the sorry state of many of our campuses today, many would find it hard to recognise the ideal picture of the university that has just been described. And this too is not unexpected because, even while they stand apart in some sense from the rest of society, universities inevitably become microcosms of society, with many of the tensions, contradictions and positive impulses mirrored within its own activities. Even so, it is absolutely crucial that universities offer a congenial atmosphere for teaching and research while retaining their autonomy and special space, and their internal democracy.

And, indeed, there are still some universities where the pursuit of academics coexists with an active political life, without the culture either of gun-toting students or Vice-Chancellors appointed from the IAS, the IPS or the Army. For example, New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University is still a beacon which attracts students from all over the country for its academic reputation, and it continues to have as Vice-Chancellor an eminent scientist. Here, intense political differences among students are sorted out by democratic processes more peaceful and less subject to money or muscle power than

PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH



Jawaharlal Nehru University students on hunger strike on the campus in September.

elsewhere in the country.

IN this situation, the recent move by the administration of this university, that is JNU, to move the court to limit and curtail the actions of members of its student body, including elected union representatives, is of very great significance. Whatever be the merits and demerits of this individual case, it may set a precedent which could change not only the internal functioning of universities but also society's relationship to them. And this in turn would be bad news for the larger society as well.

The special nature of universities makes a minimum level of autonomy of functioning necessary. And also it means that there are structures within the university that can typically deal with the problems that must inevitably ensue when there are situations of contradiction or conflict. There is a hierarchy and a chain of command which establishes and maintains order, and obviously such an order must also be based on democratic norms. Thus, issues of discipline, maintaining order and ensuring smooth functioning can all be tackled from within the university structures.

When the administration of a university decides to approach a court of law to deal with such issues, it in effect abdicates the responsibilities it already has under the Act of Parliament which governs it. Not only does it externalise what are really internal issues which should be dealt with internally, but it declares that the administration is incapable of resolving an internal dispute, is not willing to exercise the disciplinary powers that it already has, and wants an external agency to do the job for it.

Besides being in some sense an admission of failure or abdication of responsibility, such an action can also lead to perverse or irrational outcomes. In this specific case, the university administration asked the court to set a code of conduct for the student body, which also limited the specific areas in which protest actions (including sit-ins and hunger strikes) could be held. This meant that on a campus occupying an unusually large geographical space, student demonstrations were sought to be limited to a single relatively small spot, and students who had already been fasting for more than a week were told to remove themselves from a shaded portico at the side of the entrance to the administration building to a part where they would be exposed to the elements.

When the administration of a university decides to approach a court of law to deal with such issues, it in effect abdicates the responsibilities it already has under the Act of Parliament which governs it. It externalises what are really internal issues.

This could happen because the court clearly had no knowledge either of the background to this particular struggle, or of the physical conditions involved, and of course such lack of knowledge is only to be expected. By contrast, a university administration exercising its powers in full consultation with other members of the university community would be more aware of the specific circumstances and therefore less likely to make such decisions.

Indeed, this also raises questions of judicial activism, of why the court even entertained a matter which falls very clearly under the jurisdiction of the university administration. When there are a number of methods for both conflict resolution and disciplinary action within a university, the fact that a court feels it can intervene and set the terms for behaviour and functioning, is itself a matter of concern.

Another problem with this entire matter becoming the preserve of the court is that when meting out disciplinary action or limiting the context and possibilities of agitation by any particular group, it makes no distinction between different types of action. Thus, group action pressing for certain demands, in this specific case for more adequate hostel facilities, which are by nature impersonal, directed not at any individual

person but at a certain office or authority, is different from acts of personal aggression, and cannot be treated on a par.

PERHAPS the most problematic implication of all in this matter is the fact that such an action of going to court effectively destroys the basis of trust and mutual respect on which a university community is based. It therefore makes the internal resolution of conflicts even more difficult, and, especially *vis-a-vis* students, is likely to escalate tension rather than contain it. This became obvious in this particular case, where, far from resolving the problems, the episode of going to court actually contributed to a worsening of relations between the students and the authorities, and eventually culminated in a most unfortunate situation in which large numbers of police personnel entered the campus and arrested many students, including their elected representatives.

Once universities are deprived of their special status which allows for substantial internal democracy and autonomy, then their basis as communities becomes substantially eroded.

What all this suggests is that, once universities are deprived of their special status which allows for substantial internal democracy and autonomy, then their basis as communities becomes substantially eroded. But there is unfortunately also the alternative view increasingly expressed in many quarters – that democracy and autonomy is too tolerant of indiscipline and must be circumscribed by the coercive powers of the state. It should, however, be remembered that not only is this idea at variance with the very definition of a university but it is one that has been repeatedly attempted elsewhere in this country with the overall impact being adverse both for academic achievements and for campus peace. This is a major issue of concern not only for universities themselves, but for any society that values intellectual and creative development. ■

COLUMN

Stifling dissent and debate

Under attack from NGOs for its communal orientation, the BJP seeks to browbeat them and also impose indirect forms of censorship.

EVERY political party has a distinct, characteristic, style which is as important as the substance of what it stands for. Any reasonable description of the Bharatiya Janata Party's style must prominently mention crudeness, brazenness and a certain kind of daring to do what many would think is unthinkable: the Babri Masjid demolition, the nuclear tests, the wanton attacks on Christians, the telecom scam, the Kargil fiasco, the gutter-level electioneering.... This pattern has been on display in two actions of the BJP-led "caretaker" government. The first is its attempt to restrict and censor scholarly and activist debate. The second is the BJP's vicious attack on a number of civil society organisations (CSOs), which joined or endorsed the Communalism Combat campaign exposing Hindutva (*Frontline*, October 8, 1999).

Rather than counter the allegations that were levelled as part of the campaign with facts, the BJP first maligned the signatories, accusing them of (what else?) having taken "foreign money", and then stooped even lower by activating the state machinery and getting it to issue notices under the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act (FCRA) to the CSOs concerned. Both the actions display a paranoid, venal, mindset, a mortal fear of criticism, and contempt for elementary norms of democratic functioning.

TO take the second issue first, BJP spokesperson M. Venkaiah Naidu and general secretary Narendra Modi on September 25 launched a vitriolic attack on Communalism Combat and associated CSOs, accusing them of being "anti-national and anti-BJP". Venkaiah Naidu alleged that they were campaigning for the Congress(I) and the Left. Asked how this could make them anti-national, he said they had also criticised the Pokhran-II tests "and this is anti-Indian".... "Naidu clarified that [his] objection was to foreign funds being used for political propaganda. If they were using their own money they had every right to do whatever they saw fit, but the FCRA prohibited use of foreign funds for political activity" (*The Hindu*, September 26). Among the organisations were some of our best known and most respected women's groups, such as Forum against Oppression of Women, Ankur, Women's Centre, National Alliance of Women's Organisations, Awaaz-e-Niswan, Asmita, Kali for Women, Nirantar, and Shakti Shalini.

Meanwhile, Narendra Modi in Lucknow urged the government to inquire into the matter of the funds received by 13 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from foreign sources and prosecute them for violating FCRA. He claimed that the NGOs had used the funds for propaganda "which amounted to interference in the country's electoral process by foreign money power and constituted a serious threat to its sovereignty". He cited sections of the FCRA which prohibit political donations.

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

Exactly two days later, with exceptional alacrity, the Foreigners Division of the Home Ministry issued identical notices to the 13 organisations, to Communalism Combat (CC), the Indian Social Institute (ISI), and Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). The notices cited Section 5(1) of the FCRA which stipulates that no organi-

sation of a political nature, not being a political party, shall accept any foreign contribution except with the prior permission of the Central Government. The letter said: "It has come to the notice of the Central Government that, in the run up to the ongoing general elections, your association has been associated with the release of certain advertisements in the press and with certain documents the contents of which are in the nature of comments of a political nature", and then demanded that the CSO concerned show cause why it should not be required "to obtain prior permission of the Central Government before accepting any foreign contribution; and notified as an organisation of a political nature.... under Section 5(1) of the Act."

There could be no clearer circumstantial evidence of collusion between the BJP and the Home Ministry, or rather its misuse by the former. The official letter parrots the BJP functionaries' precise argument and illogic. It too wrongly characterises as "politics" and "comments of a political nature" the factual charges made in the Communsalism Combat-led advertisements about the BJP's callous, discriminatory, attitudes towards women, its endorsement of *sati* and dowry and its assault on the minorities. The charges were primarily based on quotes from BJP leaders' own past statements.

It can be convincingly argued that the Communalism Combat campaign was a strong defence of the constitutional values of democracy, secularism, pluralism and equality. The right to life and to non-discrimination is a fundamental right of all citizens. The campaign was fully consistent with the fundamental duties of the citizen under Article 51(a), including the duty to promote social and religious harmony and renounce practices derogatory to women.

Such rights cannot be abridged, leave alone violated, by recourse to technical provision of some enactment like the FCRA. There is nothing improper at all about CSOs or NGOs issuing advertisements on broad social issues on which certain political parties have taken a retrograde stand. That is perfectly in order. It is either presumptuous of the Ministry to hold, as does the BJP, that the CSOs concerned were in breach of the FCRA insofar as the advertisements were funded with foreign money, or else, that their content was "political".

Yet, this charge cannot possibly apply to CSOs such as the Indian Social Institute, VANI and the Centre for Women's Development Studies, which were not even signatories to the advertisements released by Communalism Combat, but some of which endorsed the "People's Agenda for the General Elections 1999". Now the People's Agenda too is a critique of the governance under the BJP-led coalition and an appeal to defend cultural plurality and progressive values on the basis of a broad secular-democratic agenda.

Although the show-cause notice only speaks of "certain documents", it does not specify which. Nor does Sanjay Datta, director in the Foreigners' Branch, who has signed all the show-cause notices which are identical to the point of faithfully mis-spelling "contrinbution" and "poilitical". If it is the People's Agenda that the Ministry has in mind, it will be hard put to defend its description as "political" without distorting the meaning of the word and obliterating the distinction between the political and the social.

The CSOs and institutes concerned, including the ISI and P3 women's groups, and Communalism Combat itself, have refuted the Government's tendentious charge-sheet fairly convincingly, denying that foreign funding had a role in the campaign, and showing why their defence of women's and minority rights does not constitute "political" activity.

The more fundamental point is this. The BJP and, at its behest, the government, are trying to use the FCRA to browbeat progressive CSOs. They are not only making a false connection between the secular commitment of these organisations and the fact that they have clearances under the FCRA to receive contributions. Worse, there is a suggestion that secularism in this country is intimately linked to foreign sources!

The FCRA's rationale could never have been to create an instrument with which to harass social activists. It is the Home Ministry's responsibility to issue FCRA clearances in each individual case. It usually takes a couple of years to scrutinise the application and applicant, inquire into its antecedents and so on. It has no business to turn around suddenly and hound the CSOs just because they have done something the ruling party does not like. However, according to Combat editor Teesta Setalvad, it has recently cancelled FCRA clearances of more than a dozen CSOs.

BEHIND this harassment of CSOs is the deep-seated prejudice that "foreign money" is evil, and that it is causing political and social havoc through religious conversion, especially to Christianity, through the spread of "subversive" ideas. This is dangerously wrong. Foreign contributions to Church-based organisations in India only account for a small fraction of the total. For instance, according to John Dayal, of the United Christian Forum, Church-based groups accounted for a mere 4 per cent of European Union contributions received last year. It is reasonable to assume that a lot more money goes to non-Christian, especially Hindutva-oriented, organisations.

This money is poorly, inadequately, audited. According to scholar Amrita Basu of Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts, the VHP-USA, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the United States, remitted about $1.25 billion between 1977 and 1993 to India. That is what its records show in the U.S. However, much of this money – which works out to a huge Rs. 5,300 crores – was probably transferred clandestinely. At best only a tiny proportion surfaces in the accounts of the VHP, the BJP and affiliated organisations in India. Their books would be an auditor's delight – or nightmare – as taxman Vishwa Bandhu Gupta has repeatedly discovered. The VHP in India cannot account for a huge proportion of its income. Its books are one vast mess. But there is an attempt to dress them up and remove officials who ask awkward questions.

By contrast, genuine CSOs/NGOs are subjected to relatively rigorous audit on the basis of institutionalised transfers. The funds they receive are not easily-divertible donations, but typically earmarked for specific projects. They have to be accountable to the government, to donors, and to their own members on how they spend their money.

The Sangh Parivar, with all its shady but strong foreign connections, is accountable to no one. The Vajpayee government has turned a blind eye to the Sangh organisations' foreign funding. In the process, it has immensely strengthened the super-hawkish forces within the Hindutva camp, which feel encouraged to continue to attack the religious minorities and human rights and secular activists.

It is significant that some of India's most radical and committed CSOs have been victimised in the second wave of notices sent out by the Home Ministry. Many of them, like the ISI, the CWDS, Kali, FAOW, Women's Centre, and Communalism Combat, are the greatest

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allies of progressive forces fighting for justice and human dignity. They have a superb record of supporting worthy causes. Earlier, many Christian organisations were targeted. According to Dayal, this was a signal to Parivar fanatics that Church-based groups are fair game.

FCRA notices are only one method of harassment. Others include police interrogation and virtual stalking of some CSOs in order to dig out information about their contacts and links with other groups. For instance, in recent weeks, Women's Centre and Akshara in Mumbai have had numerous instances of queries about and interference in their work by all kinds of unidentified agencies and individuals. At least two women's CSOs in Delhi too have been similarly harassed. Similarly, a Dutch private aid organisation has also had persistent inquiries about the "Christian groups" it might fund, as if this were illegal, shady or improper.

This Hindutva campaign against "foreign" funds would have sounded a little less biased and outrageous had the BJP, its cohorts, and its government, had consistent standards. As it happens, they do not. The Vajpayee government could not even countenance not being dependent of World Bank and IMF subventions. In the 1990s, the bulk of India's economic policies tended to be written by forces and agencies that represent foreign, indeed big, multinational capital. Attracting foreign capital – the most concentrated expansion of "foreign" funds – is part of the core agenda of India's policy-makers. Indeed, many of India's social programmes have become heavily dependent on foreign aid – for example, those relating to primary education, literacy, drinking water supply and reafforestation.

It is thus thoroughly duplicitous and hypocritical for those who have willingly surrendered economic sovereignty to foreign capital and become dependent on international finance, to be ranting about minuscule amounts of audited, largely project-specific, institutionalised and non-profit oriented fund flows to CSOs. This shows more than a paranoid fear of things foreign. It is a cynical device to try to isolate progressive CSOs in a vindictive manner.

THE same logic has been at work in imposing and tightening totally unreasonable restrictions on who can be invited by institutions, including universities and CSOs, to conferences and seminars. This is essentially a form of censorship and physical curfew on independent scholars. Since the middle of this year, the Home Ministry has been issuing instructions that any voluntary organisation/NGO planning to hold an international meeting/seminar must first get clearance from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), from the nodal Ministry dealing with the issue, and finally itself. Only then will the names of the participants be forwarded to the Indian embassies in the countries concerned. It is only after following this process that the participants can get their visas.

Strangely, the MEA has no basis on which to screen any application for such clearance. Nor are there written guidelines. When VANI took up the issue with the MEA, it was told by Under Secretary Manmohan Singh that "the instructions regarding foreigners attending seminars etc. are formulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs" and that the MEA "merely complies" with them.

Demanding prior approval is a method typical of the crafty, devious, bureaucrat: delay clearances until they become infructuous and thus victimise the CSO whose face you do not like or who is independent-minded. This is exactly what happened to a number of prospective participants in at least three recent civil society conferences. Indian embassies refused to grant them visas and they were told that "all conferences to do with the voluntary sector and which appear to be government/politically sensitive have to get clearance for participants from abroad."

Similar restrictive conditions are increasingly being applied to universities organising seminars, and to teachers who might be invited to conferences abroad. This is dangerous. Such restrictions are an assault on academic freedom, on genuine debate and critical inquiry. They must be stoutly resisted.

What the BJP regime is doing is turning India into an even more authoritarian replica of Pakistan, where too university professors must get a no-objection certificate from various authorities before they can go abroad. Indeed, they cannot board an aircraft without the NOC. This shameful form of high-handedness and anti-democratic regulation is calculated to stifle dissent and intimidate secular scholars and activists in an Emergency-type operation. The government must be forced to retrace its steps. ■

The meaning of George Fernandes

A critique of the man and the Minister.

A. G. NOORANI

A COLLEAGUE in his Samata Party, Jaya Jaitley, said before the votes were counted, that George Fernandes does not aspire to be Prime Minister of India. That comment tells us a lot about him and, incidentally, about Jaitley herself. It is astonishing that such a thought should have crossed their fevered minds at all. In the entire front rank of public figures today, there is not one person who is more discredited than he as a politician, a Minister and as a person. He has been ideologically fickle, politically unreliable and a disaster as Defence Minister.

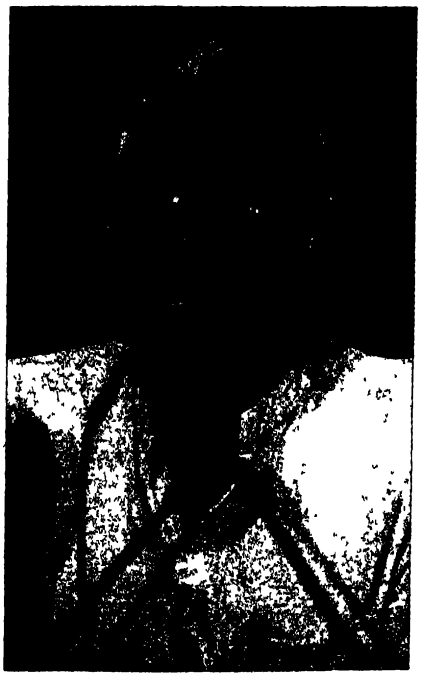
Two constants, however, stand out – unbounded ambition unmatched by aptitude and exhibitionism in the service of opportunism. No one can tell *what* he stands for. Why did he demand peremptorily of Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee, at the swearing-in of his Ministers on March 19, 1998, the Defence portfolio and not Labour, having flourished as a trade unionist all his chequered life? Why did this noisy champion of the downtrodden and the deprived, this denouncer of economic and social inequalities, adopt silence on these themes and prefer to exercise his lungs on matters of national security on which he had kept his expertise so well concealed all these years?

The Samata Party's election manifestoes of 1996 and 1998 provide a clue. The 1996 document had two pages on "foreign policy". It rejected the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but said "the country will keep her options open" – not *exercise* it.

Also, the "party firmly rejects the theory of dominance *and deterrence*" (emphasis added, throughout). Both formulations were repeated in 1998. Even a few weeks before Pokhran-II, there was no pledge to acquire nuclear weaponry. The concept of "deterrence" was lumped with "the theory (sic) of dominance" for a joint burial. Both manifestoes urged the "active involvement of India in international movements to ban research and development in the weapons industry."

But an altogether new section on "national security" was added in 1998. It began with an attack on all previous governments "irrespective of the parties that led them, to put national security on their high priority agenda." This, a favourite refrain, is repeated at the beginning of the Foreword he wrote (on December 17, 1998) to the Penguin reprint of D. R. Mankekar's book *The Guilty Men of 1962*: "National security and defence of our territory have not been priority items on the agenda of India's governments, starting with that of Jawaharlal Nehru's."

The 1998 manifesto of his party proceeded to dilate on China's "threat" to India and its liaison with "Burma" (sic). The old nomenclature was used three times. It said: "By refusing to take up the cause of the Bhutanese people who are agitating through peaceful means to establish a democratic polity with a constitutional monarchy in Bhutan, India is further *weakening its defences in its northern frontiers*." Fernandes' recipe, if adopted by the Government, would understandably annoy the King of Bhutan, impair India's existing close relations with that country and weaken India's defences in a strategically important region. The sheer arrogance of this simplistic, ignorant plea is amazing.



ANU PUSHKARNA

George Fernandes.

It is a man with such an outlook and intellectual equipment to whom Vajpayee entrusted the Defence portfolio. The results are there for all to see. Fernandes single-handedly damaged India's friendly relations with China. It took a year to repair the damage. He politicised sections of the armed forces, wiped out a decade's record of progress on the Siachen issue with Pakistan, undermined the morale of the entire armed forces by sacking the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, and acted with egregious incompetence in the Kargil crisis. Consistent prevarication provided constant company to an unsteady and destructive hand. It is grossly unjust to compare him with an ill-starred predecessor. For all his flaws V. K. Krishna Menon was an educated man. More, till the very end, he remained true to his ideological beliefs. Fernandes is pitiably ignorant and fickle in his ideological commitments.

"The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the events that followed it have created conditions which threaten to strike at the very basis of our nationhood," the 1996 manifesto of the Samata Party declared. These strong words were not followed by denunciation of the perpetrators of the crime but by the plea: "The political leadership must encourage the two communities involved to find an amicable solution to all outstanding issues in a manner acceptable to all and in keeping with the dignity and self-respect of each community." The formulation was repeated in 1998. The evenhandedness is spurious. In effect it urges condonation of the crime of 1992.

BY 1996, Fernandes had become an open ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party after a phase of tacit liaison. The cover was blown in 1993. As Christophe Jaffrelot records in his classic *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (page 472), on July 29, 1993, the P. V. Narasimha Rao Government introduced the Constitution '80th Amendment' Bill, along with a Bill to amend the election

law, designed to delink religion from politics. "George Fernandes (Janata Dal), in a dissenting note to the Joint Committee Report, objected that no change in the law was needed; rather, a political response to the challenge of communalism had to be worked out" – presumably the kind of response enunciated in his manifestoes. *Elections in India* 1952-96 by J. C. Aggarwal and N. K. Chowdhry (Shipra; 1996, page 71) mentioned Fernandes as a "prime-mover" for the BJP-Samata pact, but added that Jaya Jaitley "has also been involved in bringing Fernandes close to the BJP. Quite a turnaround anyhow."

Against this background, none should be surprised at the improprieties which Praveen Swami records in his book *The Kargil War* (Leftword Books; 1999). He writes: "The rise of the Hindu right to power was anticipated by the systematic infiltration of the highest levels of the Army apparatus. While the bulk of the Army leadership remains avowedly apolitical, the BJP has made methodical efforts to subvert this tradition, dragging a section of senior officers on to expressly partisan terrain. The decision of Director-General of Military Operations M.C. Vij and Air Vice-Marshal S. K. Malik to brief the BJP National Executive on the Kargil War on May 6 is just one example of this process. 3 Infantry Division commander Lieutenant-General V.S. Budhwar helped provide logistical support for the RSS-organised Sindhu Darshan festival at Leh in 1998. Advani and RSS ideologue Tarun Vijay were among those who attended. In 1999, he again attended the Sindhu Darshan, organised with official aid, and graced by Vajpayee, Fernandes and Advani."

No wonder that Fernandes so readily gave a clean chit to the Sangh Parivar for the Staines murders after a hurried trip to Keonjhar on January 27, 1999. "There does not seem to be any motive," he asserted in New Delhi the next day. Even the flawed Wadhwa Commission Report holds that motive there, indeed, was.

THIS is where blind ambition has landed him. Fernandes was never content to be a player. He aspired to be captain and craved for applause by theatrical performances. If the 1974 railway strike led by him sought to bring Indira Gandhi to her knees by paralysing the strategic junction at Moghulsarai, the quixotic venture with dynamites during the Emergency had the same objective – "to transport the explosives from Baroda to Varanasi". The sheer ineptness of the operation and the consistent misjudgment of chosen associates reflect utter incompetence as a leader of men (C.G.K. Reddy; *Baroda Dynamite Conspiracy*; 1977). Two socialist leaders, S.M. Joshi and N.G. Goray, who were no less opposed to the Emergency, spoke of the "so-called rebels who talked the language of violence. We tried to tell them that theirs was not the right path; they must act more maturely and sanely if they wish to win back democracy in the country."

Fernandes became Industries Minister in the Janata Party Government but did not figure in Janardhan Thakur's portraits of *All the Janata Men* (1978). Fernandes defended the Government in the Lok Sabha on the motion of no-confidence in July 1979 and then deserted it.

The National Front Government of V.P. Singh provided him with a fine opportunity when he was made Minister for Kashmir Affairs in addition to the charge as Railway Minister. This brought him into conflict with another V.P. Singh appointee, Jagmohan, the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. In his memoirs, *My Frozen Turbulence*, Jagmohan excoriated Fernandes; not least, for "establishing contacts" with the militants. "Given to a sense of drama he showed no sensibility to the administrative requirements." Last year, as Defence Minister, Fernandes rejected unconditional talks with them. Jagmohan, in turn, was denounced by Jaya Jaitley in her review of the memoirs (*The Telegraph*; November 1, 1991). Among the epithets she showered were "a megalomaniac" and "intellectual perversity", qualities which Fernandes possesses in rich abundance. The duo's presence as colleagues in the Vajpayee regime is a sight for the gods.

It was frustrated ambition which drove him into the BJP's arms. In 1998 *he emerged as a player whose votes were vital to the regime's survival.* His skills as a manipulator were freely deployed by Vajpayee. Jayalalitha's interest in national security was one of her better kept secrets. She denounced him on March 27, 1999 on the Bhagwat issue clearly because the operator had failed to deliver on his promises to her (*The Hindu*, March 28, 1999).

As unsuccessful were his forays in Bihar. The vendetta against Laloo Prasad Yadav, a former colleague never in awe of Fernandes, yielded poor returns. The latest episode, the clash with the Election Commission, reflects familiar disdain for proprieties and for institutions whether from the refusal to be frisked by securitymen at the Delhi airport in 1978 or the politicisation of the army. There are strict procedural rules for soliciting the assessment of the Intelligence Bureau (I.B) or, for that matter, the opinion of the Attorney-General. It is not open to any Minister to do either unless his request is routed through the "proper channels". But, on September 17, Fernandes telephoned Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill from Bihar to allege a conspiracy between the governments of Bihar and West Bengal to print in Calcutta excess ballot papers for the election in Bihar. "He said he had spoken to the Director of the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi, who had confirmed this from his sources." Gill, very properly, asked him to put it in writing. The next morning the three Election Commissioners met together and asked for an explanation from the Home Secretary with a copy of the I.B's information to Fernandes. "Back came the report in the afternoon – the DIB had given no such report to Mr. Fernandes" (*The Times of India*; September 21, 1999). Union Home Minister L.K. Advani confirmed this on September 23. Earlier, on September 18, Nitish Kumar said that Fernandes had told him that the DIB, Shyamal Datta, "had made an inquiry and confirmed the report". The E.C. made its own inquiries and roundly accused Fernandes on September 20 of using the DIB "by his own written admission ... to disturb the constitutional electoral process". This is the first time ever that a Union Minister has been censured by the Election Commission.

The blemished record is not mitigated by any achievement worth the name. What *has* he to show as Defence Minister, bar the dramatised trips to Siachen? The organisational set-up, with its anachronistic linkage between the Ministry and the Army Headquarters, cries for change. It was promised in January to allay public disquiet over Bhagwat's dismissal. Not one step was taken in the direction.

A. B. Bardhan, the soft-spoken leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI), was outraged by Fernandes' conduct. Bardhan remarked on January 3, 1999: "It has become apparent that every time he opens his mouth he tells a fresh lie which is not proved and cannot be proved".

All in all, this is a record of recklessness unrelieved by talent and braggadocio barren of achievement. By now, even the egotism has ceased to amuse. ■

The mobile for the masses

MTNL's new offer creates a flutter – and raises some questions.

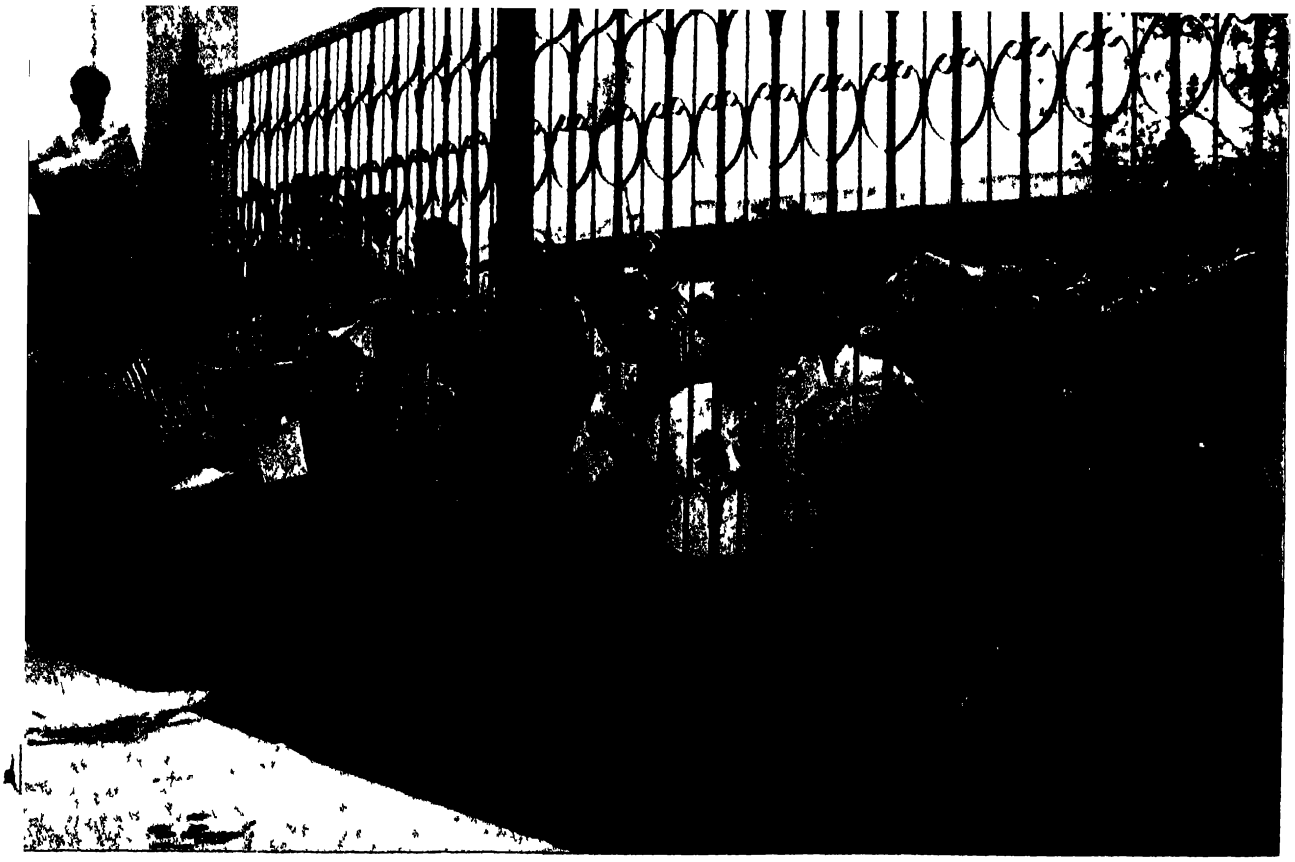
SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

IRONY underlies the controversy surrounding the launch of mobile telephone services by the state-owned Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) with tariffs comparable to those for land line telephones, and much lower than those charged by other cellular mobile services. MTNL offers mobile telephony based on Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA) technology at a monthly rental of Rs 600 (to be reduced to Rs 475 from November 1 as per the recent tariff notification applicable to all mobile licensees) and a per call charge of Rs 1.40 as against the Rs 6 charged by other cellular operators.

There has been an overwhelming response to the offer with people queuing up at the MTNL office in Delhi to obtain connections. Yet, the service has been launched without the approval of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), and is seen to deny a level-playing field to private cellular operators.

MTNL's perceived disregard for the regulator's authority may be a bad precedent, yet TRAI's own conduct in this matter has not exactly been exemplary. In fact, it is of a piece with its earlier rulings which did not favour MTNL's entry into the field of cellular telephony. The regulator has been sitting on MTNL's tariff proposals for its mobile service since August 23. It sent three sets of queries to MTNL, replies to which were furnished. A fourth set of queries was answered by senior MTNL officials on September 29. Yet, far from welcoming a proposal that is beneficial to the consumer, TRAI appears to have adopted an adversarial response, prompted by imaginary concerns over the lack of a level playing field for private licensees who offer mobile telephony at much higher rates.

HOW valid are TRAI's concerns? Will MTNL cross subsidise its mobile telephone services from the revenues of its basic telephone services? A.K. Bhatnagar, Chief General Manager of MTNL in Delhi, told *Frontline* that its service launched at a cost of Rs 17 crores (for 10,000 lines) will pay for itself. He assumes a cost of Rs 20,000 a line (including Rs 3,000 towards operating costs), against which rental alone will bring in Rs 5,825 a year. If 400 calls of two minute duration each a month are made by each subscriber, call charges will net in approximately Rs 4,000 a year. The government has stipulated that MTNL will pay to the Department of Telecommunications



People wait outside the MTNL office in New Delhi to buy application forms for cellular phone connections.



T. LAKSHMANAN

The MTNL office in Delhi.

(DoT) identical interconnectivity charges besides sharing 15 per cent of its revenue with the DoT just as in the case of the private operators. MTNL's entry into mobile telephony is conditional on these stipulations. MTNL officials believe that even after accounting for these charges, MTNL will be able to make profits from the service in less than three years, which is the normal lead time even for private licensees.

Bhatnagar believes that the cost per line will come down since the equipment that is to be sourced has become cheaper. "We purchased some of our equipment one and a half years back when the prices were higher," he says. In fact, as the subscriber base expands, MTNL will reap the benefit of larger volumes. MTNL hopes to expand its subscriber base for mobile telephony dramatically in the next few months – and it may well do so, going by the response.

MTNL is being accused of undercutting private licensees, but the truth may be that private cellular operators are charging more than they should. Bhatnagar said: "GSM (Groupe Speciale Mobile, the standard European digital cellular system) technology which is offered by the private licensees costs even less than CDMA. At $120 a line, and a customs duty of 40 per cent, the total cost comes to less than Rs.8,000 a line. Yet, the private licensees are charging Rs.6 per call."

This calculation is countered by the Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) on the plea that the sum of Rs.8,000 covers only switches and base stations. "then there are investments in microwave stations, optic fibre, real estate and so on. MTNL, with its huge infrastructure and manpower size, can utilise its existing resources, but private operators have to incur these costs," said T.V. Ramachandran, executive vice chairman, COAI.

BUT that is precisely the point. Since competition has forced MTNL to utilise better its existing infrastructure and manpower in order to be able to lower the tariffs, privatisation should be deemed to have achieved its objective. Even if there is an element of cross-subsidy involved in the initial years, is it so bad? To the extent that MTNL is utilising its profits from land lines to expand the mobile network and increase teledensity rather than pay dividends to the government (which is its owner) and income tax, both of which go to the exchequer, the new service should be welcomed. At Rs.1.40 a call, MTNL's service can no longer be considered an elite service, but just a functional one affordable to the common man. In any case, MTNL has agreed to separate the accounts of its mobile service from its land line and other value-added services as a prelude to setting up a full-fledged subsidiary company.

Although private cellular licensees are alarmed by MTNL's entry into the sector, the COAI has not formally opposed the decision since migration to the revenue-sharing regime was conditional on allowing MTNL entry into mobile telephony. The COAI, which had appealed against the decision of the Delhi High Court to allow MTNL to offer mobile services, has since withdrawn its appeal in order to facilitate the migration.

Claims by private cellular operators that they are already making losses and that they would be wiped out by the entry of MTNL, appear to be exaggerated. MTNL's CDMA technology does not offer some of the features available in the GSM technology used by the private licensees, and therefore there should still be demand for the GSM service. Besides, even with GSM technology, cellular operators in Chennai have lowered the tariff to Rs.3.75 a call, indicating that there are comfortable margins already available to the private operators. In fact, estimates of the private operators' balance sheets in the post-migration period show healthy profits, especially for the metro operators. The private operators would now do well to look into their own cost structure and offer a better deal to the subscribers if they do not want their market snatched away by MTNL.

THE overwhelming response from the public to MTNL's mobile service resulted in a fracas outside the MTNL office in New Delhi where windowpanes were broken by some people who were unable to get application forms. So far, MTNL has energised 400 connections and is in the process of energising 500 more. It has only 2,000 handsets available and Bhatnagar says another 3,000 sets are being imported. But that will not meet the demand. MTNL has evidently been taken by surprise by the demand level.

Interestingly, there is a scramble for connections from the top echelons of the government and the bureaucracy as well. It is learnt that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) asked for at least ten connections, the Delhi Government for as many, and many other government departments and Ministers are sending their emissaries to obtain connections.

MTNL's decision to launch the service without waiting for approval of its tariff proposals by the TRAI has put the latter in a piquant situation. Having indulged in delaying tactics, the TRAI now finds itself driven to the wall. Any ruling that scuttles the service will now be seen by the public as being against the common person's interests. ■

Standing up for a right

Organisations representing the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes have chalked out a programme of agitation aimed at protecting their constitutional right to reservation.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in New Delhi

THE failure of the executive and the judiciary in recent years to uphold in its entirety the constitutional right of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes to reservation in educational institutions and in employment has led to intense resentment among these disadvantaged social groups. The movement seeking to protect this right is set to intensify, and moves are afoot in this context to forge a broad unity of members of Parliament belonging to the S.Cs and the S.Ts, who will participate in agitations both inside Parliament and outside.

In the past two years, the reservation issue has sparked off mass struggles by various organisations representing the S.Cs and the S.Ts. These were rooted in the perception that the executive was denying the S.Cs and the S.Ts opportunities under their entitlement for reservation under various pretexts, including the pretext that judicial orders were being implemented (*Frontline*, January 29, 1999).

Ram Raj, chairman of the All India Confederation of S.C. and S.T. Organisations, told *Frontline* that the mass struggles that had been planned had two objectives. "On the one hand, we have to expose and oppose the apathy and indifference of and deception by the government in the light of its failure to fulfil its promises in respect of reservation for the S.Cs and the S.Ts." On the other hand, he said, the agitations would draw attention to the fact that some recent rulings by the Supreme Court had had the effect of "depriving" the S.Cs and the S.Ts of their right to reservation.

Office-bearers of organisations representing the S.Cs and the S.Ts point to the August 10 judgment of the Supreme Court, which struck down reservation for the S.Cs, the S.Ts and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in "super speciality" courses in medical and engineering colleges. The organisations petitioned the President of India and sought his intervention in the matter; on September 1 they also staged a protest demonstration in front of the Supreme Court.

Leaders of these organisations complain that the S.Cs and the S.Ts continue to be discriminated against. Ram Raj said: 'Speciality and super speciality posts in government have been kept beyond the purview of reservation in a large number of departments such as defence, space and nuclear science, science and technology and engineering. All this is done by reasoning that reservation militates against merit. Now that argument is being advanced to deny us reservation in higher education too."

Office-bearers of the Confederation of S.C.-S.T. Organisations say that developments on the reservation front in recent years have been particularly disheartening for the disadvantaged social groups. The Supreme Court's judgment on the Mandal Commission recommendations; the issue of controversial Office Memorandums (O.Ms) by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) between January 30, 1997 and August 1, 1998, when the United Front was in power; and the failure of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government to honour its assurance that it would withdraw these O.Ms – all of these, in the perception of these representatives, conform to a pattern of discrimination.

Leaders of S.C. and S.T. organisations say speciality and super speciality posts in government have been "kept beyond the purview of reservation in a large number of departments such as defence, space and nuclear science and science and technology. All this is done by reasoning that reservation militates against merit".

The O.Ms issued by the United Front Government violated not only the overall guidelines governing reservation for the S.Cs and the S.Ts but also a constitutional amendment that was aimed to overcome the adverse effect of the Supreme Court judgment on the Mandal Commission recommendations.

When the Mandal Commission recommendations reserving 27 per cent of Central government jobs for OBCs were adopted in August 1990 and later in September 1991, the move was challenged in the Supreme Court by a group of activists opposed to the recommendations. The Supreme Court ruled that reservations did not go against the principle of merit but held that the recommendations were applicable only for the initial appointment, not for promotions. It also held that reserved posts that were not filled in a particular year would not be carried forward. The apex court further ruled that reservations would not apply to technical posts in research and development organisations as also specialities and super specialities in medicine, engineering, defence services and nuclear and space applications.

Although the petitioners in the case had referred only to reservation for the OBCs, the Supreme Court *suo motu* made the judgment applicable to reservation for the S.Cs and the S.Ts.

The judgment triggered widespread protests, and in June 1995 the government was compelled to bring forward a constitutional amendment bill to remedy the situation. That legislative measure, the Constitution (77th Amendment) Bill, stipulated that reservations for the S.Cs and the S.Ts would be applicable even for promotions and at all classes and levels of employment.

However, on January 30, 1997, the DoPT came out with the first of its controversial O.Ms: it stated that a person

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who had secured a promotion under the quota for the S.Cs and the S.Ts would lose his seniority to a candidate in the general category even if the latter was promoted in a particular grade at a later date. The second O.M., issued on July 2, 1997, changed the system of roster maintenance from a vacancy-based one to a post-based one; this had the effect of slowing down the process of filling up reserved posts. The third O.M., of July 22, 1997, withdrew certain concessions and relaxations that had been provided to the S.Cs and the S.Ts to enhance their promotional opportunities. This too was seen to be in violation of the provisions of the Constitution.

Three other O.Ms, issued on August 13 and August 29, 1997 and July 1, 1998, were equally discriminatory. The first of these had the effect of barring government departments from

The leadership and rank and file believe that only through an intense campaign can they force the "high class rulers" and leaders of various parties to take note of the just demands of the S.Cs and S.Ts.

extending reservation to all classes and posts; this was a blatant transgression of the provisions of the 77th Amendment. The second had the effect of discontinuing the special recruitment drive for the S.Cs and the S.Ts. The third laid down that S.C. and S.T. candidates who qualified on merit would be considered as candidates in the reserved category, not in the general category.

As with the Supreme Court ruling on the Mandal Commission recommendations, the O.Ms led to protests by the organisations representing the S.Cs and the S.Ts. The O.Ms of January 30 and August 13, 1997 were challenged in court. Members of Parliament belonging to the S.Cs and the S.Ts raised the issue in the House. In response to these representations and demands, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee stated in the Lok Sabha on March 18, 1999 that the government would take steps to withdraw the controversial O.Ms.

Vajpayee gave a more specific assurance to a delegation comprising Ram Raj, former Union Health Minister Dalit Ezhilmalai and *Dalit Voice* Editor V.T. Rajashekhar. He told them that the O.Ms of July 2, July 22 and August 29, 1997 would be withdrawn and that the O.Ms that had been challenged in court would be abrogated after complying with the legal formalities. The government did file an affidavit in the Supreme Court in the cases relating to the O.Ms but did not deliver on its assurance.

According to Ram Raj, organisations representing the S.Cs and the S.Ts had hoped that all political parties would address in their election manifestoes the problem arising from the failure of the executive and the judiciary to uphold the constitutional right to reservation of underprivileged sections. "However," he said, "apart from the Congress(I) none of the parties has raised the issue." Disheartened, representatives of the organisations have resolved to step up their agitation. The leadership and rank and file believe that only through an intense campaign can they force the "high class rulers" and leaders of various parties to take note of their just demands. ■

Polluted Palar

"Along the polluted Palar" (October 8, 1999) rightly stated that apart from highly toxic effluents, tanneries generate sludge, which also causes environmental pollution.

The monograph, "Treatment Technology of Tannery Effluents," prepared by S. Rajamani, W. Madhavakrishna and G. Thiagarajan of the Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI), Chennai, which was referred to in *M.C. Mehta Vs Union of India and Others*, stated: "In the case of chrome tannery waste, the dried sludge should be buried or disposed of suitably as per the directions of regulatory agencies in local bodies." Dr. G. Thiagarajan, who later became the Director of the CLRI, stated that there was no viable method by which tannery sludge can be disposed of without causing health hazards.

In connection with the writ petition filed by the Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum, the Supreme Court referred to the report of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Research Centre (TNAURC) in Vellore (now at Virincheepuram), dated March 6, 1992. The TNAURC had observed: "The preliminary survey of tannery pollution has revealed that nearly 35,000 to 40,000 hectares of valuable agricultural land have become partially or totally unfit for cultivation." A similar point has been made by the author of the article. The TNAURC had also stated: "The people in the tannery belt are found to suffer from skin rashes, diarrhoea and heaviness of head." It added that tannery effluents "cause abortion in cattle".

In the light of such evidence, the question is whether we need the leather industry at all. It is pointed out in the article that the leather industry fetches Rs.2,000 crores in foreign exchange. But at what cost? In its judgment in the case filed by our forum, the Supreme Court observes: "Though the leather industry is of vital importance to the country as it generates foreign exchange and provides employment avenues, it has no right to destroy the ecology, degrade the environment and pose a health hazard. It cannot be permitted to expand or even to continue with the present production unless it tackles by itself the problem of pollution caused by the said industry."

I do not agree with the author's view that pollution in the State has been checked to a great extent with the help of the effluent treatment plants.

P.S. Subrahmanian
Honorary Secretary,
Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum

* * *

The tanneries may have spent crores of rupees to show the government and society that they are serious about treating effluents. However, many effluent treatment systems currently in use are faulty and do not meet the norms laid down by the pollution control boards (PCBs).

A new type of effluent treatment system can be used for tanneries and dyeing units that are clustered in one place. The basic aim of the design is to solidify and burn the contaminants. In the first stage, the effluent is collected in a tank. Then saw dust, agricultural waste, paper waste and municipal waste – 5 to 10 per cent – are added to it. These biodegradable materials absorb many chemical contents such as salts, colours and impurities.

In the third stage the solids are removed by centrifuging, dried and pelletised for use in boilers or to be burnt.

The effluent is then drained and filtered further with a micro filter in order to remove the remaining solids.

In the next stage, the effluent is treated with activated carbon to remove colour and odour. In the last stage it is subjected to a process of reverse osmosis in order to remove dissolved salts. After this the waste water can be disposed of safely.

This ETP unit can be operated independently by qualified technicians. Investment and operational cost can be levied from the tanneries that use it.

D. Anandaraj
Coimbatore

Vikram Sarabhai

It is said that adversities bring out the best in a person. The same seems to be true of a nation as well. For more than a century, our country remained under British rule. From being a rich and prosperous nation, it descended to total financial and economic ruin owing to the exploitative policies of the foreign rulers. In was under these circumstances that men like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel emerged.

Nehru, who went on to become the maker of modern India, orchestrated the scientific and technological revolution of the country. He was lucky to have people like J. Homi Bhabha, C.V. Raman, J.R.D. Tata and Vikram Sarabhai by his side. While Bhabha became the founder of the country's atomic energy programme, Vikram Sarabhai contributed uniquely to the field of space science.

Dr. Sarabhai, scion of a well-known industrial family and a man of style, became a cult figure. His contribution to the nation included the Physical Research Laboratory and the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, and Uranium Corporation of India Ltd at Jaduguda.

In addition, as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Science and Technology, he contributed to the all-round development of atomic energy and space programmes.

Like his predecessor Homi Bhabha, Sarabhai too died early. India needs someone as charismatic, talented and dedicated as Bhabha and Sarabhai.

Your magazine's tribute to Sarabhai ("Remembering Vikram Sarabhai", *Frontline*, October 8, 1999) was most appropriate.

Amitabh Thakur
Superintendent of Police
Deoria, Uttar Pradesh

Healthcare and education

The September 24 issue of *Frontline* had good coverage of the state of Indian politics. But it deserves special compliments for carrying a feature on healthcare and education in Karnataka.

Health and education form the backbone of society, and the main reason for India's increasingly poor performance in the social, economic and political spheres is that these areas have been neglected and the media have failed to highlight these issues.

Some of the articles that appear in *Frontline* on the political scene reflect the intensive study and research that the magazine does. "A Kargil election?" and "Slander campaign" (*Frontline*, September 24, 1999) deserve special mention.

Dr. Vinay Prasad Sahu
Imphal

Kargil and the Falklands

It is not quite correct to say that Margaret Thatcher won the 1983 general elections in the U.K. because of the successful war against Argentina over the

Against secular NGOs

I am writing in response to an item which has appeared in several newspapers, including *The Asian Age* (Rezaul H. Laskar), regarding a series of "show cause" notices which have apparently been issued to several prominent non-governmental organisations (NGOs). *The Asian Age* report, titled "Home Ministry singles out anti-BJP NGOs", lists some of the best known and most active groups – groups that have been working for over three decades in fields covering the most critical areas of social development, including education, health, gender issues, rural development, tribal development, and Dalit and human rights issues across the country.

I as a founder-director of Ankur, one of the several groups that have chosen to associate themselves with the advertisement campaign initiated by Communalism Combat, and we as citizens who have always appreciated the democratic space provided by our Constitution and our polity, view with alarm and concern the present actions, which point to increasingly unhealthy trends to harass, choke and silence all dissent and the right to freedom of expression. The dark days of the Emergency apart, there are few precedents to this kind of action to stifle the voice of civil society. Whether it was in the post-1984 riots period or the post-Babri Masjid demolition period, the right of citizens' groups and NGOs to exercise their "watchdog" role was never in question or under assault as it is today.

It is important to analyse and open up to public debate the notion of what constitutes "political activities" and who has the right to decide and determine these definitions in an allegedly open and democratic society. Here again, the role of the organs of the state in defining and determining the parameters of "patriotism", of "nationalism", and now of "political activity", must be subject to scrutiny and widespread critique.

It is not only the prerogative but the duty of civil society organisations – the globally accepted terminology for a range of organisations and groups, including NGOs – to provide information and facts and to create awareness among and educate the public. Most of us joined social movements precisely to be better able to reach out to the unreached, oppressed and exploited masses through education and other programmes, and with a clear, overtly stated objective of empowering people who had been denied all access to human rights through oppressive, systemic, social, economic and political structures.

The role of NGOs and CSOs in bringing about a universal recognition for the language of people's empowerment is well accepted today by groups and institutions across a wide spectrum.

In a country which pioneered and spearheaded structural and constitutional changes by way of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution in order to enable the practice of grassroots democracy, and in a land which takes pride in calling itself the "largest democracy in the world", it is appalling to see the highhanded use of power and authority to curb and limit precisely these voices and institutions of democratic participation and opinion. This is the sure path to fascism – and it is up to every right-thinking Indian to speak out against the actions of the Home Ministry (if these are true) and to stand up for the freedom and the right to form and propagate opinions. Quoting Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA) provisions and other interpretations of the laws governing social institutions as grounds for such action is nothing short of harassment and should be condemned without hesitation.

Lalita Ramdas,
Alibag, Maharashtra,
Sagari Ramdas,
Madhusudhan,
Usha, Asha, Pandu Dorai,
Secunderabad

Falklands ("A Kargil Election", *Frontline*, September 24, 1999).

Rather more important was the fact that there had been a breakaway party from Labour – the Social Democratic Party. Many Labour MPs defected to this party and it entered into an alliance with the Liberals, a so-called centrist party. At the same time, the Labour Party lurched dramatically to the left – its manifesto has been described as the "longest suicide note in history" – and proposed withdrawal from the European Union. These two factors were much more important than Kargil.

The implications for progressive forces in India are actually good. Kargil, or a rattling of the jingoistic military drum, are less important than unity and credible, coherent policies.

Stirling Smith
Bolton, England

Army's views

In "Changing strategies" (September 10), Praveen Swami has brought to fore certain aspects of the concept paper on "Management of Internal Conflict" that has been prepared by the Army Training Command, or ARTRAC, as known in defence circles. They do sound logical at times, when he tries to throw light on the so-called biased and lopsided view of the Army on solving or managing its burning internal conflict. Neverthless, given the present state of affairs in the country, be it in Jammu and Kashmir or in the northeastern States, it is high time that we stopped countering somthing that is constructive and innovative and that might go a long way in helping solve crises. The article seems to be reactionary and it appears that the author, like the Government, seconds *status quo* policies and discourages any meanigful step to solve the crisis.

The paper, as presented by ARTRAC, does warrant a serious thought by the Establishment since it brings out the problem as seen through the eyes of the armed forces. As has been seen by us, the price of the proxy war as also of various "Kargils" is apparently going to be borne by the Army in terms of men and machines.

The feature gives no weightage to the views of the organisation that ultimately faces the immediate consequences of the proxy war. How can we expect our soldiers to tick unless the Government gives an ear to what they say and take steps that will have their acceptance in letter and spirit?

Seeing the Army's views in the correct perspective – rather than just use the men in uniform as "cannon fodder" for insurgents, militants and infiltrators – would be an appreciative step on the part of the Government and our intelligentsia.

Malathi Ranjan
Purnea, Bihar

Correction: In the article titled "Somanatha and Mahmud" by Romila Thapar published in the April 23, 1999 issue of *Frontline*, end-note no. 38 should read as follows: R.H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1997, p. 93.

Fables rooted in history

he Nobel Prize for Literature finally reaches Gunter Grass, the writer who has found inspiration in the urbulence and tragedy of 20th century German life.

ROGER COHEN

UNTER GRASS, the winner of this year s Nobel Prize in Literature, probed the development of Germany from Nazism through Cold War division to unification with a relentlessly vivid eye

He was uncompromising in his political stances, often headily evocative in his rhythmic prose The 71-year old Gunter Grass became the first German to receive the prize since Heinrich Boll in 1972

He was the fifth successive European to receive the prize after Josi Saramago of Portugal in 1998, Dario Fo of Italy in 1997, Wislawa Szymborska of Poland in 1996 and Seamus Heaney of Ireland in 1995 From 1929 to 1998 the prize had been bestowed upon only three German authors, Thomas Mann, Boll and Nelly Sachs (he shared it with S Y Agnon in 1966)

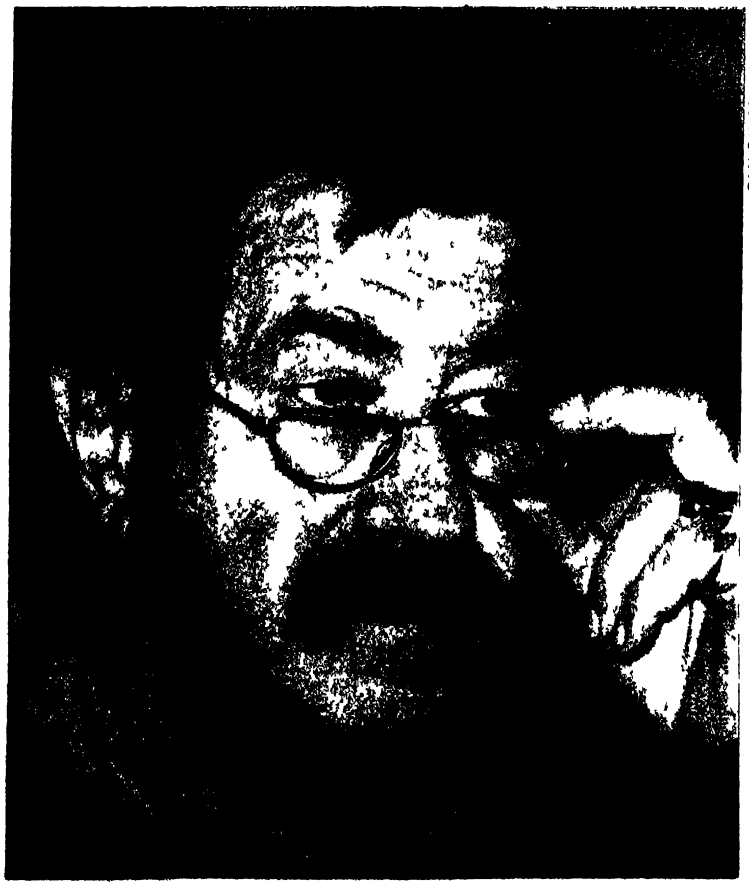
In its citation the Swedish Academy said Grass "frolicsome black fables portray the forgotten face of history" It praised his gift for "reviewing contemporary history by recalling the disavowed and the forgotten the victims, losers and lies that people wanted to forget because they had once believed in them " Grass' first epic novel, *The Tin Drum*, tackled the theme of Germany's agonised identity, which he has examined from various angles throughout his life. Of all the 20th century's fictional characters, perhaps few are as memorable as Oskar Matzerath, the boy with the tin drum and glass-shattering voice who stopped growing and so passes largely unnoticed as he observes the horror of the Nazi years with an unwavering gaze

'An entire credulous nation believed there s faith for you, in Santa Claus But Santa Claus was really the gasman, ' Oskar observes in *The Tin Drum* as he contemplates Germany s pious infatuation with Hitler The raw power of such writing propelled the book, published in 1959, to worldwide fame and helped revive German literature after what the Swedish Academy called ' decades of linguistic and moral destruction "

Grass was en route to the dentist in Lübeck, his home town in northern Germany, when he was informed of the honour Later, he said "It s a great joy for me, not just for myself but for all German literature, which is honoured with me It was an uncharacteristically patriotic remark from a man who was bitterly critical of German unification in 1990, describing it as another Anschluss and insisting that Auschwitz should have made united Germany forever impossible because it demonstrated that such a country was a danger to the world

Solidly built his face dominated by mischievous eyes and a drooping walrus-like moustache Grass has never shied away from challenging what he has often seen as his country s bourgeois complacency

He explored his anger and angered many of his countrymen in his major novel of the 1990s *Ein Weites Feld* Published in 1995 and translated as *A Broad Field* the book was widely criticised in Germany for its portrayal of ignorant and avaricious business tycoons taking over the people s property' of the former East Germany But the work whatever the criticism captured the mutual incomprehension that had plagued Germany s attempts at integration throughout the 1990s, and the academy said that it confirmed 'the author's position as the great prober of the history of this century"



RAJNI PKOSTERMEYER AP

Grass, whose passionate engagement in German society is utterly removed from the minimalist introspection of some modern literature, said 'A writer must fulfil not only literary obligations, but also those of a citizen by being involved politically I hope that young writers remember this in the future "

The admonition came from a man who has repeatedly found inspiration in the turbulence and tragedy of 20th-century German life Among Grass' best-known books

all published in the United States, are *Cat and Mouse* (1961) and *Dog Years* (1963), which with *The Tin Drum* made up "The Danzig Trilogy". In 1977 came *The Flounder*, a bustling and mischievous yarn woven from world history in which the destructiveness of men is contrasted with the achievements and sanity of women. This year Grass published *My Century: A Novel of Stories*, which is a running commentary on his times.

"The prize was long overdue," said Martin Walser, a prominent German writer. "Grass deserved to win the Nobel Prize for *The Tin Drum* alone." In a speech last year, Walser said that he was impatient with constant reminders of the Holocaust, remarks that prompted debate in Germany and revealed the uneasy conscience and uncertain national identity so often examined by Grass.

BORN on October 16, 1927 in Danzig, now Gdansk, Poland, Grass saw the rise of Nazism as a child and was drafted into the army in 1944. He narrowly escaped death when many 17-year-old members of his company were ripped to shreds by shelling. Later, when Germany surrendered, he was captured by the United States Army and held briefly.

Grass worked on a farm, in a mine and as an apprentice stonemason before studying sculpture and beginning to write poems and plays in the 1950s. He also worked as a journalist, and he illustrated some of his books. His marriage to a Swiss dancer, Anna Margareta, ended in divorce after the birth of four children; Grass married Ute Grunert in 1979.

He was indelibly influenced by his youth, which was shaped by War, the loss of a home in Danzig that became part of Communist Poland after the Second World War, and involvement with a Nazi convulsion for which he was too young to bear any responsibility but whose guilt he could not escape.

He was just too old for what Helmut Kohl, born in 1930, later called "the blessing of late birth".

Grass turned his wounds into powerful literary and political expression. With a handful of other writers, including Boll and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, he fought relentlessly after the war against German amnesia, what Enzensberger once called the "nice contented grave" of the post-War economic miracle.

It was in this context of post-War authoritarianism, of an American-assisted German reconstruction so successful that it served to blanket memory of past crimes, that *The Tin Drum* burst upon the national consciousness with all the power of a thunderbolt. Grass did not hesitate to remind his compatriots of precisely the history from which they had emerged. Gdansk might be in Communist Poland, solidly within the Soviet bloc, but little Oskar had seen what had happened there.

In the novel, the author mocked Germans looking for Poland with "Leicas and compasses, with radar, divining rods, delegations and moth-eaten provincial students' associations in costume."

He continued: "One of these days they will go searching for Poland with rockets. I, meanwhile, conjure up Poland on my drum. And this is what I drum: Poland's lost, but not forever, all is lost, but not forever, Poland's not lost forever."

Nor, as it happened, was Germany's Nazi past, the thugs whom Oskar observes after they have ransacked the toy shop of Sigismund Markus, a Jewish merchant in Danzig: "One had drawn his dagger. He was cutting dolls open and he seemed disappointed each time that nothing but sawdust flowed from their limbs and bodies."

In the 1960s, under the moral persuasion of writers like Grass and the protests of the post-War generation, this history returned to form a central part of Germany's modern consciousness, a reference point and a warning to which the country is now painfully vigilant.

The language of Grass was so pungent, even overwhelming at times, that it left Germans with no escape from the world it evoked.

Grass has never been entirely satisfied that the monsters are tamed. Through his writing and political stands, he has always attacked any indications of a re-emergent German satisfaction or smugness.

Always a man of the Left, although his relations with the Social Democratic Party have been stormy, Grass has repeatedly criticised what he once described as the "closet racism" of Germans, evident, he argued in 1997, in their attitude towards the country's large Turkish population.

"I am a Social Democrat because socialism without democracy is worthless to me and because an unsocial democracy is no democracy," Grass once said. He later left the party, and has been critical of Chancellor Gerhard Schrorder's attempts to shift Social Democracy towards a more pro-business stance.

THE No
about $1 million and is to be presented to Grass at a ceremony in Stockholm later this year.

The Swedish academy concluded its citation by saying that Grass goes "deeper than most and he unearths the intertwined roots of good and evil." Perhaps in no other country but Germany, home to Goethe and to Goebbels, to Heine and to Hitler, is this intertwining so intense. The author's authority has lain in his power to imbue his prose with a matching intensity.

As Grass writes in *Dog Years*, "While God was still at school, in the heavenly playground he came up with the idea of creating the world, together with his schoolmate, the talented little devil."

This devil, moreover, was powerful, seductive to a conformist nation, and often cleverly disguised. "He's coming. He's coming. Who is coming?" Grass writes in *The Tin Drum*. The Christ Child, the Saviour? Or is it the heavenly gasman with the gas meter under his arm, that always goes ticktock?" ■

New York Times Service

Grass' works: a selection

Some of the better-known works of Gunter Grass are:

The Tin Drum (1959)
Cat and Mouse (1961)
Dog Years (1963)
The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising (1966)
Four Plays (1967)
Speak Out: Speeches, Open Letters, Commentaries (1969)
Local Anesthetic (1969)
From the Diary of a Snail (1972)
In the Egg and Other Poems (1978)
The Meeting at Telgte (1978)
The Flounder (1977)
Headbirths: or, the Germans Are Dying Out (1980)
The Rat (1986)
Show Your Tongue (1987)
Two States - One Nation? (1990)
The Call of the Toad (1992)
A Broad Field (1995)
My Century (1999)

Consolidation in Uttar Pradesh

The results in Uttar Pradesh, where the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party fared exceedingly well, show that, contrary to speculation, "Mandal politics" may not have run out of steam.

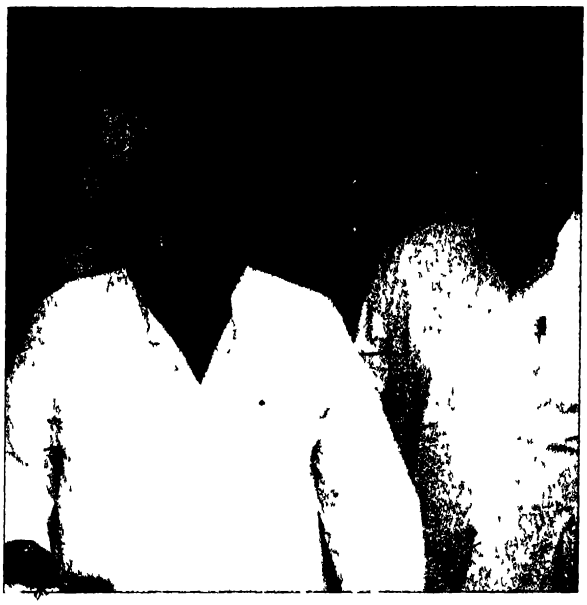
VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

THE remarkably good performance by the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh proves two things. First, that the politics of backward classes-Dalit assertion has not waned despite conjectures to the contrary. Second, the tendency among Muslims to see the prominent political forces representing the backward classes and Dalits as their natural allies and to forge tactical alliances with them to defeat the upper-caste-oriented Bharatiya Janata Party has become sharper.

The voting pattern in U.P. shows that substantial sections of Dalits and members of the backward classes and minorities continue to be committed to the politics of social justice – or Mandal politics, as it is termed – and will settle for nothing less than a real share in power. Their message is that attempts to accommodate them in systems that serve only to perpetuate the hegemony of the upper castes are doomed to fail.

In the run-up to the elections, many media commentators claimed that with the revival of the Congress(I) in the State, the practice of "umbrella politics", which ensured a measure of external harmony among the various castes and communities, had re-emerged; in their perception, the "caste politics" of the S.P. and the BSP would not be as successful as it has been in the past. This theory had it that the Congress(I)'s revival was being made possible by a shift in allegiance of Muslims, Dalits, Brahmins and backward castes from the S.P., the BSP and the BJP to that party.

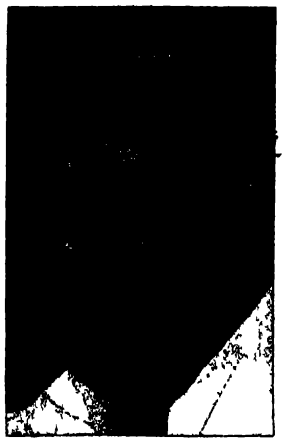
But what U.P. ultimately witnessed was a reassertion of caste politics as practised by the S.P. and the BSP. So much so that even within the BJP and the Congress(I), supporters from among the backward classes ended up supporting S.P. candidates at the local level. Former BJP member of Parliament Sakshi Maharaj, who was denied the party ticket, campaigned for the S.P. There were indications that this campaign, conducted under the auspices of an organisation that represented Lodh Rajputs, a backward community, was supported by backward class leaders within the State unit of the BJP, including Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, who belongs to that community.



RAJEEV BHATT

Samajwadi Party leaders Mulayam Singh Yadav, Amar Singh and Raj Babbar. The results in Uttar Pradesh are an indication that the influence of the politics of backward classes-Dalit assertion, as practised by the S.P. and the BSP, has not waned.

Although S.P. president Mulayam Singh Yadav and Kalyan Singh denied that they were working in tandem, the voting pattern in at least 15 constituencies point to a measure of cooperation between them. Kalyan Singh's refusal to campaign in the Mathura-Farukhabad region, where Sakshi Maharaj canvassed extensively for the S.P., was telling. In fact, in many constituencies people belonging to the backward classes claimed that both Kalyan Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav were their leaders. "Mulayam Singh Yadav for Prime Minister, Kalyan Singh for Chief Minister", was their slogan. Across the State, in meeting after meeting of these groups, one point was reiterated over and over again: that the struggle between backward classes and upper castes was far from over, and that people belonging to the upper castes in the BJP and the Congress(I) were out to undermine the influence of politicians from among the backward classes.



K. RAMESH BABU



ANU PUSHKARNA

BSP leaders Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The BSP's good showing is a vindication of Mayawati's theory that the party would fare well, even without alliances, on the strength of Dalit-Muslim consolidation.

In Unnao, the BJP's candidate, Devi Bux Singh, complained that the official administration helped members of the backward classes to rig the polls in favour of the S.P. She later claimed that her complaint had not been acted upon following instructions from a senior BJP leader – an obvious allusion to Kalyan Singh.

This backward class consolida-

Pollsters proved wrong

Interview: Mulayam Singh Yadav

Every time the media and political pundits predicted stunning reverses for the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) in elections in Uttar Pradesh, the party has confounded them by coming up with an improved performance. The story has been no different this time. The S.P., which had increased its tally to 20 seats in 1998 from 16, won an all-time high of 26 seats in 1999. Yet, when **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** met **Mulayam Singh Yadav**, the S.P. president was not happy. Surrounded by admirers and party workers who had come to congratulate him, Mulayam Singh Yadav said that adverse media projections and exit polls had deprived his party of at least 15 seats. Expcerpts:

▶ *Throughout the election campaign you emphasised the importance of rebuilding the Third Front as an alternative to the Congress(I) and the BJP. You said there was an anti-Congress(I), anti-BJP mood among the people. How do you now analyse the Lok Sabha election results?*

I had emphasised this point and even made some moves in that direction by aligning with forces such as the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). However, many of my old friends from non-BJP, non-Congress(I) parties did not understand this. The fundamental problem with many of them was that they had lost confidence in themselves. Hence they played second fiddle to the Congress(I), thinking that it would stop the BJP's march. I warned them that the Congress(I) was in alliance with the BJP and would only help it come back to power. The elections have shown that the Congress(I) is the single most important factor that helped the BJP's return to power. It is evident that the Congress(I) cannot stop the BJP. It needs a vibrant force like the Samajwadi Party. This is evident from the results in Uttar Pradesh, where the S.Ps organisational might is at the maximum. While my old friends failed to read the anti-communal, anti-dynastic-rule sentiment among dominant sections of the population we saw it early and tapped it well. Now that the results are out, I am sure that all those who pooh-poohed the Third Front concept have realised their mistake.

▶ *You had claimed that you would win around 35 to 40 seats in Uttar Pradesh.*

I would have won 40 to 50 seat, had it not been for the media pundits and the exit pollsters. Then, the BJP would not have been able to return to power. They went on campaigning that I would end up with three to five seats. They confused the minorities by propagating that Muslims across the country were deserting me and joining the Congress(I). This created a negative impression on the undecided voters. Most of these pundits and pollsters belong to the elite and they do not understand Bharat at all. They do not know about the rivers, hills, roads and forests of this great country. They do not know how people live here. They do not know what hardship poverty and lack of nutrition can cause. These are the people who reduced the S.P. to five seats. These are the people who always say that I am losing in my constituency even when I am winning by over a lakh of votes. There are television channels that say that I am trailing even after I have got the certificate of victory. I am sure that an inquiry as to how these media pundits underestimate the S.P's strength in every election would make an interesting study. Some shocking facts might come out of that.

▶ *Are you indicating a political conspiracy?*

I am only saying that an inquiry into this repeated underestimation would make an interesting study.

▶ *During the election campaign it was said that the S.P. had struck a secret understanding with the BJP.*

Three types of people made this baseless allegation. First, those who wanted to abuse me personally and politically. Second, those who pursued devious political designs, like some Congress(I) leaders. The third type of people who make

tion helped the S.P. get near-total support from Yadavs and Lodhs and substantial backing from other backward classes such as Kurmis and Keoris. Members of certain Scheduled Castes such as Pasis and Malhas also joined hands with the S.P., swayed by the influence of dacoit-turned politician Phoolan Devi. Yadavs and Lodhs are estimated to account for nearly 10 per cent and 6 per cent respectively of the State's population. Mulayam Singh Yadav wields near-total influence among Yadavs and Kalyan Singh over Lodhs.

Muslims evidently supported this combination wherever it seemed capable of defeating the BJP. The apprehension that the support extended to the S.P. by Sakshi Maharaj, who had been identified with the Ayodhya Ram temple movement, would drive away Muslim voters was found to be misplaced. In Agra, Farrukhabad and Firozabad, Sakshi Maharaj's supporters and Muslims made common cause with the S.P. Clearly, Mulayam Singh Yadav's political gamble paid off in this region.

However, the S.P. did not make uniform gains across the State. For instance, in western Uttar Pradesh, the Jat belt that includes Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Kairana and Saharanpur constituencies, the S.P-led backward class combination was not the natural choice of the minorities. In earlier elections the S.P. had derived its strength in this region solely from the minorities, and that was clearly insufficient to defeat the BJP. This time the minorities backed the resurgent Congress(I), which drew support also from among Jats, Gujjars and a section of Brahmins. Evidently, a section of the minorities was unhappy over the S.P's failure to back a Congress(I)-led government following the collapse of the Vajpayee government in April.

The S.P's support base among Muslims in this region was seriously eroded, as was evidenced in Meerut where it polled only 13,050 votes this time against 2,70,363 votes in 1998. In Saharanpur too the S.P. finished fourth, polling over a lakh votes fewer than it did in 1998. In Meerut, the Congress(I) benefited from tactical voting by the minorities. Such wholesale shifts of support from the S.P. in some constituencies brought down its vote share from 28.69 per cent to 24 per cent.

THE BSP improved its strength by retaining its support among Dalits and winning over support from a few other communities in some constituencies. The new votes were won by means of a judicious choice of candidates. As it did in two previous elections, the BSP won the votes of even Brahmins in constituencies where

his allegation are those who are ignorant of the political realities. I have answered all of them through the election results.

▶ *But BJP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh is on record as having said that the bitterness between him and Mulayam Singh Yadav is a thing of the past.*

I never had any personal animosity towards Kalyan Singh. Perhaps he was bitter at times but I took care never to say anything personal against him. This time he also did not make personal allegations. But our political rivalry continues.

▶ *How far did former BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj's campaign under the auspices of the Lodh Swabhiman Sabha help the S.P.?*

The BJP leadership humiliated Sakshiji and he wanted to get them defeated. He realised that only the S.P. could undertake this task. He campaigned for the S.P. without any conditions. In fact, throughout the campaign I had not even met him. It was only after the announcement of results that I saw him.

▶ *Do you think that the Lok Sabha results would make an impact on U.P. politics? If so, will it lead to a realignment of forces, especially between you and targeting the Chief Minister?*

How can anybody predict the future? We will have to see how the situation develops. ■

it fielded Brahmin candidates.

The BSP's vote share has gone up steadily in the past decade – from 8.32 per cent in 1991 to 20.60 per cent in 1996 to 20.90 per cent in 1998 and further to about 22 per cent this time. Studies conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies show that alongside this, the BSP's share of vote among upper-castes voters is also going up – it went up from 3.6 per cent in 1996 to 10.2 per cent in 1998. This may have gone up further, by three or four percentage points in this election.

In Amroha, Basti, Saharanpur and Shahbad constituencies, the BSP gained from the perception among Muslims that it stood the best chance of defeating the BJP. According to party supremo Kanshi Ram, the BSP finished a close second to the BJP in nine constituencies this time and will win these next time. ■

COVER STORY

Managing to lose

The Congress(I) slumps to its worst-ever electoral performance, despite regional gains and an increase in its overall vote share. An analysis of the factors behind the debacle.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

REPORTS that poured into the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC) office from various States as campaigning for the 13th Lok Sabha elections came to an end suggested a major downswing in the National Democratic Alliance's prospects. Congress(I) leaders, convinced of the party emerging as the single largest party in Parliament, even put forward to President K.R. Narayanan the demand that the single largest party, and not an alliance, be invited to form the government. Discussions within the Congress(I) focussed on whether Sonia Gandhi would be the Prime Minister or whether she would nominate Manmohan Singh for the job. There was unanimity on the view that it was Sonia Gandhi's leadership that had revived the party at the national level.

However, it was clear by October 8 that the party had slumped to its worst-ever electoral performance: it had won just 112 seats, a decline of 29 seats from its 1998 tally, which in itself was the poorest showing ever by the party. In fact the Congress(I) and its alliance partners – the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) – could together muster only 134 seats.

Yet, the Congress(I) was placed in a unique position, of having increased its vote share to 33.8 per cent, almost six percentage points more than in the previous elections, while the vote share of the BJP dropped. Congress(I) spokesperson Kapil Sibal pointed out that it was clear from the



AKLESH KUMAR

Sonia Gandhi at an election rally in Amethi.

AJITH KUMAR/AP



A dejected Congress(I) worker listens to the radio for election news.

votes polled that the Congress(I)'s organisational network had improved during the last 17 months under Sonia Gandhi's leadership although the party could not convert this factor into Lok Sabha seats.

Owing to this gain and the perception that there is no alternative to a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family, the party may not witness the kind of upheaval that characterised the post-election situation in 1998. (In 1998, party president Sitaram Kesri was unceremoniously replaced with Sonia Gandhi, who went on to become the leader of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party (CPP) without being an MP). However, Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) member Rajesh Pilot has decided to contest for CPP leadership in order to assert the "democracy principle".

THE Congress(I) had hoped to improve its strength in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It was estimated that the total gain from these States would be 45 seats. The party leadership thought these gains would offset the loss of between 30 and 35 seats in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the northeastern States, which accounted for 64 of the 141 seats the Congress(I) won in 1998, and leave the party with a net gain of 10 to 15 seats. However, during the last phase of the campaign the leadership revised this estimate, saying that the losses in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the northeastern States would not be as substantial as anticipated and hence the party could actually improve its position. This perception got firmly established as party leaders from Andhra Pradesh claimed that there was an unprecedented shift of Muslim votes towards the Congress(I). They said that the party would improve upon its 1998 tally of 22 seats out of the 42 in the State. In Rajasthan the party had won 18 out of 25 seats in 1998; State party leaders reported to the central leadership that it would retain at least 15 seats in spite of the anti-incumbency factor.

It was estimated that a minimum of 100 seats would come from Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, while the losses in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and the northeastern region would amount to less than 35 seats. Overall, a gain of 65 seats was projected.

In the event, the total gain from the areas mentioned was just 51 seats and the loss suffered in Maharashtra and Rajasthan alone added up to 30. Andhra Pradesh returned only five party candidates as opposed to the expected figure of 25. In Madhya Pradesh, the net gain was of just one seat although the expected number was 20. Rajasthan witnessed a decline of nine seats, from 18 in 1998. In Gujarat the party's tally dropped to six, one less than that in the previous Lok Sabha. In Bihar, its strength declined to three seats from five. Only Karnataka did not belie the leadership's expectations: the party won 18 seats and emerged victorious in the Assembly elections. Yet, the net loss was 29 seats.

ALTHOUGH the Congress(I) is yet to undertake a comprehensive post-election analysis, five factors are attributed to its debacle. First, lack of an imaginative approach on the part of Sonia Gandhi's coterie, which called the shots in the selection of candidates and in evolving the campaign strategy. What is regarded as the worst misadventure of the coterie was the decision to put up Sonia Gandhi for the Bellary seat and the way she filed her nomination. According to a senior leader, the negative effect of this on the rank and file was never fully overcome despite the confidence exuded by the leadership in the latter stages of the campaign. The Bellary episode strengthened the public perception that associated Sonia Gandhi's names with secrecy and inaccessibility; it also highlighted her dependence on the coterie.

The second factor is the contradictory statements that Congress(I) leaders made on the question of coalition government versus single-party rule. Sonia Gandhi, it is felt, did not adopt a clear line on this. She talked about single-party rule most of the time but occasionally lapsed into accepting the possibility of a coalition government. This deprived the party of an effective campaign strategy. The failure to project a prime ministerial candidate is also identified by certain Congress(I) leaders as a reason for the defeat. Many senior leaders now feel that in order to give the campaign a cutting edge, the party should have boldly projected either Sonia Gandhi or Manmohan Singh as its prime ministerial candidate.

Thirdly, the assessment is that the party failed to counter effectively the NDA's campaign on the Kargil war, particularly ahead of the first two phases of polling.

The fourth factor is the lack of concrete moves to repair the damage caused to the organisation by the revolt led by Sharad Pawar and to neutralise the effect of the faction fights in various State units. The results from Maharashtra, Andhra

Pradesh and Orissa indicate the failure of the organisational set-up in these States.

The failure to implement the special organisational plans in Maharashtra, the northeastern States and certain parts of Rajasthan, and the fielding of candidates with doubtful credentials – such as alleged mafia don M.K. Subba in Assam – are highlighted in this context. Attempts to perpetuate dynastic politics in the form of allotment of seats to party leaders' relatives – among them were former Kerala Chief Minister K. Karunakaran's son, Punjab Congress(I) president Amarinder Singh's wife, Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) president Salman Khurshid's wife, Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang's wife and former Union Minister K. Natwar Singh's son – have been cited as representing an unhealthy trend.

Lastly, the alliances with the AIADMK and the RJD and the lack of coordination with the allies are seen as having had negative effect. In order to emphasise this point, critics mention the unrest in the Bihar unit of the party during seat adjustment talks between Sonia Gandhi and RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav as well as the snub that AIADMK leader Jayalalitha handed to Sonia Gandhi by skipping her first election rally in Tamil Nadu.

THE question now is whether the outcome of the elections will give rise to a threat to Sonia Gandhi's leadership. According to a senior leader, the elections were characterised by the continuation of a plethora of mistakes Sonia Gandhi committed since November 1998, after the Congress(I) scored a major victory in the Assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Yet it is unlikely that her position will be challenged. However, the attack against the coterie, which consists of CWC member Arjun Singh, Sonia Gandhi's secretary Vincent George, and party general secretaries Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Oscar Fernandes, would gain strength. Mukherjee and Fernandes have already resigned their party posts.

Whatever Sonia Gandhi's immediate fate as Congress(I) president, there has been change in the way she is described: hailed not long ago as the person who transformed the Congress(I) from a moribund and direction-less establishment into a vibrant organisation capable of leading the country, her position today is that of a leader who led the Congress(I) to one of its worst defeats. That is bound to diminish her stature in the party. ■

Whose agenda?

Tasks before the new government.

VENKATESH ATHREYA

AS the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government in New Delhi settles down, attention should shift to the question of the agenda before it.

There has already been considerable discussion in the print and electronic media on the agenda. The overwhelming focus has been on economic issues. The captains of industry, speaking through various industry associations, have been especially vociferous in spelling out the economic agenda.

The concern with economic issues, and the sense of urgency about them, is understandable. During the election campaign, the two main formations in the fray – the NDA and the Congress(I) – pushed economic issues into the background.

The NDA campaigned almost solely on the plank of A.B. Vajpayee's virtues, and the fact that he was "able and stable" prime ministerial material, while the Congress(I) claimed that it alone had in the past provided a stable government, and it alone could do so again. It was only the Left parties which projected economic issues, both in their manifestoes and in their campaign. However, the Left had accorded primacy to the issue of secularism even while attacking the economic policies of the BJP, which constituted both the continuation and intensification of neoliberal policies pursued by the earlier Congress(I) and United Front governments. Given this fact and the limited reach of the Left, economic issues did not figure prominently in the election campaign. Of course, the telecom scam hit the headlines, but was not sustained as a campaign issue in a big way.

It is now obvious that the new government will have to contend with several urgent economic issues. The National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has described the fiscal situation as "...a source of grave concern".

The incongruence between the people's agenda and that of the NDA/BJP is bound to have implications for economic and political stability.

The pressure on the government's finances is coming from both the revenue and expenditure sides. While revenues have grown by only 13 per cent as against the projected 19 per cent, the additional expenditure on the Kargil war alone is estimated by some sources at more than Rs.5,000 crores. The Central government's net borrowings in the first two quarters of the current financial year at Rs.50,331 crores amount to 87 per cent of the amount budgeted for the entire financial year 1999-2000. The fiscal deficit is expected to reach 6 per cent of GDP and will exceed the figure if public sector disinvestment does not generate the budgeted provision of Rs.10,000 crores.

The current rate of inflation is quite low, this being the result of a very high base created by the extraordinarily rapid increase in primary product prices earlier. However, with 'normalcy' in primary product prices getting restored, and several new inflationary pressures emerging – witness, for instance, the sharp rise in petroproduct prices – the rate of inflation is expected to reach 7 to 8 per cent by the end of the year. In fact, a feature of the neoliberal policy regime of the 1990s has been the coexistence of a high inflation rate with sustained recession. The average annual rate of inflation for the decade of the 1990s is close to 9 per cent.

These emerging economic issues apart, there is also an air of expectancy among the corporate sector leaders of some quick and decisive action from the NDA government, now that its parliamentary majority is not as precarious as that of the previous regime. The industry bodies – the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and so on – have put forward the following agenda.

★ Clearing, within two to three months, the backlog of economic legislation pending before Parliament including the Companies Bill, the Insurance

Regulatory Authority (IRA) Bill and the Foreign Exchange Management Bill;

★ Privatisation of the public sector by bringing down government holding below 51 per cent;

★ Allowing 74 per cent foreign equity in the car, auto component, bulk grain handling and tourism sectors;

★ Financial sector reforms including privatisation of banks;

★ Easing of price controls in the pharmaceutical industry;

★ Approval of the new telecom policy;

★ Focussing on intellectual property rights, and the agricultural and services sectors at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) coming up in Seattle.

The corporate agenda is quite in line with the policies of the previous BJP-led government. During its 13-month rule, the BJP-led government had pursued neoliberal policies with greater vigour than all its predecessors. It opened up the economy to foreign investors in a big way, pushed hard the agenda of privatisation of public sector undertakings, provided several tax concessions to the corporate sector, and substantially raised the issue prices of rice, wheat and sugar provided through the public distribution system (PDS), besides hiking other administered prices and tariffs.

Interestingly, in anticipation of its return to power, the caretaker government had been busy making plans for the pursuit of an economic agenda largely consistent with what the corporates have now sought. Thus, the core group of Secretaries of the Government of India have finalised plans for the sale of several public sector undertakings including the Indian Petrochemical Corporation Limited (IPCL), the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) and the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL). Close on the heels of the sharp rise in diesel prices announced by the caretaker government a day before counting of votes began on October 6, the Petroleum Ministry mooted proposals for hikes in the prices of kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The Prime Minister himself was quoted as saying that once the new government is in office, the IRA Bill will be passed in three days' time.

It is interesting to note, however, that while the NDA manifesto had spoken of continuing with the reform process, it also claimed that it would "... give it a strong *swadeshi* thrust..." and reappraise and revitalise reforms through giving primacy to removal of unemployment.."

It is clear that the economic agenda of the new government will largely be in line with the needs of the demands of the corporate sector, Indian and foreign, and that there would be a fair degree of consensus among NDA partners on the matter of the agenda. The socio-political agenda of the new government is, however, an issue on which consensus will be less easy to forge.

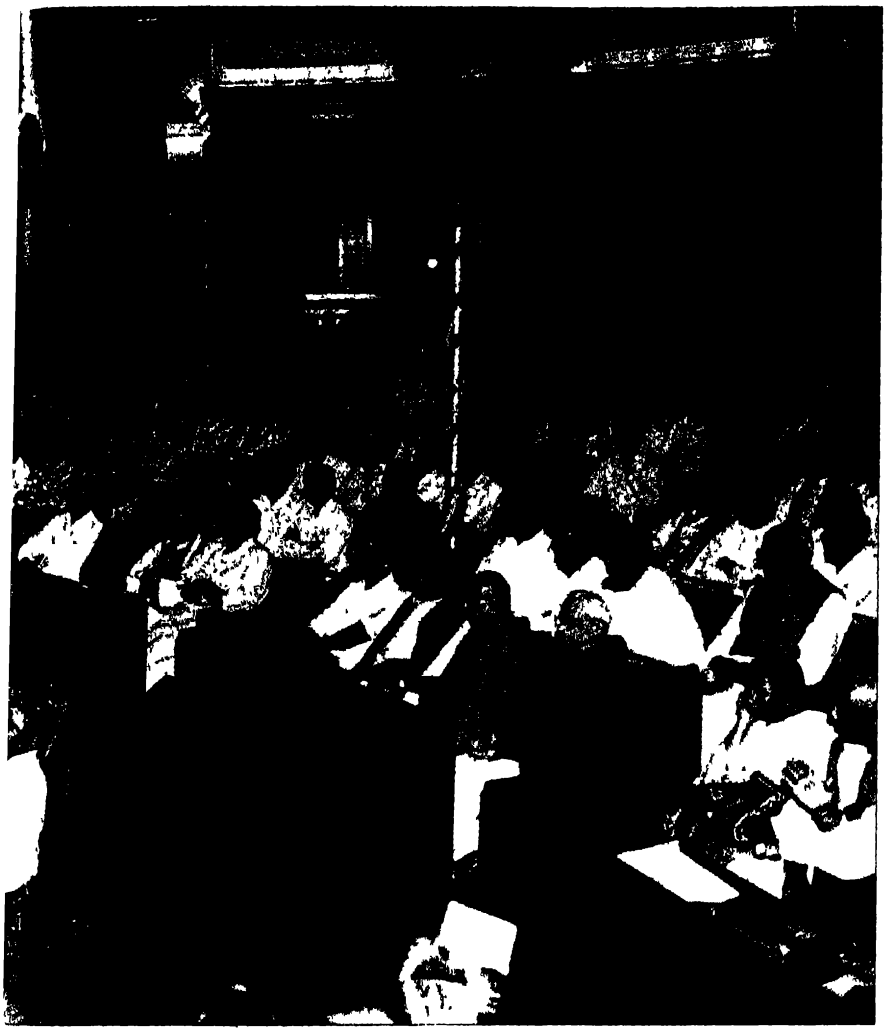


S ARNEJA

Prime Minister A.B. Vajapayee addresses NDA leaders and MPs in the Central Hall of Parliament on October 10. It is obvious that the new government will have to contend with several urgent economic issues.

During the election campaign, while the NDA manifesto steered clear of the contentious issues of Ayodhya, Article 370 and a uniform civil code, this was not necessarily true of the actual campaign itself. In communally sensitive constituencies (such as Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu), a clear effort was made by the BJP to consolidate the 'Hindu vote', with a not insignificant degree of success. It would, therefore, appear somewhat naive to assume that the presence of such parties as the DMK or the TDP would ensure that the dominant partner BJP will abjure communal mobilisation and stick to the parameters agreed upon among the NDA partners. In fact, the rather evasive remarks of senior BJP leader L.K. Advani, to a question on whether the Ayodhya issue was being postponed or given up, provides a clue to the dilemmas facing the BJP leadership as well as the NDA. Clearly, the BJP's agenda is not the same as that of the NDA's, and equally pertinent, the RSS/VHP/Bajrang Dal agenda is not in every instance (though it is in the main) necessarily identical to that of a BJP in government.

In an important sense, this election has shown that communal mobilisation is not always efficacious even in electoral terms. Where clear alternatives to the BJP's communal-plus-neoliberal agenda were present, they have received popular support. The performance of the Left forces in Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura and that of the S.P. and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh bear this out. On the other hand, as



already noted, communal mobilisation has helped the BJP win in several constituencies. The political and social forces which seek to fight for a secular and democratic polity will need to keep this complexity in mind, and hence also the need to retain the focus on the three inter-related goals of secularism – social justice and economic equity and self-reliance.

An issue of which much was made in the NDA manifesto is that of constitutional reforms. The NDA sought to make the 'stability' of an elected government – and guarantee of its continuity throughout the five-year term of the Lok Sabha – the focus of such reforms.

Leaving aside the essentially undemocratic proposals that seek to ensure a five-year term for an elected government at all costs, an issue that is of longstanding importance and is bound to come up is that of Centre-State relations. Going by the record, both the BJP and the Congress(I) have tended to ride roughshod over elected State governments, and have sought to utilise Article 356 to bring them down. In the present coalition dispensation, that would be rather more difficult. Be that as it may, a well-thought-out overhaul of Centre-State relations in order to ensure a genuinely federal, democratic and pluralist polity, which strengthens the Union as well as the States, should certainly be on the nation's agenda. To this, one should add further decentralisation of power and authority to elected local bodies, as well as reservation for women in Legislative Assemblies and parliament as issues to be addressed urgently.

FINALLY, does the BJP/NDA agenda correspond to the needs of the people of India? It unfortunately does not, in most respects. Its agenda of continuance and intensification of the reform process, including the carrying out of the so-called second generation of reforms, flies in the face of people's experience with the neoliberal economic policy regime for nearly a decade now. These nine years of economic reforms have not led to accelerated growth, nor to significant reduction of poverty or unemployment. There have been no major breakthroughs in such areas of human development as education or health, despite lip-service to such goals as part of the official rhetoric on reforms. The economy today is far more vulnerable to external shocks and the policy makers find themselves increasingly constrained by the need to attract foreign investors and keep them happy. The failure of the state to mobilise resources for development is evident in the decline in the tax-to-GDP ratio and the sharp decline in government capital formation, a decline not compensated by private investment. The erosion of the PDS imperils the people's food security. India's weakness at the WTO forum weakens the nation's economic sovereignty. The economic agenda really ought to address and reverse these developments, rather than pursue neoliberal economic policy as the panacea for all ills.

Similarly, on the socio-political front, securalism, and commitment to India's socio-cultural, linguistic and religious plurality are essential to ensuring political stability, which can hardly be guaranteed by mere parliamentary arithmetic.

There is, of course, the all-important question of nuclear policy. In the months to come, the consequences of Pokhran-II will come to haunt India repeatedly, as they have already done in Kargil. The pressures to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) will be strong. The straws in the wind – witness Murli Manohar Joshi's statement to the effect that India was ready to sign the CTBT, all that remained was to get the NDA partners to agree – indicate that the NDA partners, many of whom have in the recent past held forth on the inadvisability of signing the treaty, would have to be vigilant.

Finally, there is the larger issue of India's foreign policy, its role in a unipolar world and its relations with major countries as well as its neighbours. The complex questions of foreign policy need a far more nuanced discussion than would be possible here. Suffice it to say that cozying up to the United States, allowing it to intercede in the Kashmir issue in the hope that it will favour India as a regional power or announcing China as the country's main enemy – these hardly constitute an inspiring record.

As the nation faces a complex agenda, the incongruence between the people's agenda and that of the NDA/BJP is bound to have implications for economic and political stability. ■

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, has been undertaking post-poll surveys of a sample of 16,000 respondents since the general elections of 1996. According to the CSDS, the surveys are considered by political analysts as an ideal source of data on voting behaviour. Unlike in the case of a pre-poll survey, there is no possibility here of the voter-respondent eventually changing his or her mind or not voting at all. And, unlike in the case of an exit poll, these surveys offer an opportunity to do a random selection of respondents and ask them a wide range of questions, the CSDS points out.

Investigators of the CSDS have gone back to the same respondents after the 1996, 1998 and 1999 elections. According to the CSDS, this technique is considered the most precise and reliable way of measuring change over time, for it eliminates the possibility of change in two readings occurring simply as a result of differences in sample selection. The CSDS surveys have followed a rigorous technique of selecting a strictly random sample from the electoral rolls. As a result, the sample is known to match all the known attributes of the Indian electorate within a margin of 1 per cent, the CSDS says.

The sample involves 108 Lok Sabha constituencies spread over 20 States and Union Territories: it consists of 216 Assembly segments and 432 polling stations. The total sample size is 16,000, but since the survey does not make any substitution it normally achieves a target of between 9,000 and 10,000 respondents.

In the current elections, three of the target constituencies of the CSDS sample will go to the polls only on October 28. The survey has hence been conducted in 105 Lok Sabha constituencies, covering 210 Assembly constituencies and 419 polling booths. The achieved sample is thus 9,069.

The CSDS survey has been supported in part by *Frontline*.

Interpreting the mandate

YOGENDRA YADAV
SANJAY KUMAR

IF elections are only about who gets the right numbers to form the government, there is no doubt that the Bharatiya Janata Party and its numerous allies have emerged winners in the 13th Lok Sabha elections. Unlike on the previous two occasions, there is little uncertainty this time about who will form the government. For the first time in the last decade a pre-electoral alliance has crossed the majority mark. And it is not a wafer-thin majority. Once elections are held to the remaining six seats, the BJP can hope for a situation in which no single ally of it will be able to bring down the government, not even the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). The new government will not be susceptible to blackmail by small allies. No wonder there is palpable relief in those circles within and outside the country for whom government stability is the predominant concern. So much so that no one stops to notice the fact that this is the fifth election in a row to have thrown up a 'hung parliament'.

But if election results are to be seen as anything more than the score in a numbers game in Parliament, if the larger political signs of a popular mandate are to be read, then the signals sent by the latest verdict are far from obvious. The winning coalition has increased its parliamentary strength by 50 seats. But that is mainly because the BJP acquired new allies, rather than having won greater mass support. If the current score of the BJP and its allies is compared to what the current allies had in the previous Lok Sabha, they have gained very little. In the previous Lok Sabha, they had 265 seats based on 42.3 per cent of the popular vote. The final picture for the new Lok Sabha shows that the current alliance has 296 seats based on 40.8 per cent of the popular vote. In other words, they have gained 34 seats and have lost 1.5 percentage points of the popular vote. The figures will surely dampen the enthusiasm of BJP strategists once the celebrations are over.

The BJP on its own has not been able to increase its tally in the Lok Sabha. It might, once the six remaining constituencies also go to the polls. But the fact remains that there is no substantial gain for the party at the end of a dream campaign. In terms of vote share too, the BJP has lost almost two percentage points, from 25.6 per cent last time to 23.7 per cent this time. It is true that this loss can be accounted for by the fact that the BJP contested 50 seats fewer than last time. But it cannot be denied that the BJP's almost unstoppable upward march has come to a halt. However, there is a silver lining for the BJP: it has for the first time made inroads into new territories, thus taking another step towards becoming an all-India party. The BJP's victories in Goa, Assam and the Andaman Islands may not contribute very much to its kitty, but they are crucial to its nation-

Lok Sabha election results 1999: Group-wise analysis

	Seats	Turn-out 1999	Change over 1998	Cong(I)+ Seats	Gain /Loss	Vote share
Total	537	59.8	-2.2	134	-28	33.8
Locality-wise						
Rural	415	61.1	-1.7	109	-17	34.3
Semi-rural	59	60.8	-2.1	11	-12	34.0
Urban	63	52.3	-4.2	14	+1	30.8
Category-wise						
S.C.	79	59.7	-2.3	10	-8	29.6
S.T.	39	57.4	-2.0	8	-10	36.8
General	419	60.0	-2.1	116	-12	34.3
Phase-wise						
Phase I	148	57.4	-2.4	50	-13	39.8
Phase II	124	60.7	-0.7	36	-9	40.4
Phase III	79	54.8	-4.5	13	+1	30.5
Phase IV	72	59.1	-1.9	18	-1	35.5
Phase V	116	66.2	-0.9	19	-6	31.1

l ambitions. Elections 1999 have thus ompleted one phase of the BJP's rise to ower. In this period the party underwent geographical, social and political expan- on. It has now reached a plateau of elec- oral success and is now subject to the normal cycle of success and failure. While he BJP's ascent to power at the Centre llustrates one face of this process, its lefeat in Uttar Pradesh shows the other ace.

The only real victors of this election seem to be some of the allies of the BJP, such as the TDP, the Biju Janata Dal(BJD) and the Trinamul Congress, which have added to their votes and seats. The TDP on its own has 3.7 per cent of the national vote share, besides 29 seats. It is too early to say whether the gains of its allies would necessarily strengthen the BJP. It is an important point, since the BJP's share of the combined seats of the ruling alliance has declined from 73 per ent at the time of the constitution of the 2th Lok Sabha to 61 per cent at the eginning of the 13th Lok Sabha. The decline in its share of seats is bound to lead to a reduction in its clout within the reconstituted National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

FOR the Congress(I) too, the results are ambiguous. After successively losing its vote share in every round of elections since 1984, the Congress(I) seems to have staged something of a recovery. Its national vote share now stands at 28.5 per cent, an improvement of 2.7 percentage points over the last elections. If its allies are included, the gain is nearly five percentage points. The Congress(I) is back in power in Karnataka and Arunachal Pradesh and may well share power in Maharashtra. The recovery in Uttar Pradesh must be the best news the Congress(I) has had in quite a while. Much of the party's rise in vote share nationally is owing to the upswing in U.P.

Notwithstanding these consolations, the Congress(I) must confront the harsh reality that with a tally of 112, its contingent in the 13th Lok Sabha is the smallest ever. It is the third successive round of elections, and the second in which Sonia Gandhi campaigned, that the party has lost decisively. This defeat must be particularly hard to take, for less than a year ago it seemed that the 13th Lok Sabha was the Congress(I)'s for the asking. The BJP had lost three crucial Assembly elections – in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh – and nationwide opinion polls had predicted swing of between six and seven percentage points against it. If that potential swing could not be translated into actual electoral victory, the Congress(I) has no one else to blame. The defeat in this round of elections has long-term implications for Sonia Gandhi's leadership, the party organisation and the very survival of the party in its present form.

THE Left Front has lost six seats and added a tiny fraction to its votes. Given its organisational problems in Kerala and the slowly rising dissatisfaction in West Bengal, its seems to have got away lightly. Even the slightest swing of votes away from it would have resulted in lots of red faces.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) looks like an obvious winner with a three-fold increase in its number of seats. While 14 parliamentary seats will no doubt give it a visibility that it did not have earlier, the fact that the BSP is shrinking into an only-U.P. phenomenon cannot be overlooked. Its nationwide vote share dropped by 0.4 percentage point, about 10 per cent of what it had last time, though there has been a 1.2 percentage-point gain in U.P. It lost its only seat outside U.P. and dropped votes in the crucial State of Madhya Pradesh where it once hoped to become the third major player. Even in U.P., its gain in seats is owing to a very small swing of votes and tactical voting, a temporary phenomenon.

The same can be said of the Samajwadi Party (S.P.). Its remarkable achievement in this round of elections was to defy its obituaries once again. But its gain in seats has come despite a loss of 4.7 percentage points in its vote share in U.P. and one-fifth of its all-India votes. Like the BSP, it has disappeared from States other than U.P.

Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has proved to be only a Maharashtra phenomenon. While he showed that he can ensure the defeat of the official Congress, Sharad Pawar was unable to dislodge the Congress(I) the way Mamata Banerjee did in West Bengal. With 22 per cent of the votes in Maharashtra, he trails the official Congress(I) by 12 percentage points.

In other words, while this round of elections has produced what looks like a coherent majority, much of it is owing to the vagaries of the electoral system. The attainment of a majority in Parliament does not imply a polarisation of voters in favour of the winning combine. Nor does it indicate any effective bipolarisation of the party's political space. The seats occupied by the two leading alliances have not increased compared to the 1998 elections.

	BJP+			Left+				Others			
ats	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Seats	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Seats	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
99	+80	40.8	+4.2	42	-6	8.0	+0.2	62	-22	17.4	-9.3
218	+38	39.5	+4.0	32	-9	7.8	-0.2	58	-18	18.4	-9.2
38	+13	43.7	+6.9	6	+1	7.1	+1.1	4	-2	15.1	-10.2
43	+1	45.9	+2.6	4	+2	9.7	+2.0	2	-4	13.6	-9.0
9	+14	42.2	+6.1	9	-2	9.4	-0.2	11	-6	18.8	-12.7
3	+9	40.9	+4.2	4	-1	8.1	-0.5	4	—	15.1	-2.5
227	+27	40.5	+3.7	29	-9	7.7	-0.3	47	-16	17.4	-9.1
				2	+1	1.8	-0.6	8	-14	12.8	-11.6
				8	-1	2.4	+1.5	10	-11	13.4	-12.7
				—	-2	2.0	-1.0	19	-7	26.5	-8.7
				—	—	4.0	+1.2	8	-2	19.9	-4.1
				32	-4	29.0	+0.2	19	-2	20.2	-2.6

State	BJP + allies			Congress(I) + allies			Left parties + allies			BSP		Others		
		Seats	Vote share		Seats	Vote share		Seats	Vote share	Seats	Vote share		Seats	Votes
[illegible]		35	49.8	Cong(I)	5	42.8	CPI(M)	—	1.4			MIM	1	1.4
	BJP	7	9.1				CPI	—	1.4					
	TDP	28	40.7				TDP(LP)	—	0.2					
Assam*	BJP	2	29.6	Cong(I)	9	38.8	CPI(M)	—	1.9	—	8.1	CPI(ML)	1	2.4
												Ind.	1	8.1
Arunachal Pradesh	BJP	—	16.3	Cong(I)	2	56.9						ARC	—	16.6
												NCP	—	7.8
Bihar*		40	44.5		10	39.8				—	1.4	CPI(ML)	—	2.7
	BJP	23	23.3	Cong(I)	3	8.9	CPI(M)	—	0.1			JMM	—	1.8
	JD(U)	17	21.2	RJD	7	29.8	CPI	—	2.7					
Goa	BJP	2	51.5	Cong(I)	—	39.0	CPI	—	2.9			NCP	—	3.8
Gujarat	BJP	20	52.5	Cong(I)	6	44.4	CPI	—	0.1	—	0.1			
Haryana		10	58.1	Cong(I)	—	34.9	CPI(M)	—	0.2	—	1.7	HVP	—	2.8
	BJP	5	28.5											
	HVC(S)	5	29.6											
Himachal Pradesh		4	58.6											
	BJP	3	46.2	Cong(I)	—	39.5	CPI	—	0.5	—	0.3			
	HVC(S)	1	12.3											
Jammu & Kashmir	BJP	2	31.5	Cong(I)	—	17.8	CPI(M)	—	1.0	—	4.8	JKNC	4	28.9
Karnataka		19	40.4	Cong(I)	18	45.4	CPI(M)	—	0.1	—	0.7	JD(S)	—	10.5
	BJP	7	28.9											
	JD(U)	3	13.5											
Kerala	BJP	—	7.9	UDF	11	46.9	LDF	9	43.7	—	0.1	S.P.	—	1.3
				Cong(I)	8	39.4	CPI(M)	8	27.9					
				KC(M)	1	2.3	CPI	—	7.6					
				IUML	2	5.3	KC(J)	1	2.4					
							JD(S)	—	2.2					
							Ind.**	—	3.6					
Madhya Pradesh	BJP	29	46.6	Cong(I)	11	43.9	CPI	—	0.3	—	5.2			
Maharashtra		28	38.5		11	34.0	CPI(M)	—	0.5	—	0.4	NCP	6	22.1
	BJP	13	21.9	Cong(I)	10	30.7	CPI	—	0.1			PWP	1	0.9
	Shiv Sena	15	16.5	RPI	—	1.5						JD(S)	1	0.9
				BBM	1	1.8						RPI (A)	1	1.4
Manipur	MSCP	1	34.7	Cong(I)	—	30.3						MPP	—	32.8
Meghalaya	BJP	—	9.4	Cong(I)	—	32.8	CPI	—	0.7			NCP	1	27.9
Mizoram												Ind.	1	95.6
Nagaland	BJP	—	5.1	Cong(I)	1	71.2						Ind.	1	22.9
Orissa		19	57.6	Cong(I)	2	36.9	CPI	—	1.3					
	BJP	9	24.6				CPI(M)	—	0.1					
	BJD	10	33.0											

State	BJP + allies			Congress(I) + allies			Left parties + allies			BSP		Others		
		Seats	Vote share		Seats	Vote share		Seats	Vote share	Seats	Vote share		Seats	Votes
Punjab		3	40.6	Cong(I)	8	38.4					3.8	SAD(M)	1	3.4
	BJP	1	9.2				CPI	1	3.7					
	SAD	2	28.6											
	DBSP	—	2.7											
Rajasthan	BJP	16	46.9	Cong(I)	9	44.8	CPI	—	0.4	—	2.7			
							CPI(M)	—	0.5					
Sikkim	SDF	1	52.6	Cong(I)	—	4.8	—	—	—	—	—	SSP	—	42.2
Tamil Nadu		26	47.1		12	36.8	—	1	5.0	—	—	TMC	—	7.2
	BJP	4	7.1	Cong(I)	2	11.1	CPI(M)	1	2.4	—	—	P.T.	—	2.1
	DMK	12	23.1	AIADMK	10	25.7	CPI	—	2.6	—	—			
	PMK	5	8.2											
	MDMK	4	5.9											
	TRC	—	1.2											
	MADMK	1	1.5											
	MGR-K	1	N.A.											
Tripura	BJP	—	25.3	Cong(I)	—	13.9	CPI(M)	2	43.8	—	—	TRMC	—	14.5
Uttar Pradesh		32	30.5		12	17.3	CPI	—	0.3	14	22.1	S.P.	26	24.0
	BJP	29	27.6	Cong(I)	10	14.8	CPI(M)	—	N.A.			SJP.	1	0.5
	Lok.Cong	2	1.5	LKDA	2	2.5								
	Ind**	1	0.8											
West Bengal		10	37.9	Cong(I)	3	13.3		29	46.7	—	6.2			
	BJP	2	11.1				CPI(M)	21	35.6					
	Trinamul Cong	8	26.8				CPI	3	33.5					
							RSP	3	4.2					
							F.B.	2	3.4					
A&N Islands	BJP	1	52.7	Cong(I)	—	43.2						NCP	—	0.7
Chandigarh	BJP	—	45.1	Cong(I)	1	47.0				—	2.8			
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	BJP	—	20.8	Cong(I)	—	14.7						Shiv Sena	—	19.5
												Ind.	1	44.9
Daman & Diu	BJP	—	43.1	Cong(I)	1	49.5								
Delhi	BJP	7	51.8	Cong(I)	—	41.9		—	—	—	—	JD(S)	—	1.4
Lakshadweep	—	—	—	Cong(I)	1	54.0						JD(U)	—	43.3
Pondicherry	PMK	—	31.7	Cong(I)	1	37.2						TMC	—	25.2
ALL INDIA	Total	299	40.8	Total	134	33.8	Total	42	8.0	14	4.2	Others	48	13.2

*Elections not held in six constituencies: Bihar (Rajmahal, Khagaria, Purnea, Bhagalpur), Assam (Dhubri) and Manipur (Outer Manipur)

**Independents supported by the LDF (in Kerala), and by the BJP (in Uttar Pradesh).

BJP+ allies: BJP, JD(U), Trinamul Congress, TDP, Biju Janata Dal, Loktantrik Congress, Shiv Sena, Jantantrik BSP, DMK, PMK, MDMK, Lok Dal Rashtriya, Himachal Vikas Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal, Sikkim Democratic Front, Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress, Democratic Bahujan Samaj Morcha, MGR-ADMK, MGR-Kazhagam, Arunachal Congress, Manipur State Congress Party, Independent (Maneka Gandhi).

Congress(I) + allies: Congress(I), Rashtriya Janata Dal, AIADMK, Muslim League, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Kerala Cong (Mani).

The third space, occupied by the various non-Congress, non-BJP formations, has not shrunk in any significant way. What has declined, of course, is the vision and organisational capacity of those wanting to create a Third Front in national politics. At the State level, though, there appears to be a movement towards bipolar competition in Karnataka and Bihar. At the same time, Maharasthra and Tamil Nadu moved away from the two-party competition to triangular contests.

From 1998	To 1999				Total
	BJP+	Cong+	Left+	Others	
BJP+	157	60	2	27	245
Cong+	95	53	1	12	161
Left+	6	4	37	—	47
Others	41	18	2	23	84
Total	299	134	42	62	537

All this might create the impression that this verdict produced no difference. A quick look at the seat tally of the parties is likely to reinforce an impression of everything having come back to square one. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth: such an impression is created because one looks only at the national aggregates. If one looks instead at the State level or below, one would discover evidence of enormous churning having taken place. Most of the States witnessed major political shifts and reversals in this round of elections. So much so that one has to look for exceptions such as Gujarat, Kerala, West Bengal and Orissa, which did not see any major shifts in political preferences. Elsewhere it has been an election full of upsets. Since these upsets did not go in the same direction, they tended to cancel out one another, thus creating the impression of there being no change. An analysis of seat retention figures shows that of the 537 seats for which results are available, only 281 returned the same party that won in 1998. This ratio has been very low throughout the 1990s: 264 between 1991 and 1996 and 263 between 1996 and 1998. The figure will go down further for constituencies that returned the same member. Clearly, one is looking at the rejection of the incumbent at the ground level.

A detailed analysis of how seats changed hands between 1998 and 1999 shows that the BJP and its allies have been able to hold on to 157 of the 245 seats they held last time in these 537 seats. The Congress(I) and its allies retained only 53 of 161 seats. In other words, the BJP and its allies have retained two-thirds of the seats they won, while the Congress(I) holds only one-third. These figures indicate that the Indian elections continue to produce greater upheavals than elections in most other democracies. Even parties on the upswing tend to lose a lot of seats. The BSP could retain only Mayawati's seat while the S.P. lost 10 of the 20 seats it won last time. As many as 50 of the 85 seats in U.P. changed hands this time.

An analysis of the verdict based on the urban or rural nature of the constituencies does not throw up any such clear pattern. The gains for the BJP and its allies have mainly come from rural constituencies this time, perhaps because the BJP had already reached the saturation point in the urban constituencies. It is a comment on the expansion of the BJP that with its allies the party controls the majority of rural parliamentary constituencies as well. The Congress(I) gained votes both in rural and urban seats, but it incurred net losses in terms of seats in rural and semi-rural constituencies.

A comparison of the final picture of seats and vote share between reserved and general seats shows some interesting shifts. The Congress(I) and its allies, which made gains overall in terms of votes, have acutally lost about three percentage points in constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (S.T.). Their tally came down from 18 to eight in these constituencies. Since these seats are invariably in pockets where there is a concentration of the S.T. population, the decline indicates an erosion of S.T. support to the Congress(I). The BJP and its allies picked up nine of these seats and gained more than four percentage points in vote share. For the first time, the BJP and its allies won the majority of the seats reserved for the S.Ts. It is equally significant that the BJP alliance increased its vote share by 6.1 percentage points and seat share by 14 seats in the case of constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes (S.C.). This may not directly indicate any shift of S.C. voters towards the BJP, but it does point to a social expansion of the BJP's base alongwith that of its allies. The Congress(I) got far fewer votes in the constituencies reserved for the S.Cs than in general constituencies or constituencies reserved for the S.Ts. Interestingly, nine of the 14 BSP MPs were elected from non-reserved seats. Perhaps this is the first indication of limited acceptance of the BSP among the sarva samaj that the party has begun speaking of.

DID the fact that voting was done in five phases influence the results? An analysis of the final results confirms the popular impression that it did. If the number of seats won by the BJP and its allies across different phases is compared, no clear pattern emerges. They did better in the third and the fourth phases than in the second. But a pattern begins to emerge when the numbers of seats in terms of gains or losses are compared to the seats won in the same set of constituencies in 1998. The BJP and its allies gained by 26 and 21 seats in the first and second phases respectively. In the third phase there was a gain of only six seats, while there was a loss of three and six seats respectively in the fourth and fifth phases. An analysis of the phase-wise swing confirms the picture of a steady decline of BJP gains in every subsequent phase of polling. However, the opposite is not quite true for the Congress(I) and its allies. They lost seats in the first two phases but did not quite gain in the last three. The gains went to others. In terms of vote, the gains were more or less evenly spread across all the phases, except the last one in which the Congress(I) and its allies did badly.

This clear evidence of the effect of the timing of the polls on the outcome shows that something of a Kargil effect cast its shadow over the first two phases. As the nation moved further into polling, that effect wore thin, and it was back to normal elections in their local settings. This finding raises the question whether the final outcome would have been different if the elections were held a little later, or for that matter a little earlier. It also questions the wisdom of staggering elections over such a long period.

THE evidence about the phase-wise voting also provides us a clue to understanding the big picture of the electoral verdict. It points to the possibility of a nationwide effect of the Kargil conflict and its aftermath on voting. The findings need to be corroborated by survey analysis, but it seems that the BJP staged a recovery after its decline towards the end of last year. The manner of the dissolution of Parliament

nd the inability of the Opposition to form n alternative government, the Sharad 'awar-led split in the Congress(I), and the 'argil conflict made for conditions in which the BJP won back some of the votes had lost. Yet all these factors put togeth- r did not create anything like a national vave of the kind the BJP hoped for. It just reated a favourable climate in which the BJP's claim to power was considered by he people. But the claim was finally set- tled on the terrain of State politics, the basic unit of political choice-making in this decade.

This combination of State and national-level trends meant that the BJP could get a verdict against incumbent non-BJP regimes, particularly in States such as Orissa and Bihar which has had unpopular governments in power for a long time. West Bengal and Kerala, which have Left-led governments, and small States such as Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim were the only exceptions.

The logic of incumbency, or rather poor governance, worked against the BJP and its allies too, as in U.P., Punjab and Karnataka, but only when the regime was very unpopular. In the rest of the States, a slightly favourable national climate and a redrawing of alliances enabled the BJP to escape severe punishment. Its alliances in Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh helped it reap rich electoral harvest. By splitting the Congress(I), the NCP made the task of the BJP-Shiv Sena easy in Maharashtra.

In this sense the 1999 elections do not represent a fundamental break from the new kind of electoral system inaugurated in 1989. This phase of electoral politics put an end to the wave elections of the 1970s and 1980s. Elections are no longer decided solely on any national issue or personality. State-level politics has emerged as the primary arena of poltical choice-making. The fundamental question at the beginning of this round of elections was whether the 1999 polls would retain this character. One possibility for the BJP was to turn this into a national election in the sense in which the results of 1971 or 1984 was nationwide verdict. The other path was to accept the nature of political choice in the 1990s and work out a unique solution to the situation in each State. The BJP pursued both paths. The verdict makes it clear that the BJP did not succeed in changing the ground rules of poltical choice in the 1990s. It has won the game, at least for the time being, but by following rules that will not favour it in the long run. ■

ELECTION ANALYSIS

The turnout factor?

OLIVER HEATH

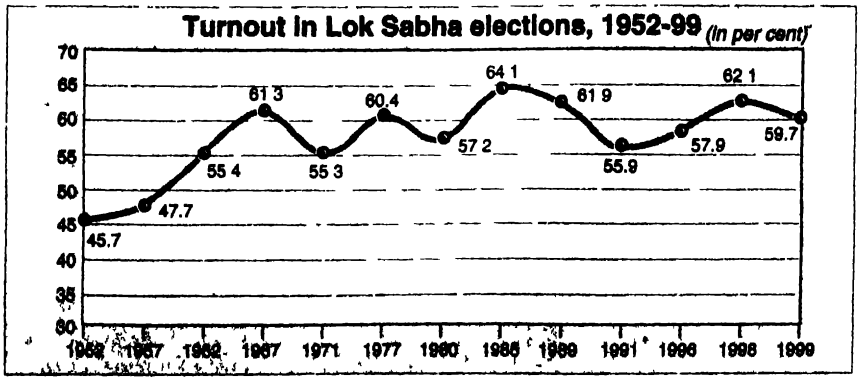
DESPITE widespread media reports of a dismal voter turnout owing to 'election fatigue', the overall polling figure for the 1999 Lok Sabha elections was higher than in many previous years. It was higher than not only the 1991 and 1996 elections, but seven previous elections.

Mid-term elections are generally likely to produce lower turnouts than elections held after a government's full term in office. The mid-term polls of 1980 and 1991 both registered noticeable drops in voter participation. Bearing in mind then the fact that this was a second consecutive mid-term election, taking place barely one year after the last one, the voter apathy was not nearly as pronouced as might have been expected. Besides the long-drawn-out nature of the campaign and unfavourable weather conditions in many States, the electorate had many reasons to stay away from the polls. Indeed, seen in this light the turnout of 59.5 per cent shows the commitment of the Indian voter to democracy.

Despite a slight drop in the overall participation compared to the previous election, there were in fact many States in which the turnout increased. As is to be expected, the States that had simultaneous Assembly elections were amongst those that registered an upturn. With the exception of Andhra Pradesh, where the figure fell a little from 1998, Arunchal Pradesh, Sikkim, Karnataka and Maharashtra all surpassed their previous marks in the 1990s.

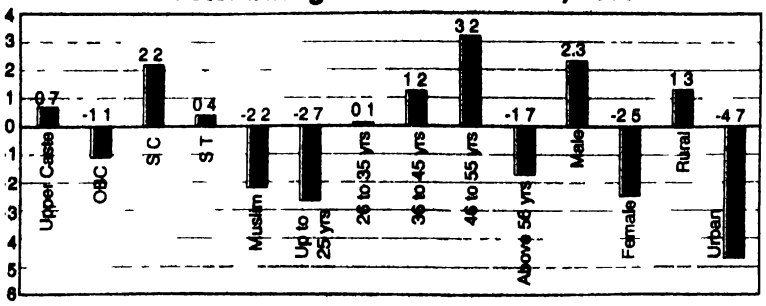
There is little evidence of any correlation between the level of the turnout and the success of a party. Despite the media's fascination with the hypothesis that the level of the turnout is directly related to the success or failure of the BJP, the results show that the turnout did not favour either of the two main formations, and that incumbent State governments were just as likely to do well as they were to do badly in states that witnessed a low turnout. In States where the turnout fell, there were some major reversals. In Punjab the Akali Dal was routed and in Rajasthan the Congress(I) lost a lot of ground. Conversely, the BJP extended its control over Delhi, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, all of which recorded a drop in turnout over 1998.

The CSDS post-poll survey data show how turnout figures have varied among respondents from different social backgrounds. The categories are for community, age, sex and locality. The plus or minus figure indicates by how much the group in question is above or below the national average. Of the different communities the Scheduled Castes were the most likely to vote, as their turnout was 2.2 percentage points higher than the national average. The community least likely to vote were Muslims, whose turnout was 2.2 percentage points below the national average. The figures for the upper castes and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were roughly 1 percentage points over and under respectively of the national average, but the biggest increases are in the case of the Scheduled Tribes, the figures in respect of whom is a fraction more than the national average, which marks a significant increase in participation by a community that has traditionally been the most reluctant to turn



ALISTAIR McMILLAN

Voter background and turnout, 1999



out to vote. Previous CSDS research has shown that there is a participatory upsurge in the 1990s, as citizens from the lower orders enter the political arena. Similarly, the gap between the turnout in the general constituencies and the reserved (S.T.) constituencies has also narrowed. In 1977 the gap was 12.9 per cent, which by 1998 had come down to just 2.3 per cent. The same level was maintained in the 1999 election.

There is a strong age effect at play. The data show that voting seems to be mainly a middle aged activity, with both the young and the old falling well short of the national average.

Men are more likely to vote than women. The biggest differential is found between urban and rural respondents, where the turnout for town and city dwellers is 4.7 percentage points lower than the average, and 7.2 percentage points lower than in the case of rural voters. The same conclusion emerges from an analysis of turnout by the urban or rural nature of constituencies. Since the mid-1980s, the rural constituencies have overtaken the urban ones in the matter of turnout. The gap increased this year from about 6 percentage points to 9 percentage points, as the urban centres recorded a turnout of 51.6 per cent compared to 60.6 per cent for the entirely rural constituencies.

Surprisingly, education counts for very little in determining whether people vote or not. Figures for both illiterates and graduates are similar here.

Although there is a certain amount of variation in the social profile of those who vote, there is enough evidence to refute one of the commonly held assumptions about electoral participation. Conventional wisdom from the West states that it is the most dominant sections of society, such as the educated, the upper caste, the urban, and the men who are the most likely to vote, as it is they who have the highest stakes in the system. This view is supported by data from many other democracies around the world. However, the case in India seems to indicate the reverse, and India is possibly the only country that upsets the pattern. It is now the lower sections of society that have over taken the elite in this respect. The fact that the most disadvantaged members of society have not become disillusioned with the system and still actively participate in political choice-making proves that the democratic revolution set in motion by universal adult franchise still works. ■

State-wise turnout in Lok Sabha elections, 1991-1999

	1991	1996	1998	1999
Andhra Pradesh	61.4	63.0	66.0	67.6
Arunachal Pradesh	51.3	55.0	59.2	72.4
Assam	75.3	76.5	61.1	76.5
Bihar	60.4	59.5	65.2	60.6
Goa	42.4	56.3	61.2	45.1
Gujarat	44.0	35.9	59.3	47.0
Haryana	65.6	70.5	69.0	63.7
Himachal Pradesh	57.4	57.8	71.1	56.7
Jammu & Kashmir	—	49.0	41.2	32.4
Karnataka	54.8	60.2	64.9	65.0
Kerala	73.3	71.1	70.1	70.2
Madhya Pradesh	44.4	54.1	61.7	54.9
Maharashtra	49.8	52.5	57.1	60.1
Manipur	69.7	75.0	56.8	67.9
Meghalaya	56.6	61.8	74.4	56.1
Mizoram	53.6	78.4	69.6	65.3
Nagaland	71.0	82.9	46.4	76.2
Orissa	56.6	58.2	58.0	58.6
Punjab	24.7	22.3	60.1	58.1
Rajasthan	47.3	49.6	60.3	54.2
Sikkim	69.6	77.6	67.1	82.3
Tamil Nadu	55.6	56.5	60.0	59.0
Tripura	67.3	78.1	80.0	66.1
Uttar Pradesh	42.2	48.2	54.6	54.0
West Bengal	76.7	80.1	75.8	75.0
Andaman & Nicobar	64.4	62.2	66.7	63.4
Chandigarh	57.6	59.2	66.7	58.4
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	66.5	77.8	77.8	74.7
Daman & Diu	66.8	76.7	76.8	72.7
Delhi	49.3	53.4	61.3	59.9
Lakshadweep	70.1	80.2	80.2	80.2
Pondicherry	67.8	77.2	77.2	77.2
All India	56.9	57.9	61.9	60.6

NOW that the final results are available, we have the opportunity to look back at the accuracy and influence of the opinion and exit polls that proliferated during the campaign. The 1999 election brought the science of psephology into the realm of public debate as never before. Although competition over poll forecasting by the media is by now an established feature of the Indian elections, never before have we seen so many polls and so much heat over what they said. The Election Commission's ban, the hearing in the Supreme Court, the subsequent withdrawal of the ban and the Chief Election Commissioner's call for a national debate on this question brought pollstering into public arena.

The debate focussed on two issues although the participants were not always conscious of the fact that these are two independent questions: how reliable are these polls? and, how right is it to allow them during the electoral process? The battle lines were drawn in a rather simple fashion. Those who thought that these polls should be banned said that these were unreliable and *vice versa*. Unfortunately the intervention of the political parties in this debate resulted in a misplaced focus on the motivations of the pollsters rather than any informed debate on the methodology of forecasting. Now that the dust has settled down, perhaps we can look at both these questions less dispassionately.

The verdict on how the various poll forecasts have fared is not difficult to sum up: good on the national aggregates but poor on the State-wise disaggregates. And also, generally less than transparent on their methodology and less than careful in cautioning the public. Any reputable pollster makes it clear that the prediction is subject to error, and that therefore the results cannot be taken as given, even when the poll is conducted at the time and place of voting as in the case of exit polls. But what are we now to make of Narasimha Rao's prediction in the *Times of India* (September 23, 1999) that "the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) may end up as a marginalised force in this election and be relegated to fourth place (in Uttar Pradesh), with its seats in single-digit figures" (it won 26 seats to finish a close second to the BJP) or that the BJP in Madhya Pradesh "is likely to end up with 15 seats" (it won 29). Like him many others could do with some caution.

Exit polls and all that

The two tables here present in summary form some of the forecasts made by pollsters and carried by the media. Table 1 carries those forecasts that confined themselves to national aggregates or at the most zonal break-ups. Most of these were based on pre-poll surveys, although *India Today*'s forecast based on post-poll survey also falls in the same category. Some of the early forecasts based on pre-poll surveys had clearly over-estimated the BJP and allies. Both the *India Today*-Insight poll and the two rounds of the *Outlook*-CMS poll overestimated the BJP and allies by at least 25 seats. It is not clear if this was a mistake on the part of the pollsters or it reflected the mood as it stood then. The predictions brought down their figures for the BJP and allies by the time elections drew closer.

Even when results are not presented as State by State predictions, as in the polls published during the campaign by *India Today*, it is clear from the regional groupings that there was a similar bias, with the prediction for the Southern States underestimating the Congress(I) seats, and for the North over-predicting the number of BJP seats by 21. The *India Today* polls also presented their data in a rather disingenuous manner: not making their estimate of the vote share explicit, but implicitly giving the NDA between 47 and 48 per cent of the vote (it is easy to estimate this, since they claim that the NDA received 49.3 per cent of male votes and 45.4 per cent of female, and we know that slightly more men vote than women). Their suggestion that 19.5 per cent of Muslims were voting for the BJP-led alliance is also extremely suspect. Overall, their prediction is not particularly wide off the mark, but these internal discrepancies suggest that this was more by luck than design.

Table 2 presents the second category of forecasts, which chose to reveal their hand at the State level, and compares it to the final outcome. All the polls in this category except the *Times*-DRS poll are exit polls. It must be noted that this kind of disaggregated forecast of seats is an unusual phenomenon in election forecasting. Pollsters all over the world would be reluctant to make this kind of disaggregated forecast for seats in a first-past-the-post system. The fact of small sample size at the State level and the vagaries of our electoral system in non-bipolar contests makes it a psephological nightmare. The final results have once again proved that the conventional wisdom on this score is not off the mark. Perhaps the pollsters would have been better off not attempting State-wise seat forecast.

In overall terms all the exit poll forecasts except the one carried by *Lokmat* seem to have got the aggregate seats for the BJP alliance within a reasonable margin of error. But it is not clear if it is not the function of a verdict that leaves ample room for

Predictions in respect of major alliances

Survey agencies	BJP + allies		Congress(I) + allies		Others	
	Seats	Vote share (in per cent)	Seats	Vote share (in per cent)	Seats	Vote share (in per cent)
Final Result	299	40.8	134	33.8	107	25 8
India Today-Insight	322-336	41.1	132-146	28.7	70-80	30.2
HT-AC Nielson	300	41.6	146	30.4	97	28 0
Lokmat-IMS-CMCR	255-270	N.A.	220	N.A.	67-75	N A.
Pioneer-RDI	313-318	N.A.	140-150	N.A.	84-89	N A
*Outlook-CMS-I	284	39.2	157	31.2	81	---
**Outlook-CMS-II	324	42.7	138	33.5	75	---
IT-Insight post-poll	298	41.0	155	30 9	90	28 1
CINS-Poll	178	N.A.	204	N.A.	161	N A

** Outlook-CMS-I — without TDP ** Outlook-CMS-II — with TDP*

State-wise prediction by various agencies and the results

State	Party	Final result	DD-DRS	STAR-Insight	JAIN-C-Insight	TOI-DRS	Pioneer-RDI Pred - I	Pioneer-RDI Pred - II
Andhra Pradesh	BJP+	36	22	33	---	28	30	28
	Cong(I) +	5	18	7	---	13	12	13
Assam	BJP+	2	---	3	---	---	4	5
	Cong(I) +	9	---	9	---	---	6	8
Bihar	BJP+	40	30	29	---	36	34	40
	Cong(I) +	10	20	21	---	16	18	14
Gujarat	BJP+	20	18	15	14	17	18	15
	Cong(I) +	6	8	11	12	9	8	11
Karnataka	BJP+	9	17	19	18	18	18	18
	Cong(I) +	18	10	8	9	9	9	9
Kerala	LDF	9	7	9	13	7	8	7
	UDF	11	13	11	7	13	12	13
Madhya Pradesh	BJP+	29	---	24	---	15	28	26
	Cong(I) +	11	---	16	---	25	12	15
Maharashtra	BJP+	28	29	31	26	25	28	25
	Cong(I) +	11	13	10	11	17	11	15
Orissa	BJP+	19	17	18	---	18	17	16
	Cong(I) +	2	4	3	---	3	4	5
Rajasthan	BJP+	16	11	14	11	11	14	13
	Cong(I) +	9	14	10	14	14	11	12
Tamil Nadu	BJP+	26	25	26	30	24	24	25
	Cong(I) +	12	14	13	9	15	15	14
Uttar Pradesh	BJP+	31	46	50	---	49	60	52
	Cong(I) +	12	14	10	---	15	4	12
West Bengal	BJP+	10	16	10	---	13	14	15
	Cong(I) +	3	3	1	---	2	---	3
Punjab, Haryana & Delhi	BJP+	20	14	20	15	14	15	20
	Cong(I) +	8	15	9	14	16	13	16
All India	**BJP+**	**299**	**287**	**300**	**291**	**284**	**316**	**307**
	Cong(I) +	**134**	**174**	**150**	**147**	**179**	**142**	**165**

Phase-wise results (forecast by DD-DRS)

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total
BJP+	**88 (76)**	**70 (69)**	**47 (46)**	**48 (44)**	**46 (52)**	**299 (287)**
Cong(I)+	**50 (64)**	**36 (41)**	**13 (21)**	**16 (19)**	**19 (29)**	**134 (174)**
Others	**8 (8)**	**18 (13)**	**10 (9)**	**8 (11)**	**51 (39)**	**104 (77)**

the errors to cancel each other out. Everyone overestimated the Congress(I) and its allies, while underestimating the rest. The record leaves much to be desired at the State level. The DD-DRS forecast was widely off the mark in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and of course U.P. The STAR-Insight poll opted for much bigger sample size, the kind one would require to make State-wise forecasts. They must be credited with getting the Andhra Pradesh forecast closer than anyone else did. But big samples did not help them get Bihar, Karnataka, Punjab or U.P. right. As in 1998 when no one predicted the huge change in Tamil Nadu, the pollsters have appeared to have made collective errors which must cast doubt on their methodology. No one appears to have predicted the Congress(I) victory in Karnataka, although the difference in votes was some five per cent, and no one saw how badly the BJP was really doing in U.P. These failures serve to remind us that making disaggregated seat forecast is indeed a very demanding if not an impossible task. None of the pollsters was willing to divulge exactly what methods they used for converting their vote estimates into seats, but the expectation is that some estimate is made of the vote share and distribution in each State, then this estimate is used to make a seats forecast for each State and finally the predicted seats for each State are totalled to get an overall picture. If the overall picture was all that was revealed then the pollsters would be justified in arguing that their model is built to cope with inaccurate forecasts for the individual States. If pollsters are going to predict results on a State by State basis in future, they should re-examine their methodology.

TABLE 3 presents the phase-wise predictions of the DD exit poll and compares it to the phase-wise outcome. As in the case of the State-wise break-up, the forecast does not do very well in terms of the phase-wise break-up. But it needs to be noted that its figures actually underestimated the wave in favour of the BJP and its allies in the first phase of voting. It also overestimated the Congress(I) and its allies in all the phases. Clearly, accusations of manipulating the actual outcome in favour of the BJP combine are hard to substantiate.

NOW to the second question. At the core of the debate about exit and opinion polls is the question of whether they influence voting – after all, if the opinion polls have no effect on how people vote, there is little point in trying to manipulate them. The main argument against the publication of opinion and exit polls is that they create a bandwagon effect, with voters seeing that a party is doing well and adjusting their voting decision. If this were the case we would expect to see some shift in voting patterns in favour of the NDA, front-runner in all these polls, as the election progressed. The contrary hypothesis is that there is an underdog effect – that voters see one party or alliance doing well, and as a result vote against them.

Looking at the election results it is very difficult to distinguish any clear trend which stands out above the fluctuations determined by which States were voting. To look for a clearer picture it is possible to look at individual States in which polling was over a number of phases. Again, there is a problem that the different phases occurred in different regions within the States and so can be expected to show different patterns of voting. In the CSDS post-poll survey, we asked our sample of the electorate whether they had either read or heard of the forecasts based on the opinion or exit polls, and if they said yes, whether it had affected their voting decision.

Of the sample of over 9,000 electors some 9 per cent said that they had read about the polls, and 21 per cent that they had heard about them. It is interesting to note that the polls respondents who did know about the polls were more likely to vote for the NDA, a consequence of the BJP alliance having supporters with more access to the media and a higher educational profile. The pattern of responses shows little variation across the polling phases, slightly higher in the first two phases and the last phase, and lower in the third and fourth phases. Again, it is hard to make much of the phase-wise pattern because it is so dependent on which part of the country the polling was taking place – the first and second phases include the highly literate Southern States, the third and fourth phases were largely in U.P., Orissa and Bihar where exposure to the media is limited, and the final phase was dominated by West Bengal, again where literacy and media exposure are high. What is apparent is that the cacophony of polling analysis and debate during the polling did not reach out to where the voting was actually going on, and throughout the election most voters were unaware of the polls.

Of those who had heard about the opinion polls, 15 per cent said that their voting decision had been influenced by them. This figure, just over three per cent of the total in our survey, is potentially extremely politically significant – a shift in votes of this magnitude could have completely changed the outcome of the election. The proportion of those who were influenced by the polls also increased slightly in the last three phases, suggesting that the exit polls from those States voting early in the election could have influenced those voting later on. But there does not seem to be any clear systematic effect. People who said that they were influenced by the polls were more likely to have voted for the NDA, but this appears to be because the NDA voters are more likely to have heard about the polls. And when we compared the voting decisions of this group with how they said they had voted in the last election, the responses suggested that there were only a very small proportion who had actually changed their voting behaviour. This does not mean that there was actually no effect: they may have been intending to switch sides but been persuaded not to, after reading an opinion poll, but suggests that there is not any great systematic effect that could change the overall outcome.

A further way that the opinion polls published during the election could change voting is by encouraging tactical voting. The results from U.P. are a startling reminder of the fact that in a first-past-the-post electoral system how the votes are distributed is almost as important as the sheer numbers. In 1998 the BJP and allies won 71 per cent of the seats in the State with just 37 per cent of the vote: this year it won just 37 per cent of the seats with 31 per cent vote. The S.P. saw its vote fall by four per cent from last year, but picked up six more seats, and the BSP picked up 10 more seats from just a two per cent rise in vote share. It seems that the anti-BJP voters shifted to whichever party put up the strongest fight in each particular constituency, and with the Opposition less divided the BJP suffered significant losses. Did the opinion polls help make voters who wished to vote out the BJP decide whom to vote for? The evidence is not clear, and the main problem is that State-wise opinion polls do not help someone who wants to vote tactically very much because the decision depends on the voting patterns at the constituency level rather than at the State level. The idea that the pro-NDA polls solidified the anti-BJP vote in U.P. cannot be given any support.

Inaccurate opinion and exit polls can hardly help the democratic process. And when the voting process is dragged out over such a long time, a decision the Election Commission must surely regret, the uneasy sensation that the fairness of the election can be undermined arises. But the evidence from the 1999 election shows that the voter is more likely to be influenced by the regional dynamics of political power than national issues and media punditry. ■

Testing times

The U.S. Senate is holding out on the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, while India seems set to sign on.

JOHN CHERIAN

IN the last couple of weeks, the Clinton administration has been mounting pressure on the governments of India and Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The United Nations also got into the act in the last week of September when Secretary-General Kofi Annan invited India to attend the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT. The conference was held in Vienna from October 6 to 8 at the request of the states that have ratified the treaty. Its stated purpose was to consider and decide on measures, consistent with international law, to facilitate the early Entry into Force of the CTBT.

Until September 1999, 154 states had signed and 45 had ratified the CTBT. Opened for signature on September 24, 1996, the treaty will enter into force only when it is ratified by all the 44 nuclear-capable states listed in it. So far 41 of these have signed it and 21 have deposited the instruments of ratification with the UN Secretary General.

The Indian government politely declined Annan's invitation. Indian officials emphasised the fact that only 21 countries had ratified the CTBT. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government anyway has indicated that it has no significant objections to signing it. Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, went to the extent of indicating on television that signing the CTBT would be in India's interests. He claimed that enough "expertise" had been gained from the nuclear explosions at Pokhran. According to Mishra, all that was now needed was a national consensus on the matter and 'a proper environment'. After the election victory, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said that India should be ready for 'hard decisions' in the larger interests of the country. Signing the CTBT is likely to be one of such decisions to be taken early.

One reason why India may go ahead and sign the CTBT is that it will ensure that President Bill Clinton's proposed visit to New Delhi early next year will take place as per schedule. In the first week of October, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth said in Washington that Clinton 'made it clear that he intends to travel to South Asia soon'. Inderfurth expressed the hope that "there will be no further unexpected occurrences between now and early next year" so that Clinton could go ahead with his proposed visit to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Significantly, Inderfurth said that the U.S. had "received clear signals from India's National Security Adviser that India is moving towards signature on CTBT. We are hopeful that Pakistan would then sign as well."

INDICATIONS are that the Indian government does not seek to exploit the opportunity offered by the Republican Party dominated U.S. Senate's refusal to ratify the CTBT. Ratification by the Senate would have allowed the Clinton administration to occupy the moral high ground. Now, owing to the standoff in the Senate, there is a real threat of the CTBT itself unravelling. While arguing for Senate ratification of the treaty Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said that the CTBT's prohibition on nuclear explosives would 'have the practical effect of constraining China and Russia from developing with high confidence more advanced and dangerous weapons". Besides, Albright emphasised, it was the commitment of the nuclear weapons states expressed at the 1995 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference – to conclude a CTBT in 1996, which was instrumental in achieving an indefinite and unconditional extension of the treaty.



U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen (left) and Gen. Henry Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Owing to the stand-off in the U.S. Senate, there is a real threat of the CTBT itself unravelling.

Of secrets and sensors

A MYSTERY unfolded on May 13, 1998 when India announced that it had set off a pair of nuclear blasts. The global network of seismometers – sensitive devices buried deep in the earth to monitor shock waves from distant earthquakes and blasts – recorded no faint rumbles emanating from India's underground test site in Pokhran in Rajasthan. There was no blip, no twitch of pen or meter suggesting that the awesome power of the atom had just been released.

Had India faked the explosive tests? Were they flops? Or had small blasts eluded the eavesdroppers? And if they had, what did that mean for a global ban on nuclear blasts in which compliance was to be assiduously verified? These questions have a strong bearing on the bruising battle in Washington over whether the Senate should bless the United States' participation in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Friends and foes have engaged in a war of words, with arms control experts from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Department of Energy warning Congress that the U.S. would have a hard time knowing if foreign states were secretly setting off small blasts. But two of the world's top groups of earth scientists weighed in heavily on the side of the backers of the treaty, saying technology could easily police the ban.

The test ban supporters say that even current sensors are up to the job and that the network called for by the treaty will be even better. Moreover, this official network will be augmented by the rapid global spread of all kinds of private sensors, including seismometers and spy satellites. All this, treaty advocates say, will make it hard to hide all but the smallest blasts.

Though opponents of the treaty point to the Indian claim as a test-ban embarrassment, the emerging consensus among nuclear experts is that what failed that day was not global monitoring gear but the pair of explosive devices.

"The Indian claims were exaggerated," said George Perkovich, author of *India's Nuclear Bomb* (University of California), to be published soon. The problems were so great, he added, that India had another nuclear device in the ground that it left undetonated.

The emerging consensus among nuclear experts is that what failed on May 13, 1998 was not global monitoring gear but the pair of explosive devices.

To police the globe for clandestine blasts, the nuclear test ban treaty calls for 321 monitoring stations – 170 to detect underground shock waves, 80 to sniff the air for telltale radioactivity, 60 to listen for revealing sounds and 11 to track undersea booms.

"If a suspicious occurrence cannot be resolved through consultation and clarification," says a treaty document, "each state party has the right to request an on-site inspection." This array of monitoring devices should be be able to detect nuclear blasts as small as a kilotonne, or equal to 1,000 tonnes of high explosives. On recording gear for earthquakes, experts say, such a blast would measure about magnitude 4, like a minor tremor.

In the bomb business, 1,000 tonnes is indisputably small. The weapon that levelled Hiroshima had a power of about 15,000 tonnes, and the first hydrogen bomb was about 700 times as powerful, enough to cause the Pacific isle of Elugelab, one mile in diameter, to vanish.

The American Geophysical Union and the Seismological Society of America, in a joint statement released recently in Washington, said that when arrays of sensors called for by the treaty are all switched on worldwide, "no nation could rely upon successfully concealing a programme of nuclear testing, even at low yields" in which blasts are

Inderfurth went on to say that if the Senate failed to ratify the CTBT it would produce "negative consequences, jeopardising our interests in South Asia". In his speech at Johns Hopkins University on October 6, he said that since the 1998 nuclear tests in South Asia the U.S. had made "substantial progress on the nuclear testing aspect of our dialogue with India and Pakistan". Both countries have declared moratoria on further testing. "Rejection of the CTBT may cause them to question the wisdom of their moratoria, if not now, then later," said Inderfurth.

As of now, the Clinton administration faces an uphill task in its efforts to convince the Republican Right on the question of ratification. In fact, many Republican Senators plan to go to the other extreme of demanding an immediate vote so that the CTBT can be formally rejected. Ratification of the treaty has been a cornerstone of the Clinton Presidency. If it fails to convince Congress on this issue, it will be a public relations disaster for the White House and could trigger the unravelling of the whole edifice of non-proliferation which the West has so painstakingly put up.

Clinton is making a last-ditch effort to convince the Senate about the urgency of ratifying the CTBT. General Henry Shelton, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the American military establishment unanimously favoured ratification. But the die-hard opponents of the CTBT organised a letter from six former Defence Secretaries, opposing the CTBT on the ground that it would "reduce the credibility of America's nuclear deterrent". With both sides hardening their stands, there is a growing likelihood that the vote on the CTBT would be delayed indefinitely.

Trent Lott, the Senate Majority Leader, said that a vote on ratification could be cancelled only if Clinton gave an assurance that he would not seek a vote on the treaty before he left office in January 2001. If the CTBT is put to vote in the Senate, it is doomed to defeat as the Democrats have attracted very few Republicans to their side on this issue. Both Republican and Democratic Senators are urging Clinton to shelve the CTBT rather than face the embarrassment of seeing it rejected by the Senate.

Clinton is expected to make one more effort to bring the Senate round to his point of view. Trying to bail him out were his fellow statesmen and close allies. Tony Blair of Britain, Gerhard Schroeder of Germany and Jacques Chirac of France jointly wrote an article in *The New York Times* on October 8 urging the U.S. Senate to ratify the treaty. "Rejection of the treaty in the U.S. Senate would remove the pressure from other states still hesitating about whether to ratify it," they wrote.

ery small.

Gregory E. van der Vink, an earth scientist at Princeton University who helped draft the statement, said existing instruments already exceed the treaty's monitoring goals. In fact, for such places as the underground test sites in China and Russia, Van der Vink added, the sensitivity of existing seismic detectors is already up to hundreds of times better than necessary.

The scientists said that the treaty's own 170 seismic stations will be augmented and strengthened by thousands of private ones run by universities and research institutions worldwide.

Most private seismic sensors track earthquakes. But for decades such detectors have also been used for monitoring arms control treaties and nuclear blasts, whose characteristic signatures in most cases are easy to distinguish. "We've had 40 years to work on this and we've done quite well," Jeffrey Park, a Yale university geologist who helped draft the scientists' statement, said.

The scientists cautioned that no verification system can be perfect. But they added that treaty monitoring would be good enough to detect all but the most egregious cheating, which would require not only great cost and skill but would probably be exposed anyway by satellite photographs or atmospheric sampling. Some of the trickiest spots to monitor are old underground nuclear test areas – like Novaya Zemlya in Russia's northern archipelago, Lop Nor in China's northwestern desert and the Nevada test site in the American West – where the treaty allows non-nuclear tests, including the detonation of conventional explosives to compress nuclear fuels short of firing.

Such tests are considered vital for checking weapon safety and reliability. Although it can be hard to distinguish their seismic effects from those of very small nuclear blasts, nuclear blasts emit certain radioactive isotopes of xenon, a colourless, odourless, highly unreactive gas – gas that invariably percolates up through the ground. Sniffing for such gas is to be a main job of atmospheric surveillance.

Lawrence Turnbull, a top CIA seismologist, has long warned of clever ways to evade detection of nuclear explosions. In 1995, he briefed industry executives on how foes could use large mines or caves for small clandestine blasts. The surrounding air would soften the bomb's shock waves, in theory making them so diminutive as to be undetectable.

But Lynn R. Sykes, a seismologist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University and an authority on detecting nuclear blasts, dismissed the CIA's fears as groundless. "Testing in a cavity is portrayed as easy, when in fact it is exceedingly difficult," he said. And experts say even deft clandestine tests would still emit telltale xenon gas, in theory allowing the cheats to be exposed.

What of small blasts that somehow managed to escape detection? After the Cold War, official disclosures made clear that the superpowers had occasionally done very small tests underground. Most of these small explosions – all below 1,000 tonnes – were done after the superpowers had mastered the art of producing big blasts. The intentional making of tiny nuclear explosions can be difficult for a novice.

"The chance of a beginner doing anything under a kilotonne is zilch," said Dr. Ray E. Kidder, a scientist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and a former bomb designer. Besides, he noted, there would be strong incentive to progress to larger blasts more useful for bomb design.

But Frank J. Gaffney, Jr., a former Pentagon official in the Reagan administration who now directs the Centre for Security Policy, a private Washington group that opposes the test ban, said tests below 1,000 tonnes were sufficient to investigate some aspects of the atomic triggers used to ignite hydrogen bombs.

"That can be very valuable militarily," he said in an interview. "And from such a successful test you can extrapolate." Small blasts, he added, echoing the view of some intelligence officials, "can escape detection." Gaffney concluded that the treaty is a bad thing. "Our hands are tied," he said. "And everybody else does what they want." ■

New York Times Service

They also said that such rejection would "give great encouragement to proliferators. Rejection would also expose a fundamental divergence within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation". The European leaders believe that ratification of the treaty by Washington will lead to similar moves in Moscow and Beijing which in turn will put pressure on India and Pakistan to sign it. As things stand, only about half the states whose signatures are needed for entry into force have done so.

THE Clinton administration's dilemma on the CTBT should have been welcome news to the Indian government. But the BJP-led government seems to have given a commitment to the administration that it would sign the CTBT, regardless of its fate in the U.S. Senate. Signing the CTBT, Indian officials feel, could pave the way for an "unprecedented relationship" with the U.S. Indian officials say that signing the treaty is a good idea irrespective of its fate in the U.S. and elsewhere. People who push for a close strategic relationship with the U.S. argue that since India has made a commitment that it would desist from further nuclear testing, signing the CTBT is of no great significance and will not hurt its interests.

But the Vajpayee government may find it difficult to create a "national consensus" on signing the CTBT. Addressing the U.N. General Assembly, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said that signing the CTBT "requires the creation of a positive environment as we work towards the widest possible consensus domestically". With the U.S. Senate refusing to play ball with Clinton, a "positive international environment" is absent. Besides, a national consensus on the issue has never been there. Prakash Karat, Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said that India's decision taken in 1996 not to sign the CTBT was the correct one. "That decision should not now be reversed. The reasons for not signing are still valid today," he said. According to him, the Vajpayee government had given a commitment to the Clinton administration last year that it would sign the CTBT. "But now that a new government has taken over, Vajpayee should discuss with all political parties what it intends to do on the CTBT and seek their opinion on the matter." ■

The BJP-led government seems to have given a commitment to the U.S. administration that it would sign the CTBT, regardless of its fate in the Senate.

The final verdict

The Supreme Court reconfirms the death sentence awarded to four accused persons in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

T S SUBRAMANIAN

BRINGING the curtain down on the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, the Supreme Court on October 8 reconfirmed the death sentence awarded to Nalini, Santhan, Murugan and G Perarivalan alias Arivu. A three-Judge Bench comprising Justice K T Thomas, Justice D P Wadhwa and Justice Syed Shah Mohammed Quadri dismissed the petitions, by a two-one majority, of the four accused seeking a review of its judgment of May 11 this year sentencing them to death for their participation in the conspiracy to murder former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (*Frontline*, June 4, 1999). They had been sentenced to death under Section 120 B (conspiracy) read with Section 320 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Justice Thomas, who gave the dissenting judgment, said Nalini's review petition "should be allowed and her sentence should be altered to imprisonment for life". (He had given a similar dissenting judgment with regard to Nalini on May 11.)

The three Judges rejected a petition from the Union of India, through the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), to review its May 11 conclusion that all the 26 accused in the case had committed no offence under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987, or TADA.

Senior advocate N Natarajan, who appeared for Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan, said the four accused would seek presidential mercy; they would also move the Supreme Court to stay the death sentence until the President acted on their mercy petitions, he added. The four prisoners are lodged in Central Prison, Vellore. Nalini is in the women's prison.

RAJIV GANDHI was assassinated on May 21, 1991 at Sriperumbudur, about 50 km from Chennai, by belt bomb assassin Dhanu, who belonged to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a few minutes before he was to address an election meeting. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the CBI was constituted to crack the case with D R Karthikeyan (he went on to become CBI's Director) as its head. After a meticulous investigation, the SIT filed the charge-sheet on May 20, 1992 before the Designated Court at Poonamallee near Chennai. The charge-sheet named 41 persons as the accused and said that the LTTE was behind the assassination. Of the 41, three persons were "absconding": the LTTE's chief V Prabakaran, its intelligence wing chief Pottu Amman, and deputy leader of its women's intelligence wing Akila. Twelve of the accused including Dhanu and Sivarajan, who was the chief of the assassination squad, and Subha, a member, had died by the time the case reached the trial stage. The remaining 26 stood trial. Nalini's mother Padma, and brother Bhagyanathan were among them. On January 28, 1998 Designated Judge V Navaneetham awarded death sentence to all the 26 accused. All of them went in appeal to the Supreme Court.

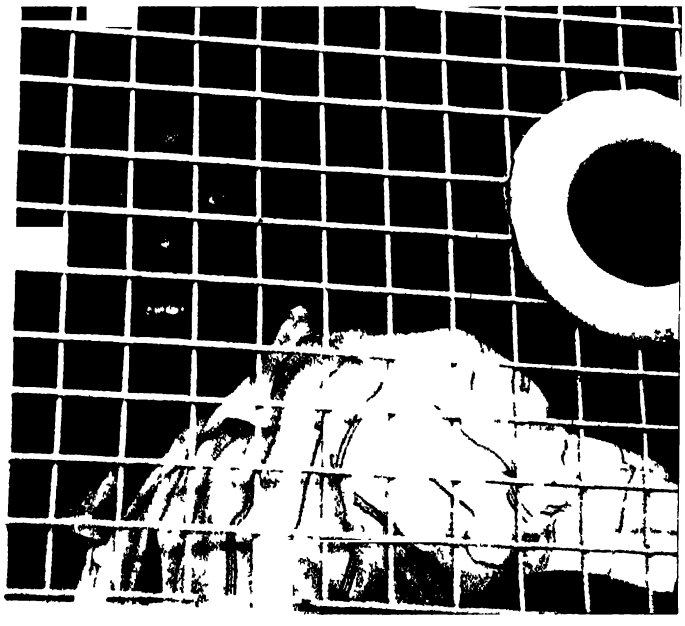
The apex court disposed of the appeals on May 11. Justice Thomas, Justice Wadhwa and Justice Quadri held that it was the LTTE that was responsible for the killing. They confirmed the death sentence awarded to Nalini, Santhan, Murugan and Perarivalan.

Justice Thomas, in a dissenting judgment with regard to Nalini, said: "One gets the impression, on reading her confession, that she was led into the conspiracy by playing on her feminine sentiments. She became an obedient participant without doing any dominating role. She was persistently brainwashed by A-3 (Murugan) who became her husband and then the father of her child. She realised only at Sriperumbudur that Dhanu was going to kill Rajiv Gandhi. But she would not have dared to retreat from the scene because she was tucked into the tentacles of the conspiracy. She knew how Sivarasan and Santhan had liquidated those who did not stand by them."

Justice Thomas said it could not be overlooked that "she is the mother of a little female child who would not have experienced maternal cuddling as that little one was born in captivity". "Since the death sentence had been confirmed on the father (Murugan) and since the child had to be saved from "imposed orphanhood", Justice Thomas said, "the sentence passed on her is altered to one of imprisonment for life".

The death sentences given to Robert Payas, Jayakumar and Ravichandran by the trial court were also "altered" to life imprisonment.

Of the remaining 19, the three Judges cleared 18 of taking part in the conspiracy. Although the



SRIDHARAN

Murugan, one of the four on whom the death sentence has been reconfirmed.

udges confirmed the entences under sections f the Arms Act, the xplosive Substances Act, the Passport Act and on, the 18 persons vere released from rison because they had erved out their terms S hanmugavadivelu, who was charged only under TADA, was acquitted Thus, 19 of the appellants were freed



Nalini, also on death row.

An important feature of the May 11 judgment was that Justices Thomas, Wadhwa and Quadri set aside the conviction and sentence by Designated Judge Navaneetham under Sections 3(3), 3(4) and 5 of TADA and acquitted all the 26 of charges under this Act This signalled a victory for Natarajan

Nalini, Santhan, Murugan and Perarivalan filed petitions seeking a review of the death sentences The Union of India, through the CBI, also filed petitions seeking a review of the finding that the offence was not committed by the accused with an intent to strike terror in the people or any section of the people, and that on that account no offence under Section 3(3) of TADA had been made out

Normally, a review petition in the Supreme Court is heard by the same Judges who gave the original judgment Since the Judges had already heard the case fully and thoroughly, they do not give the right of audience to review petitioners However, as an exceptional case, Justices Thomas, Wadhwa and Quadri thought it fit to allow arguments by both the parties So arguments were advanced in the open court on September 28

In his main order on October 8, Justice Wadhwa said advocate Natarajan did not challenge the guilt of the petitioners but sought a review on the question of award of the death sentence. Natarajan said the evidence that had been led to prove the charges under TADA could not be used while appreciating evidence regarding commission of offences under the IPC He also pointed out certain errors in the judgment in recording the names of the accused, which, he said, could have a bearing on the award of the sentence Natarajan contended that the planners and perpetrators of the crime were dead, three of the seven accused had been sentenced to life imprisonment, and the remaining four could also be given life imprisonment

Additional Solicitor-General for India Altaf Ahmed, who questioned the maintainability of the review petitions, said that no error that could have led to a miscarriage of justice had been pointed out Only after examining the role of the accused from all angles did the Judges confirm the death sentences on the four, he contended

Justice Wadhwa said it was difficult to accept Natarajan's arguments The errors pointed out by Natarajan were not even contradictions, and they were inconsequential, he observed After examining the role of each of the accused on the basis of evidence on record, the roles of the four were found to be different from those of the three others, who were earlier sentenced to life imprisonment

In the review petitions filed by the Union of India, Attorney-General Soli J Sorabjee said that relevant considerations had not been taken into account to hold that the accused did not commit the offence with the intent to strike terror in the people or any section of the people Sorabjee submitted that in the present case where several innocent persons had been killed, the impression could be gathered that the accused had committed the crime with the intent to strike terror in the people or any section of the people

Natarajan replied that *mens rea* was vital in a criminal trial and that the three judges had concluded on evidence that the accused did not commit the crime with the intention to strike terror in people or any section of people He agreed that if the state's view was accepted, then the contingency might arise that all the other accused, acquitted of charges under TADA and other offences, were likely to get at least life imprisonment

In his main order, Justice Wadhwa said We do not think Mr Sorabjee is right in his submission '

IN his separate order, Justice Thomas said he had a dissent' with regard to sentencing Nalini The Constitution Bench in *Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab* (1980) had narrowed down the scope for awarding the death sentence to 'the rarest of rare cases where the lesser alternative of life imprisonment was unquestionably foreclosed Of three Judges, when one Judge favoured life imprisonment to death penalty for any accused, 'I think it would be a proper premise for the Bench to review the order of sentence of death in respect of that accused That fact was sufficient to treat the case as not falling within the narrowed ambit of "rarest of rare cases"



N SRIDHARAN

Chinna Santhan (left) and Perarivalan (right) sentenced to death with Ravichandran, who has been awarded life imprisonment.

Natarajan, Advocates N Chandrasekaran, Sunder Mohan and V Ramasubramanian appeared for the accused E Jacob R Daniel, Deputy Legal Adviser, CBI, Chennai, assisted Soli Sorabjee in his arguments Altaf Ahmed opposed the plea to reduce the death sentence on the four accused to life imprison-

Monsanto's retreat

THE recent announcement by the gene giant Monsanto that it would not commercialise its sterile seed technology, popularly called the terminator technology, has been received with scepticism by Third World governments, farmers organisations, non government organisations, and scientists, who have waged a campaign against it.

In an open letter to Gordon Conway, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Monsanto's chief executive officer Robert B Shapiro, said that the company was making a public commitment not to commercialise sterile seed technologies, such as the one dubbed terminator. He said this was being done after the company undertook a thorough, independent review of gene protection systems following the concerns expressed over the potential impact of gene protection systems in developing countries and after consulting a number of international experts and development leaders. Monsanto's decision follows that of the United Kingdom based Astra/Zeneca which announced this June that it would not commercialise seed sterility technology.



A specimen of Bollgard Bt, the genetically altered cotton variety from Monsanto.

Monsanto has been forced to make this public retreat owing to the world wide revulsion generated against a technology that cuts at the root of sustainable agriculture, food security and environmental health. The Company finally realised that Terminator will never win public acceptance, said Hope Shand, Research Director, Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI). He said (Terminator) has become synonymous with corporate greed, and it was met with intense opposition all over the world. (RAFI is the Canada based NGO that first uncovered the patent for this technology acquired by Delta and Pine Land, a company Monsanto has acquired.)

However, as RAFI was quick to point out, Monsanto has said that it will continue with research into another track of the terminator technology that RAFI has called "Traitor" technology. Here the specific genes responsible for value-added biotechnology traits can be activated or deactivated. "The technology for seed sterilisation and trait control are on the same trajectory, said Pat Mooney, RAFI's Executive Director, in his reaction to Monsanto's announcement. At some point, either through a corporate takeover or a change in management, trait control could easily be transformed back into genetic seed sterilisation."

Monsanto's pledge has not convinced those opposed to the company's presence in India. "Looking at their past record they are not honest and may smuggle in sterile seeds," M D Nanjundaswamy, the president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha told *Frontline*. 'We would like the Government to strengthen seed laws and quarantine systems."

Concerns have been expressed by farmers' organisations, scientists, NGOs and sections of the media, over Monsanto's expanding presence in India, and in particular its agreement with the Indian Institute of Science, India's premier centre of public-funded research ■

Parvathi Menon

Hostage drama in Bangkok

IN early October, five heavily armed gunmen calling themselves the vanguard of the "Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors staged a 25 hour seizure of the Myanmarese embassy in Bangkok after storming into the premises. The hitherto unknown group held 89 persons hostage, threatened to kill them, resorted to gunfire in a random show of force, and finally negotiated with the Thai authorities their safe passage by helicopter before releasing all the captives unharmed.

Apart from embassy officials and their family members who live in the premises, people who had gone to the consular office to collect visas were taken captive. The gunmen, disowned by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) despite her sympathy for their stated cause and by the various groups of Myanmarese dissident exiles in Thailand made unrealistic demands – a dialogue between Myanmar's military junta and Suu Kyi, the release of political prisoners by Yangon and the constitution of a parliament. Thailand, responsible for the inviolability of the embassy, was in no position to address any of the demands. Nor did it denounce the gunmen as terrorists keeping the safety of the hostages in mind. In the end, the captors settled for a helicopter ride to the Thai-Myanmar border and a guaranteed escape into the jungles there.

The gunmen passed through a safe air corridor and Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra flew with them as a proxy hostage even as the last of the captives were released. This soured ties between Thailand and Myanmar even as the captors escaped unimpeded. A top Myanmarese Minister, Brigadier General David Abel, indicated to this correspondent during the hostage crisis that Yangon would not regard Suu Kyi's NLD as a spent force despite its failure to set off a much-advertised big bang of protest for democracy on September 9.

The Bangkok episode has given Myanmar's pro-democracy movement a new and qualitatively less endearing dimension. The question now is whether it presages a new trend of violence or whether it was just a fleeting aberration ■

P S Suryanarayana



APICHART WEERAWONG AP

An armed rebel keeps watch over the hostages at the Myanmarese Embassy in Bangkok on October 2.

How to plan a happy future for your child?

By a panel of experts

Today we shall look at how you can plan for your child's happy future. The sole major hurdle to financial planning for your child (below 18 years of age) is the provision of clubbing of the minor's income with yours. Clubbing means that any income arising or occurring to your child, including stepchild or adopted child, is included in the total income of that parent whose income is higher.

What are the provisions you can benefit from?

1. Under Sec. 64(1A) basic exemption of Rs.1500 p a. is available for each child.
2. The income of a child totally blind, mentally retarded or physically handicapped as specified under Sec. 80U is exempted from clubbing.
3. Under Sec. 10 interest from Public Provident Fund (P.P.F), Relief Bonds(Rahat Patra), specified tax free bonds, share dividends etc. is tax free to all. Such income of a child is not clubbed.
4. The income of your child arising form manual work or through the application of its skill and talent is not clubbed with your income.

How can you plan your child's future?

1. Open a separate Bank Account for each child whose name will be first, with joint names of parents who will operate the account on Either/ Survivor basis. Make sure to note where the money has been received, to ascertain whether the amount is taxable or not.
2. Develop capital for your child through gifts. Invest in shares or put it in his/ her P.P.F. account. (Gift Tax on gifts given after 1st October 1998 is abolished.)
3. Establish your child's ownership of shares by paying for them from his/her Bank account. Get the share-broker's bill in your child's name The dividend for such shares will be in the name of the parent whose name appears first on the share certificate. Deposit such dividends in your child's bank account, since the account has also the parents' joint name(s).
4. Open a P.P.F. Account for child. Under Sec. 88, the parents will get the benefit of tax

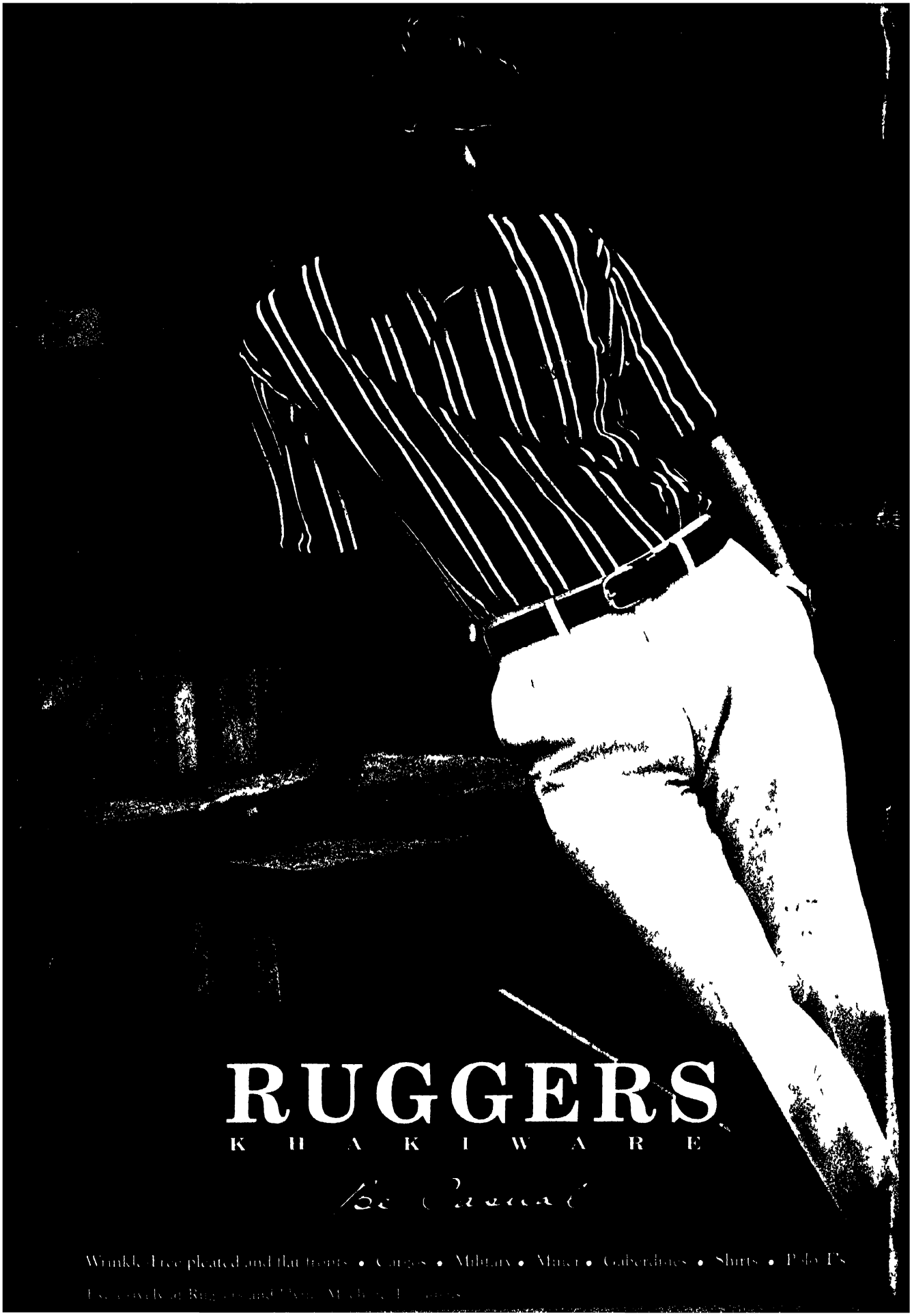


rebate of 20% on their contributions to this account, subject to a maximum of Rs. 60,000 p.a. per individual in aggregate (the total of contributions to Companies' P.F., P.P.F., N.S.C., Life Insurance Premium etc.). This apart, every deposit of Rs. 1,000 p.a. in a P.P.F. account grows to Rs. 40,000 at the end of 15 years.

5. For a child, insurance is purposeless. Ignore the lure of low premium and the emotional appeal to "do something for your child" through insurance.
6. The law does not require submission of Income Tax Return unless the basic exemption limit of Rs. 50,000 p.a. is crossed. You have to declare your child's income in the I.T. return of that parent whose income is higher. Deductions under Sec. 80L up to a maximum of Rs. 15000 p.a. in respect of eligible incomes from bank deposits, NSC, UTI and Mutual Fund dividends etc. are available from the incomes of parent and child. Nevertheless, once your child reaches 18 years of age do submit a separate I.T. return for him/her, to establish the major child's capital and source of income.
7. Plan for your child's thread ceremony, education, marriage, start - in - life etc. through either Bank/ Post Office deposits/ Insurance policy (where the sum assured would be paid back to the family in the event of untimely demise of the insured parent)/other long term instruments.

The planning for your child's future must ensure the availability of funds at the right time and make adequate provision for inflation.

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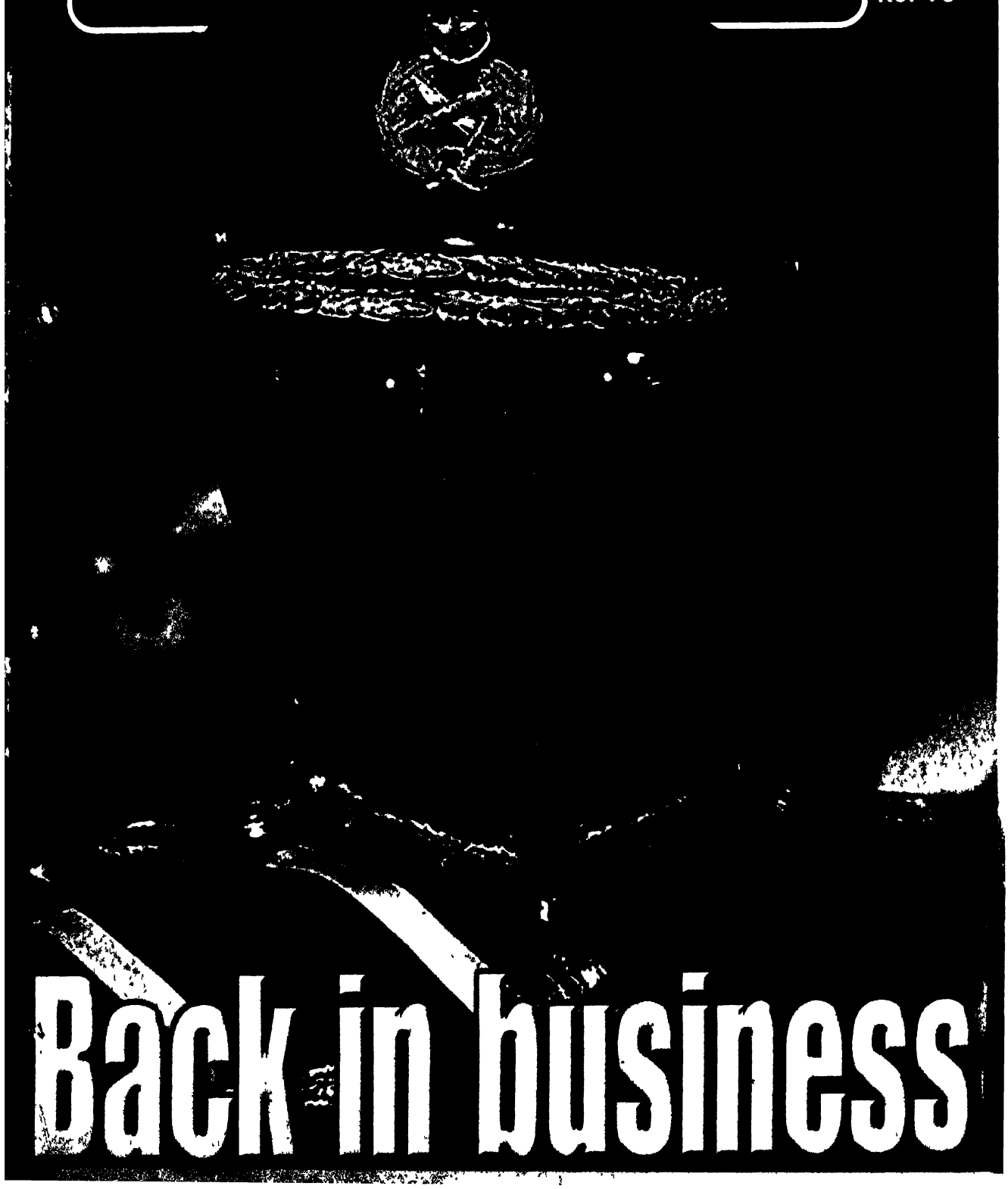

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SPECIAL ELECTION ANALYSIS

Frontline

Nov. 19, 1999
Rs. 15



Back in business

Are you aware of bonds as an investment option?

Part - I

By a panel of experts

Life-cycle financial planning divides your adult life into four phases, identifies objectives typical to each phase and offers matching financial strategies. Adopt those that suit your chosen life-style, life goals, needs and attitude to risk.

The hallmarks of disciplined saving and wise investment are safety, adequate returns, liquidity - for easy encashment, growth - to counter inflation and tax shelter - to reduce your tax-bite.

Consider strategies that have all these hallmarks distributed across them and select a suitable mix.

Phase 1 : Age Group 25 to 30 years

Objective: Funds for an emergency

Maintain about three months' income in Bank Savings, as a constant cash reserve. If you keep very large amounts, inflation will erode your capital.

Objective: Income protection & provision for larger expenses in later life

Your income must be protected to replace the loss of earnings in the event of your disability, untimely demise, or premature retirement.

Insurance Plans that offer periodic return s can, besides protecting your income, meet large cash requirements such as those for your children's education, marriage and augmentation of your retirement income.

Objective : Tax shelters

Take judicious advantage of: i) N.S.C., Units. M.F. etc. for fully tax-exempt incomes under Sec.80L ii) P.P.F., share dividends etc. for fully tax-exempt incomes under Sec.10 iii) P.P.F., L.I.C. premium, N.S.C. - 20% of your contribution (maximum Rs.60,000), is deductible under Sec. 88. iv) Infrastructure bonds. Here, up to Rs.70,000 of your contribution attracts 20% deduction under Sec.88.

Objective : Hedging against inflation



While evaluating all investment products, you must take care to compute the "real" return, net of inflation and tax. Investment in equity-based funds is the safest recommended means of overcoming inflation in the long run.

Phase II : Age Group 31 to 44 years

The four objectives and their accompanying strategies above continue in this phase. In addition, the following three emerge.

Objective: Health insurance

Health Insurance policies of leading insurance providers which also give tax breaks.

Objective: Home ownership provision

Loans from Employers, P.F. and financial institutions. Secure the prepayment of loan (against your untimely demise) with a mortgage redemption policy.

Objective : Development of capital and generation of income for spouse & children.

Give money as gifts to your family. Now that Gift Tax has been abolished, income from gifted amounts invested in shares for spouse and children or deposited in their P.P.F. accounts is tax-free (i.e. not clubbed to your income).

We all desire a comfortable present and a secure future. And you know that proper utilization of your assets now is the only way to attain this goal. For this, financial planning is necessary and action to implement your plan is essential.

Phase III and IV will be discussed next week.

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Frontline



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Situated in the north of Norway, Samiland has no borders or boundaries, wars or armies, and it does not appear on the map – it is a place for those who love nature untouched and clean 69

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BACK IN BUSINESS

Pakistan is back in the military mould, although 'Chief Executive' Pervez Musharraf talks of the path to democracy. Where does the country go from here?

AMIT BARUAH
in Islamabad

> What is the Constitution? It is a booklet with 10 or 12 pages. I can tear them up and say that from tomorrow we shall live under a different system. Is there anybody to stop me? Today, the people follow wherever I lead. All the politicians, including the once-mighty Mr. (Zulfiqar Ali) Bhutto, will follow me with their tails wagging. But is that good for the country? No, I have no political ambition personally.
>
> – Pakistani dictator Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, quoted in *Working with Zia* by General (retd) K.M. Arif.

ON October 12, General Pervez Musharraf's troops went about their business in a cool, clinical manner. Not a single shot was fired as the khaki-clad men moved into Islamabad, took over strategic locations, and confined Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his key associates to their houses. As the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) aircraft in which Musharraf was returning from Colombo neared Karachi, troops under the command of the X Corps Commander based in Rawalpindi, Lt. Gen. Mahmud Ahmad, announced by their presence on the streets the "ouster" of the Nawaz Sharif Government. They met with no resistance. The coup was indeed a bloodless one.

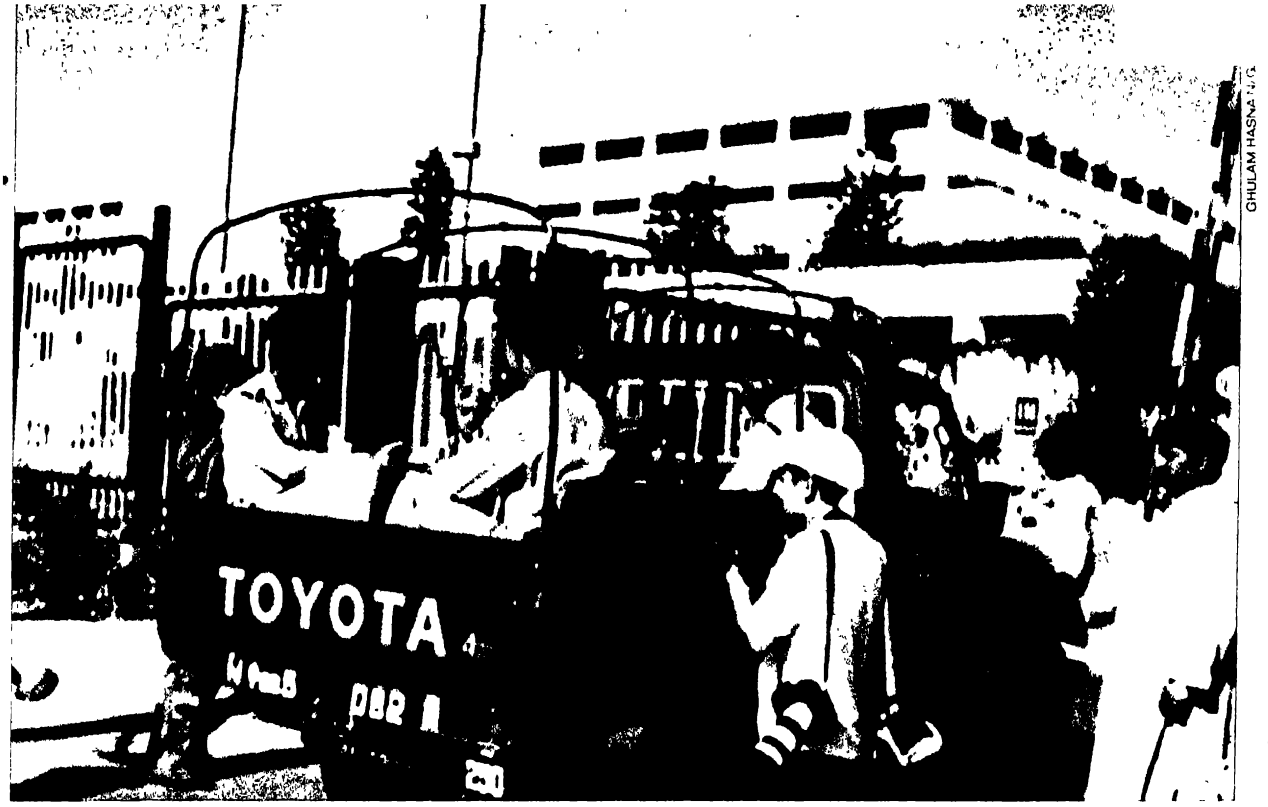
However, a mid-air drama unfolded in the skies above Karachi. According to Musharraf, who had gone to Colombo to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan Army, instructions had been given to the Karachi airport authorities to deny permission for the plane carrying him to land in Pakistan and to divert it elsewhere. The aircraft was low on fuel, and the order imperilled the lives of the passengers, he said. According to reports, Musharraf immediately took charge of the situation. Using the in-flight radio transmission facility, he ordered the Karachi control tower to allow the plane to land since it was running short of fuel. Permission was accorded, and the plane eventually touched down at 6.50 p.m. with hardly any fuel left. Musharraf's troops were by then in command of the airport building.



Gen. Pervez Musharraf takes the salute at the Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul on October 18.

It is apparent from the sequence of events that the X Corps Commander did not await instructions from Musharraf, who had only hours earlier been "retired" by Sharif, before taking over key installations in Islamabad. His motive was to prevent a rebroadcast of the news of Musharraf's dismissal, which had been put out by Pakistan Television at 5 p.m.

In the 6 p.m. English bulletin, only Chechnya and Kashmir were in focus. Suddenly, the programme went off the PTV World channel, but continued on PTV's main terrestrial channel. Shaista Zaid, the newscaster made famous by the fact that it was she who "broke" the news of the coup, read on. This time, the information put out at 5 p.m. – that Gen. Pervez Musharraf had been "retired" with immediate effect and Lt. Gen. Khwaja Ziauddin, chief of the Inter-Services



GHULAM HASNAIN

Security forces outside the National Assembly building in Islamabad after Musharraf took over on October 12.

Intelligence, appointed the new Army Chief – was not repeated. After the weather report, however, the dramatic announcement was repeated: Gen. Musharraf had been dismissed by Sharif.

All this gave sufficient indication that something was up. As this reporter rushed to the PTV station, scores of people had gathered outside it. Khaki-clad Army personnel were at work inside the station.

Inside the newsroom, another drama had been played out. PTV Chairman Pervez Rashid reached the station to ensure that the news of Musharraf's dismissal was duly announced. A few Army personnel, led by a Major, entered the newsroom just as Shaista Zaid was reading the bulletin. However, the Prime Minister's Military Secretary, Brig. Javed Malik, disarmed the Major.

Only then, the weather report over, did Shaista Zaid repeat the announcement that a new Army chief had been appointed. Only PTV's main channel carried the news; PTV World had by then passed into the control of troops loyal to Musharraf.

From the PTV station it is only a two-minute drive to the Prime Minister's residence ,,but access to it had been blocked with trucks. A young Army officer and a few soldiers stood at the end of the access road.

At this point, it was unclear as to whom the troops were loyal to. Soon enough came the information that the Prime Minister was at home and that no one was allowed to enter or leave the premises. In a few minutes, another piece of reliable information trickled in: the troops had moved in on the orders of the chiefs of the three wings of Pakistan's armed forces.



Nawaz Sharif, who was dismissed as Prime Minister.

SHARIF'S plan to divert the plane carrying Musharraf, arrest him using the Sindh police and instal Gen. Ziauddin as the Army chief was doomed to failure. For of the nine corps commanders, Sharif could muster the support of only two: Lt. Gen. Salim Haidar (Mangla) and Lt. Gen. Tariq Pervez (Quetta). Haidar had been shifted to General Head Quarters, Rawalpindi, by Musharraf, and Tariq Pervez retired on October 9 for having had an unauthorised meeting with Sharif.

Sharif was evidently misled by advice from his cronies into thinking that he could carry out the plan to dismiss Musharraf. Sharif perhaps thought that he could repeat what he did in December 1997 to Supreme Court Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah: with the support of other judges, he forced Shah to withdraw from the scene. The Army did nothing when Shah sought its protection. The then Army chief, Gen. Jehangir Karamat, merely marked to the Defence Secretary his letter seeking security.

American scholar Stephen Cohen made a prescient observation in an epilogue to the 1998 edition of his book, *The Pakistan Army*: "It (Sharif's attack on the judiciary in 1997) may, however,



AP

Musharraf with President Rafiq Tarar in Islamabad a day after the coup.

have brought the next civilian-military crisis closer if Nawaz Sharif ever attempts to pack the upper reaches of the Army with his followers as he attempted to pack the Supreme Court with sympathetic judges

However, Sharif's plan came unstuck this time because seven of the nine Corps Commanders stood solidly behind Musharraf

Musharraf had made it clear on September 23 that he would complete his term as Army chief For the Sharif Government, that obviously set the alarm bells ringing Sharif, who had extended Musharraf's term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) on September 29, retired him on October 12

Informed sources told *Frontline* that another reason for Sharif's worries was that Musharraf had replaced the commander of the 111 Brigade some time ago with his own man Brigadier Salahuddin Considering that Sharif sees conspiracies where none exists, this appointment served to heighten his sense of insecurity

It was, however, Kargil which brought to the fore the differences between Musharraf and Sharif There are reports that the Kargil operation was planned in October-November 1998 and that the first infiltrators moved in at the time, if so, the operation was planned by Musharraf soon after he took over as Army chief on October 7, 1998 Approval from the Prime Minister was, possibly, obtained in due course

However, Musharraf was not prepared to take the rap for Kargil If anything, both he and Sharif are responsible for the misadventure which led to the death of some ₹,000 Pakistani and Indian soldiers

Political analyst Ayaz Amir wrote in the newspaper *Dawn* on September 17 'Kargil has dealt a blow to the unity of the governing class, driving a wedge between the heavy mandate (of Sharif) and Rawalpindi While both have had their fingers burnt, both are trying to put the blame for this fiasco on the shoulders of the other This is the real cat-and-mouse game being played " Amir warned that the mood in Rawalpindi was dark, even dangerous"

It is clear, therefore, that the strains in the relations between the Army chief and the Prime Minister were no secret

ON October 12, public uncertainty continued to mount as the PTV channel remained off the air Finally, transmission resumed at about 11 p m with an announcement that the Nawaz Sharif Government had been dismissed and that the JCSC Chairman would address the nation

Musharraf began the brief addressat 2 50 a m on October 13 He said " I wish to inform you that the armed forces have moved in as a last resort, to prevent any further destabilisation " He accused the Sharif Government of trying to "politicise the Army, destabilise it" and create "dissension" within its ranks.

Late on the night of October 15, Musharraf issued an emergency proclamation in "pursuance of deliberations and decisions of Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces and Corps Commanders of Pakistan Army." It said the Constitution was kept in abeyance, the elected Assemblies and the powers of



K M CHOUDARY

Books and tracts on Islam and on the militancy in Kashmir being sold on a Lahore street after Friday prayers. Proceeds from the sale of the books go to fund the militancy.



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Pakistan came under military rule on three previous occasions, under (from left) Gen. Mohammad Ayub Khan, Gen. Yahya Khan and Gen. Zia-ul-Haq.

the presiding officers were suspended, the Prime Minister, Federal Ministers and provincial functionaries ceased to hold office and the 'whole of Pakistan' came under the control of the armed forces of Pakistan' The General proclaimed himself Chief Executive

Along with the proclamation Provisional Constitution Order No 1 of 1999 was issued, it allowed civil courts to function but prohibited courts from issuing any writ against the Chief Executive or persons acting on his directions The order stated "The fundamental rights conferred by Chapter I of Part II of the Constitution, not in conflict with the Proclamation of Emergency or any Order made thereunder from time to time, shall continue to be in force

Unlike Gen Zia-ul-Haq who dissolved the elected Assemblies, imposed martial law and suspended the fundamental rights Musharraf appears to have attempted to soften the blow Just as significant, unlike Zia ul Haq, Musharraf did not designate himself Chief Martial Law Administrator

In a policy address on October 17, Musharraf said This is not martial law, only another path towards democracy However, going by the dictionary meaning of martial law – the exercise of military power by a government, etc in time of emergency (war, riot, etc) with the temporary suspension of ordinary administration and policing" – Pakistan is under military rule

Announcing that a six member National Security Council (NSC) with himself as its chief would head the new structure of governance, Musharraf said that a think-tank would act as an adjunct to the NSC while a Cabinet of Ministers will work under the guidance of the NSC The NSC is to comprise the Air Force and Navy chiefs and a specialist each in law, finance, foreign policy and national affairs

The Chief Executive laid down six objectives for his regime – rebuilding national confidence and morale strengthening the Federation, removing inter-provincial disharmony and restoring national cohesion reviving the economy and restoring investor confidence, ensuring law and order and dispensing speedy justice, de-politicising state institutions, devolving power to the grassroots level and ensuring swift and across the board accountability

Musharraf attempted to give an account of the problems facing Pakistan

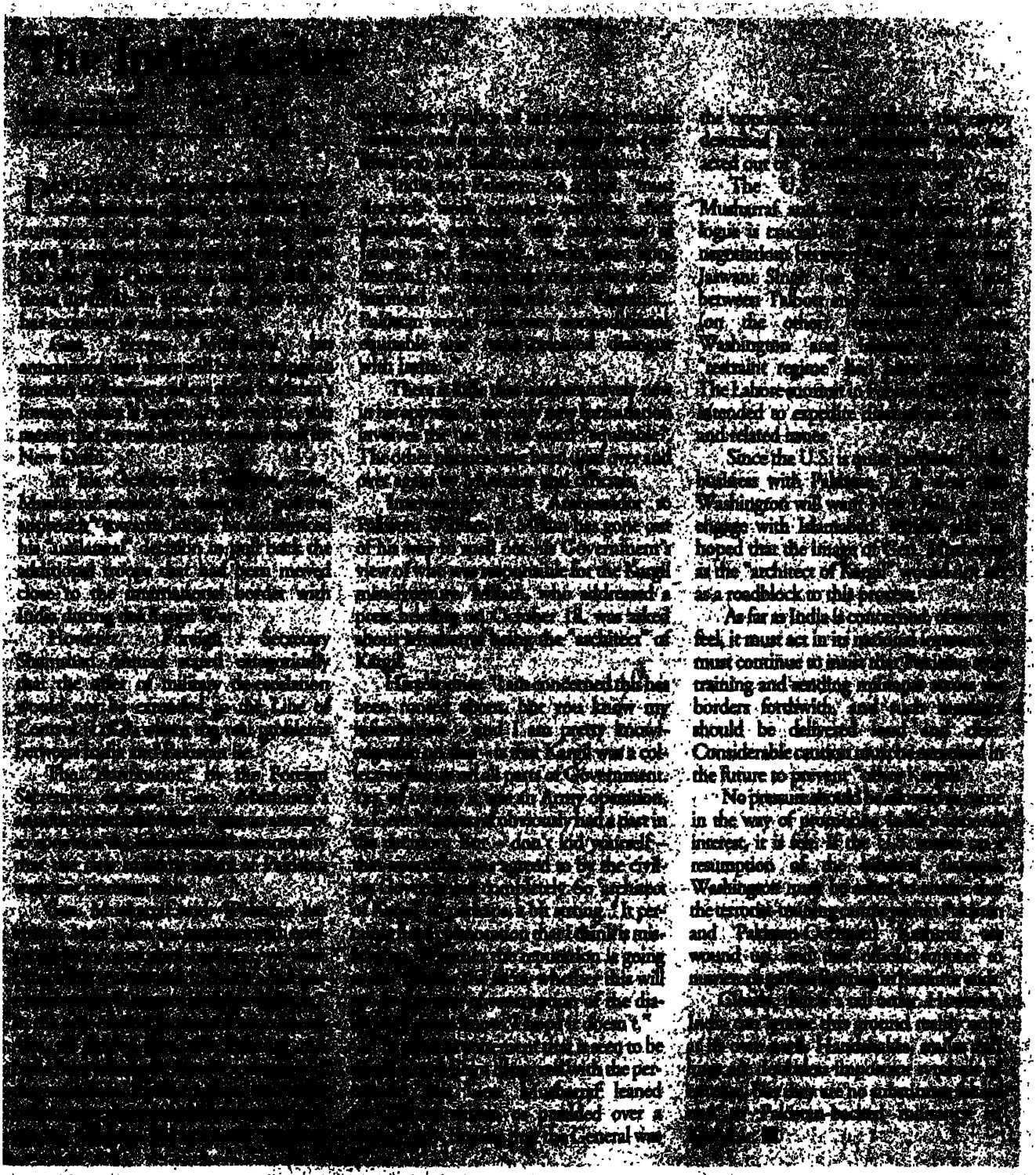
There is despondency and hopelessness surrounding us the slide has been gradual but has rapidly accelerated in the last many years Today, we have reached a stage where our economy has crumbled, our credibility is lost, state institutions lie demolished, provincial disharmony has caused cracks in the Federation and people who were once brothers are now at each other s throat '

"In sum," Musharraf said, "we have lost our honour, our dignity, our respect in the comity of nations Is this the democracy our Quaid-e-Azam envisaged? Is this the way to enter the new millennium? Quite clearly, what Pakistan has experienced has been merely a label of democracy, not the essence of it. I shall not allow the people to be taken back to the era of sham democracy but to a true one. And I promise you I will, Inshallah."

Clearly, the General has set



A souped-up truck bearing merchandise lumbers across the Khyber Pass in North West Frontier Province, close to the Afghanistan border. Musharraf has identified the revival of the economy as one of his priority areas.



himself a formidable agenda. So far no Pakistani government – civilian or military – has succeeded much in these areas. Whether Musharraf can reverse this trend remains to be seen.

In a review, Musharraf has to deal with Zia-ul-Haq's legacy, Imtiaz Alam wrote in *The Nation* October 10:

"General Zia-ul-Haq brought us the [illegible] ... well-

great communism, institutional decay, corrupt politicians of the local body variety, the Sharif model of governance, Talibanisation, Kalashnikov culture, massive corruption, millions of narcotics, besides a criminal neglect of physical and social infrastructure and a debt trap...

"One may trust Gen. Musharraf's sincerity and integrity. But that is not a sufficient justification to take the burden of an agenda that requires tremendous effort for decades and essentially by civil society and not the least by the garrison." The shorter the intervention, the greater would be its success, Imtiaz Alam argued.

Alam further said: "If extended, the democratic process and civil society that has never been allowed to flourish in an ideological nation-state, will suffer and the citizens will remain without a constitutional status... The central question is: can the armed forces rise above their institutional



Musharraf with his parents, wife Saiba and granddaughter Mariam.

interests and let the forces of civil society in a fragile Federation respond to overall challenges of political and economic survival? If so, can they play the role of a neutral broker, help evolve a national consensus and leave it to the people to decide a new social contract and their future?"

Pakistanis await the answer to that question, as they get used to a new military regime, which has so far not placed restrictions on the freedom of the press, a litmus test of tolerence for any regime, military or civilian. So far the overall approach has been correct even though the information flow has been "controlled".

FEW Pakistanis have shed a tear for the Sharif Government, which had undermined every institution, including the press. The arrest and detention of journalists was a frightening pointer to the state of mind of the civilian rulers. Ordinary Pakistanis are doubtless pleased that Sharif and Co., who faced serious charges of corruption, have been deposed. However, having heard and seen enough over the years, they have a disdain for words and promises that do not mean much yet.

Conversations with people from various walks of life reflected a popular expectation that the Army would now have to deliver on its promises. The recovery of national wealth, in their view, was crucial to restoring the economic health of the country. The people want the Army to deliver – and deliver quickly. However, optimism is tempered by realism. The people are aware that Zia-ul-Haq gave precious little to the people, nor did he put in place any process of accountability. His sole aim was to hold and accumulate power – a legacy he passed on to his civilian "successor", Nawaz Sharif.

If Pakistan's history holds any lessons, it is that controlled and directed democracy will not work. The Army is a homogeneous institution, but part of the problem in Pakistan is that the Army's political ambitions (and corrupt practices in the past) have led to acts of blatant intervention in electoral politics.

A variety of leaders, including Imran Khan (former captain of Pakistan's cricket team), have argued that the Army should hold power for a two-year period and then hand over power to a civilian government. But if the people of Pakistan do not today have politicians they can trust, what is the guarantee they can produce them in, say, two years?

Not a single member of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), the erstwhile ruling party or its government moved the Supreme Court seeking restoration of the civilian regime. That, in a sense, said it all: that section's faith in democracy is only skin-deep and fear of the military is deep-seated. After a full week, some members of the former ruling party made a meek demand for the immediate release of the ousted Prime Minister. There was no condemnation of the military for overthrowing a civilian government.

It is not as if the people of Pakistan do not like democracy. The fact is that they have been deprived of democracy and democratic practices by a state that is all-powerful and which controls and watches closely individuals who matter. Note the fact that no Pakistani politician with a military background has ever been given an electoral mandate.

In her book, *The State of Martial Rule*, Ayesha Jalal, one of Pakistan's finest scholars, wrote about the challenges that lay before Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1988: "The greatest challenge to the largest political party, however, stemmed from the lingering imbalance between elected and non-elected institutions in Pakistan's history..."

Jalal further wrote: "To survive and succeed, an elected Prime Minister in the Pakistani context has almost to play the role of the leader of the Opposition upholding the case of the political process against the pre-existing state structure..."

Benazir Bhutto twice failed to make the grade democratically and rein in super-powerful institutions; her successor, Nawaz Sharif, more than matched her. For its part, the Army intelligence network resisted any extension of true democracy.

Nawaz Sharif, who was once the Army's blue-eyed boy, thought he could consolidate his own personal power by bringing the military to heel. In a country where the Army has either ruled directly or never been far from the levers of power, that proved to be a disastrous miscalculation.

To return to Ayesha Jalal's thesis, can Gen. Musharraf do what four successive civilian governments failed to do since 1988? Can he play the role of the "leader of the Opposition" from within? Or is that too much to expect from a man in uniform? ■

Correction: In the report "A face-off averted" (November 5), the opening paragraph should have read: "The Nawaz Sharif Government announced that Pervez Musharraf, the Chief of the Army Staff, had been appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and that he would hold the dual posts concurrently until October 6, 2001." It was erroneously stated that his term as COAS is to run until April 8, 2000.

Treading slowly

India's cautious approach to the developments across the border and the rush of initiatives from the military rulers does not make for much movement on the bilateral front in the immediate context.

JOHN CHERIAN
in NewDelhi

IN the past three years, successive Indian governments had found a degree of comfort in doing business with the civilian government in Pakistan led by Nawaz Sharif. The thaw set in when I.K Gujral was in charge of Indian foreign policy from 1996 to 1998. Both governments indicated at that time that they were willing to discuss substantive issues, including Kashmir. When the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition came to power in 1998, relations between the two governments were initially frosty. Then the political heat generated by the nuclear explosions in May 1998 took time to dissipate. When Prime Ministers Atal Behari Vajpayee and Sharif met during the summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Colombo, the bad vibes were manifested in the their body language. But matters improved in a few months.

Indian policymakers may not have anticipated a military takeover in Pakistan at this juncture: military coups have become unusual worldwide, and Sharif's party had an overwhelming majority in Parliament. India initially responded to the coup by taking the high moral ground. External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said that the events in Pakistan "by themselves are a deadly comment on the situation in that country". He added that India's commitment to democracy had been vividly put across to the international community. "It is ironic that on the eve of the swearing-in of the Vajpayee government, coup leaders took control of Pakistan and the country went under martial law," Jaswant Singh said.

The Indian government then decided to send National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra to Washington to discuss, among other things, the latest developments in Pakistan with U.S. State Department officials. This was not surprising considering the fact that Indian government leaders, from the Prime Minister downwards, had characterised the U.S. as a "natural ally" of India. However, there were surprises in store for them.

Although the world's most powerful democracy was quick to criticise the coup, it made it clear that it would continue to do business with Islamabad. Washington also wanted New Delhi to do likewise. In a telephonic conversation with Vajpayee, President Bill Clinton suggested that India and Pakistan resume talks at the earliest. It is known to discerning observers that successive U.S. administrations have practised double standards in respect of their dealings with military regimes. In the case of countries with which it has had historically close ties – such as Pakistan, Turkey and Indonesia – the U.S. connives at overt or covert military interventions. The Clinton administration, as in the case of previous U.S. administrations, reckons that in certain circumstances the military could prove more sensitive to Washington's concerns.

The armed forces in Pakistan, Turkey and Iran were partners in many important Western enterprises during the Cold War. It is therefore no surprise that Washington has concluded that General Pervez Musharraf is "a man you can do business with". Musharraf, for his part, has advertised to the world his admiration for Turkey's "military democracy" and indicated that he would prefer a similar model for Pakistan. In much the same way as the Turkish military, Musharraf has taken a tough stance in respect of Islamic parties. So far only Islamic parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami have dared to protest openly against military rule.



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Prime Ministers A.B. Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif at the Wagah border on February 20.

Senior U.S. officials have now begun to exert pressure on the Indian government to restart the stalled dialogue process. Indian officials have, however, dismissed Musharraf's announcement regarding the withdrawal of Pakistani troops along the international border as a gimmick. India said that for the withdrawal to be meaningful, Pakistan should simultaneously withdraw troops from the Line of Control. Pakistan insists that the situation along the LoC is qualitatively different as it has been volatile with heavy concentration of troops and firepower on both sides of the border.

However, the U.S. claims that Musharraf's gesture is an



KAMAL NARANG

At the height of the Kargil War, an Indian artillery gun booms in the Batalik sector.

important confidence-building measure (CBM) and that reciprocal action from New Delhi would help ease tensions. The Indian side, however, insists that no progress is possible in the dialogue process unless Islamabad gives a "commitment" that it will stop cross-border terrorism. The new military regime in Pakistan has regretted India's "negative response" to its offer of unconditional resumption of dialogue.

Indian officials are evidently not as impressed as their U.S. counterparts are by the rush of initiatives from the military rulers. Musharraf reiterated the Pakistani offer of a dialogue on Kashmir and other issues. In recent days, the Indian Foreign Office has toughened its stance on Kashmir, asserting that Kashmir is the key to India's territorial unity and that there can be no compromise on this. In the third week of October, a spokesman for the Indian External Affairs Ministry said on condition of anonymity that it was "imperative" that Islamabad stopped cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India. The official said that there were as yet no signs that Pakistani support for cross-border terrorism had abated. Jaswant Singh said in late October that it was "too early" to consider a resumption of the dialogue with Islamabad. He dismissed concerns expressed by some Western nations about the danger of the recent events triggering a nuclear flare-up in the region.

In Washington, Brajesh Mishra expressed India's concerns about the military takeover. India's initial interpretation was that the coup was intended to negate the Pakistan Prime Minister's efforts to clamp down on terrorists in that country. Musharraf was portrayed as an officer who was influenced by the concepts of militant Islam and it was even alleged that he had close links with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In support of this charge, Indian officials pointed to the transcripts of a telephone conversation between Musharraf and a senior Army officer during the early stages of the Kargil war; intelligence agencies had secured tapes which, they said, "proved" Musharraf's early role in the Kargil intrusion. Copies of the tapes had been handed over to Nawaz Sharif through secret envoys.

Both Sharif and Vajpayee seemed to want to convey the opinion that Musharraf was the "architect" of Kargil. U.S. officials were less than convinced and were willing to give Musharraf the benefit of the doubt. They, however, assured Mishra in Washington that the U.S. was as keen as India was to see civilian government restored in Pakistan and that they would use their influence on Pakistan to address Indian concerns over cross-border terrorism. The Clinton administration also announced that for the present it would not waive the Pressler Amendment, as proposed, which would lead to the resumption of arms supply to Pakistan.

At the same time, U.S. officials in Washington and those who were recently in New Delhi want India to keep the door open for talks with the new regime in Islamabad. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Karl Inderfurth said recently that Washington was optimistic of convincing the generals to end state support for cross-border terrorism. Inderfurth said that he would meet Jaswant Singh in early November, and that at the top of the agenda for discussion would be the recent developments in Pakistan and adherence to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Inderfurth told mediapersons in Washington that both the U.S. and India would "closely" watch Musharraf's actions, rather than his words. He conceded that the prospects of "renewing the Lahore process did not look well".

Inderfurth, however, stressed that the U.S. "cannot walk away because Pakistan is important – because stability or the lack thereof in Pakistan will have an impact on Pakistan's neighbours." Bruce Reidel, Senior Director for South Asia in the National Security Council, who was in New Delhi in the fourth week of October, let it be known that Washington viewed Musharraf as a man with "moderate" political views and admitted that Gen. Anthony Zinni, who is in charge of U.S. forces in the Gulf, had a long discussion with Musharraf on security-related issues. New Delhi is not happy at what it feels is only a muted response from Washington to the events in Pakistan.

The Commonwealth, on the other hand, took a tough stance; it suspended Pakistan from the organisation, barely a month before the scheduled Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) summit in Durban. Members from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group took the decision at a meeting in London, stating that the suspension would be effective "forthwith" and would remain "pending the restoration of democracy in the country". In a statement released after the talks, the Ministers unanimously condemned the overthrow of the democratically elected government in Pakistan.

The European Union set a November 15 deadline for a return to civilian rule. Failure in this regard would invite punitive action. The Indian government, especially a BJP-led one, cannot afford to take such an open stand on an issue that involves the question of democracy. Vociferous support for the restoration of democratic rule could be misconstrued as support for the ousted Sharif government.

Vajpayee will however have an occasion to interact with the new military strongman of Pakistan at the SAARC summit to be held in Kathmandu in late November. That occasion could well provide the opportunity for the resumption of the stalled dialogue process between the two countries. ■

Changing tack in Washington

The United States is evidently set to continue the game and engage the Generals.

SRIDHAR KRISHNASWAMI
in Washington

A POLITICIAN as astute as Nawaz Sharif should have known that when it comes to dumping those who have outlived their utility and shedding crocodile tears for them, there is none to beat administrations in Washington. And that the Clinton administration would be no different in this matter. When push came to shove and the men in uniform forcibly entered the political process in Pakistan, Washington was looking for rationales to continue the game and engage the Generals.

It took the Clinton administration a few days to determine, officially and legally, that a coup in Pakistan had indeed taken place.

For Sharif, the only solace was that senior officials in the Clinton administration were ready to hand out commendation certificates; but this was in some ways intended to "protect" the political establishment in Washington – in the unlikely event of the deposed Prime Minister returning to power.

It should come as no surprise that Washington will continue its dialogue with Islamabad. In fact, it would have been naive to assume that the Clinton administration would close all the avenues just because Pervez Musharraf took over the reins of power. It was keen to maintain the dialogue because the bottom line was that there are tangible interests for the U.S. in Pakistan – strategic, political and economic.

But domestic politics in the U.S. being what it is – and what it will always be – the appropriate noises had to be made. And the officialdom at the White House and in the State Department did an excellent job of it; its job, of course, was made a lot easy by the popular reaction within Pakistan to the turn of events.

The U.S. administration subsequently found it easy to list all the shortcomings of the deposed Sharif Government. However, few in Washington are making the point that the Kargil factor – in particular, Sharif's orders (under U.S. pressure) to his troops to pull back from the Indian side of the Line of Control in July – was a principal reason why Sharif lost the power game.

The Clinton administration then began parroting the line that Gen. Musharraf must restore civilian democracy at the earliest, that the U.S. could not do business with Pakistan until then, but that, on the other hand, the U.S. could not "walk away" from Pakistan. This line has been articulated fairly routinely at the State Department, the White House and at congressional hearings.

It is unlikely that the broad contours of this policy line will change in the short term; it will probably be amended suitably over a period of time if the General gets "more comfortable" in his new outfit.

The coup in Pakistan could not have come at a worse time for Washington: just after Congress had passed legislation authorising comprehensive and permanent waivers of the sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan following the nuclear tests of May 1998. And upon the President signing the Defence Authorisation Bill, the administration would have started reviewing and lifting most, if not all, of the sanctions (story on sanctions on page 120).

What will happen now is that while sanctions against India will merit immediate attention, President Bill Clinton cannot do anything for Pakistan until an elected government has been restored. And analysts in Washington believe that that could be a long way off. There is talk that about .wo years will be needed for the situation to stablise and for elections to be held in that country.

One of the key backers of the move to lift the sanctions was Republican Senator Sam Brownback from Kansas; he pointed out that his amendment at this point of time only amounted to a "structural change in the law" that would help the President after a democratically elected government is in place in Pakistan. He also lashed out at the administration for "dumping" Sharif; such an action only sent a "terrible message" to the world, he said.

Brownback was one of the first to argue that no one was giving Pakistan a "pass" on the military coup; he pointed out that the administration had invoked Section 508 of the Foreign Assistance Act, which mandated blanket sanctions on any country where the duly elected leader was deposed in a coup. There may not be much sympathy for Sharif's way of doing business in his country, but Section 508 does not give the administration much leeway in the matter.

There was another unintended fallout of the coup: the U.S. administration was forced to make its intentions known on the scope of the waivers on the Glenn and Pressler amendments. In response to some close questioning by Congressman Gary Ackerman, the Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, in the House Asia-Pacific Sub-Committee Hearing, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Karl Inderfurth said that the administration had neither the plan nor the intention to resume supplying arms to Pakistan.

AP



U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan William Milan (right) calls on Musharraf.

The Clinton administration has for long been pressing Congress for a "level playing field" in respect of legislation that is perceived as restrictive; it argued that such legislation was preventing the U.S. from fully pursuing its foreign policy goals. When Congress was debating the future of the sanctions on India and Pakistan, the Senate adopted through the Brownback Amendment a permanent waiver but took the Pressler law from the books. The House version spoke of waivers for one year but did not tamper with the Pressler law. The Conferees of the House and Senate went in for comprehensive and permanent waivers; as a result, not only the Glenn Amendment but also the Pressler Amendment were taken off the list.

For all its expressions of "sympathy" and invocation of national security interests, the Clinton administration will have a difficult time explaining to Congress just why certain relaxations would have to be made. For instance, it is fairly common knowledge that Pakistan's economy is in deep trouble. In fact, the conviction in the U.S. is that Pakistan has for quite some time been tottering on the brink. A formal meltdown of the Pakistani economy will have an impact in the immediate neighbourhood and on Washington's policies in the region.

This is the reason why the Clinton administration will not anymore lean heavily on Pakistan. Washington has said, for instance, that Islamabad has problems with the International Monetary Fund and that the disbursement of the third tranche of IMF loans, $280 million out of the total package of $1.6 billion, was in jeopardy much before the Army emerged from the barracks.

The Clinton administration will also look to India to a certain extent to ease things in Pakistan. And it will expect India to respond meaningfully to the olive branch extended by Gen. Musharraf. Senior officials are also aware of the problems from an Indian point of view: aside from a perception of being let down or "cheated" after the Lahore summit, New Delhi has made it plain that it cannot negotiate so long as Islamabad was fully involved in a state-run terror campaign across the border.

But the hope in official and private quarters in Washington is that the Lahore process will be restarted and that India and Pakistan will settle down to talk about contentious issues in a serious manner. If Gen. Musharraf can be taken at face value – given that he is believed to have initiated and presided over the Kargil debacle – something positive could still come of the ominous developments. ■

■ COVER STORY

Return of the Generals

The takeover of a country by military leadership in the face of failures by civilian governments only leaves the country in a worse state than before. Pakistan's is a case in point.

AZIZ SIDDIQUI

IMPOSITION of military rule for the fourth time in the country's brief history is bad enough. What makes it gloomier is that the action is by all accounts, widely popular. It has not only been welcomed by a wide swathe of common citizenry, it also seems to enjoy an embarrassing measure of acclaim among the intelligentsia. Even long-time democrats and human rights activists are averse to sounding a note of dissent. "Do you want us to go back to Nawaz Sharif?" they ask testily.

That is at the core of the current dilemma. If it is not one it has to be the other. If it is not to be an extra-constitutional public-spirited benevolence, as presumed, it can only be a constitutional self-serving despotism, as experienced. The historical factors that have created this stark choice, the experiences of the past, and the fact that weighing the alternatives on the basis of the accepted norms may still be the best course for the longer term, is lost sight of in this initial euphoria.

There is, of course, no question about the gargantuan failures of the Nawaz Sharif Government. What official publicists are busy reeling out on the official media is, for once, largely true. During his 32-month stint, Nawaz Sharif not only failed to catch the popular imagination – despite his Z.A. Bhutto-like bids to win the personal support of the masses in the interior of Sindh, Punjab and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) – he also came to be regarded as a bit of a disaster by the educated elite in the cities. His intellectual limitations had become the stuff of popular jokes. Z.A. Bhutto's brilliance was barely a mitigation of his offensive *wadera*ism. But Nawaz Sharif was bereft even of that.

People find it hard to dispute Pervez Musharraf's contention that what he rolled back was not democracy, it was a sham. Nawaz Sharif had made sure that every potential check on his freedom to do his will was effectively gotten out of the way – extra-constitutionally if necessary, and let the chips fall where they may.

Nawaz Sharif first thought up a series of constitutional amendments to fortify himself against possible challenges to his rule and to invest himself with powers few constitutional rulers ever enjoyed. The first of his amendments dispensed with the President's power to dismiss a government and dissolve Parliament in a situation he thought was one of constitutional breakdown. That power had been written into the Constitution by President Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, who had wished to retain with himself the ultimate leverage over the Prime Minister. The provision went on to cause the downfall of four elected governments and Parliaments in eight years, the first of those at Gen. Zia's own hands. This power, therefore came to be regarded as a destabilising and undemocratic weapon in the hands of a head of state meant to be only a figurehead. For that reason, its repeal by Nawaz Sharif was generally welcomed. But there was more to come.

Nawaz Sharif's next amendment bonded parliamentary parties to the will of their party leader. It required every member to vote strictly in accordance with his or her party's (which meant the party leader's) decision. Even abstention, let alone dissent, would cause the member to forfeit his or her seat. That had the effect of completely neutering the National Assembly. The Opposition, being minuscule in the House turned into a pen of sheep. There was rarely a Parliament as dull as this one.

The ultimate in constitutional despotism, however, came with Mian Nawaz Sharif's third amendment, meant as a measure to enforce Islam in the country. The original draft placed before the National Assembly gave the government (read the Prime Minister) total power to decide what was prescribed and what was prohibited in Islam, and to go ahead and enforce it regardless of what the Constitution or the courts said. He could,



B K. BANGASH/AP

Troops on alert at the main gate of the Parliament building in Islamabad on October 15.

for instance, decide that Islam did not permit leadership by a woman or a multiparty system of government, and nothing could stop him from making that into a law. Any functionary of the state (including obviously an officer of the courts or the armed forces) who was considered tardy in the implementation of such a decree was liable to severe penalisation. An even more remarkable provision was that any future constitutional amendment considered necessary for the purpose would need only a simple majority to be passed – simple majority not even of the total membership but of just those present at the time and voting! In other words, an amendment could sail through even without the Opposition participating, and even in the face of opposition by the smaller three of the country's four provinces. Clearly, it took a sinister mind to think up the whole design.

The proposal was so plainly outrageous that a few members even of the ruling party gathered courage to demur against it in a party meeting (they came to know of the Bill only after it was presented in the National Assembly). The objectors were immediately asked to resign, which they did, whereupon they were conceded a part of the ground. In the second draft, the last two elements were removed. The Bill, not the less offensive for the revision, got more than the needed two-thirds of the votes in the Lower House. However, since the Muslim League did not have that kind of majority in the Upper House and the others had joined in opposing it, it was kept pending on the calculation that with threats of divine wrath from the mullahs and the re-election to half the Senate seats due in March 2000 the requisite numbers would become available.

NAWAZ SHARIF and his men were active outside of the Constitution as well. The so-called Accountability Cell had throughout his tenure, concentrated on just the Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto and her imprisoned husband Asif Ali Zardari. That pretty much took care of the principal Opposition. The other party occupying considerable political space that the Muslim League coveted was the MQM, Mottahida (formerly Mohajir) Qaomi Mohaz, which had begun as, and still largely remains, the party of the first- and second-generation migrants from India settled mainly in Karachi. At first, the Muslim League joined up with it to form the government in Sindh and keep out the PPP, the single largest party in the province. However, after it had a national Emergency declared following the nuclear tests, and had that measure endorsed by the supreme court, the Muslim League thought that it no longer needed the MQM – it could impose Governor's rule in the province and rule from Islamabad without giving anyone a share in power. Not believing in half-measures, it did not just ditch its former coalition partner, it also cracked down heavily on it in the name of fighting terrorism.

The bid to tame the judiciary also started early. It succeeded so well that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (and the then President) were made to resign, following a raid by party goons on the Supreme Court building while the court was in session. Official criticisms against the judiciary continued after that on the supposed grounds of its dilatoriness and its not awarding sentences that were prompt and stiff enough. This was seen as a bid to warn the judges against assuming too much independence. On the eve of Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore, the world media that was on hand to witness the occasion huddled around the available television sets when it was announced that Nawaz Sharif was to address the nation. The expectation was that the speech would be about the event that was on the minds of most people – the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan in close to 40 years. However, as it happened, there was not a word about that. The address was a tirade against the judiciary and the judicial system.

The list of the ousted government's bids to undermine the democratic and federal principles, institutions and sentiments is long despite the relatively brief spell in power. It includes a series of actions against the media and mediapersons, a campaign of vilification against independent-minded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by name and drawing up a law to limit the freedom of the NGOs and enhance the official say in their affairs, moves that made the predominance of Punjab increasingly felt in the three smaller provinces, and the extravagant sallies into populist economism at a time of virtual bankruptcy.

THE bill of indictment against the Nawaz Sharif Government can go on and on, but that still does not prove that one wrong can be made good by another. Pakistan has had prolonged experience with military rule. Nearly half of its 50 years has been spent thus, with each bout coming in the midst of similar public euphoria and a sense of good riddance for the ousted order. But each such spell left the country, when it was made to leave it,



ZIA MAZHAR/AP

Bodies of victims of a sectarian clash between Shias and Sunnis being taken for burial in Karachi on October 2.



M ZIA/AP

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Qazi Hussain Ahmed addresses a rally in Karachi on October 4.

in an even worse mess than it found it in.

The rule of gen. Ayub Khan, among a number of other things, started the process of alienation in East Pakistan, which Gen. Yahya Khan after him carried to completion. Between them they saw half the country break away, the only occurrence of its kind in current history.

Zia-ul-Haq's gifts were similarly manifold and far-reaching. He put the country on the map of drug traffic. Drug addiction spread widely within the country too: from being negligible at the start of the 1980s, the numbers shot to upwards of three million at the close of the decade. The country also became the site of the busiest cross-border arms trail since the Vietnam war, with parts of the weaponry meant for Afghanistan trickling sideways, deep into the country, and creating the phenomenon of arms proliferation in private hands. This in turn led to the birth and spread of terrorism within, with gruesome incidents rocking the country. Zia-ul-Haq also acted as a midwife in the process of introducing religious fundamentalism into the body politic. It has since made deep inroads into the corpus of laws and the administration of justice. The pressure has continued to mount. There is an unrelenting bid to enhance its influence and its embrace.

Perhaps the most baneful of the long-term effects of the earlier spells of military rule was that they robbed constitutionalism of much of its sanctity. The Constitution was either abrogated or suspended, replaced or overhauled at the convenience of the dictator of the time. With all that happening – and happening unfortunately with the endorsement of the country's judiciary – the way was opened for political governments too to press against constitutional constraints. A country that was already a bit difficult to rule was thus made even more ungovernable.

The length and nature of past military rules had yet another effect: they made the military's presence loom large even when it was not in power. The political governments that have come in between have felt obliged to keep looking over their shoulders – or, like Mian Nawaz Sharif, to try and create personal loyalties in that camp.

There is little evidence so far that Gen. Musharraf's tenure in power will be very different from those of his predecessors. The objectives he has spelt out for himself make a full enough agenda. The approach is soft for the present. The term martial law has been strictly avoided this time, as a nod no doubt to world opinion. Fundamental rights are also promised to be generally respected. But on past evidence it is hard to be optimistic even about small mercies. As the regime exhausts its ingenuity and innovativeness and public euphoria begins to dissipate, it may find even a relatively free press, independent judiciary and active elements of civil society a bit of a spoilsport.

The Chief Executive has already given himself the authority to act outside of the suspended Constitution in pursuit of the aims he has set out. He may have to make structural changes in such areas as devolution of powers to the grassroots and strengthening the federal bonds, in case he takes those objectives seriously enough. The proposed National Security Council headed by himself and including the two other service chiefs seems particularly likely to become an organic feature as the supreme governing body. The armed forces had long favoured a constitutional role for themselves in governing the country. Now that they have the opportunity to give it to themselves it is unlikely that they will not make sure it stays for all forseeable future.

When asked about his new responsibilities, Gen. Musharraf remarked that it was "nice to be in charge". This candour was amusing. It can also be ominous. ■

A former Editor of The Frontier Post *and* The Pakistan Times, *Asma Siddiqui is currently Joint Director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.*

The coup and the Indian nuclear theology

Who controlled the nuclear button in Pakistan as the coup was under way? An assessment of the implications of the coup vis-a-vis nuclear weaponisation.

T. JAYARAMAN

THE interest that the international media have evinced in the coup in Pakistan is undoubtedly in part owing to the fact that it involved the spectacle of a military takeover in an era when such political transitions have become somewhat passe. In the post-Cold War years, the ruling classes in most other nations have discovered far more effective and superficially democratic means to contain dissent or manage internal crises. But the other major reason for the interest undoubtedly stem from the serious concern that is generated by political instability in any state which has nuclear-weapons capability. Who controls the nuclear button at a time when the normal chain of political and military authority of a state is actively disrupted is a question of more than passing interest to most governments and international public opinion.

But, curiously, in India the question of the nuclear dimensions of the coup in Pakistan has not yet triggered a debate on the dangers posed by nuclear weaponisation when there is endemic political instability in at least one of the nuclear-armed states of South Asia. The Indian media have been flooded with self-congratulatory commentary on the swearing-in of a democratically elected government in India at the same time that the coup got under way in Pakistan; little attention has been paid to the coup's implications for the nuclear issue and the evolution of an Indian nuclear doctrine.

The fact that India's leading nuclear theologians have maintained a studied silence on this issue should, however, be entirely unsurprising to those who have read the recently released draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine (dIND). The crux of the matter is that events such as the coup in Pakistan deal a body blow to some of the fundamental assumptions of the nuclear doctrine enunciated by the high priests of Indian nuclear weaponisation.

As is evident from even a cursory analysis of the dIND, India's nuclear weaponisation programme is Pakistan- and China-specific. In this context, a key assumption of the dIND is that peace and security in South Asia can be ensured by the possession of nuclear weapons that act as a deterrent. In other words, it is the balance of terror between India and Pakistan, when both nations are nuclear-weaponised, that will guarantee peace and stability. The dIND says as much, with its entirely unoriginal invocation of the basic principles of deterrence theory. To be sure, the document does not refer to Pakistan directly but the implications *vis-a-vis* that nation are obvious. The question that is important for any objective analysis is whether the assumptions of deterrence theory will hold when there is deep political instability in one of the states that is a player in the game.

The Achilles heel of deterrence theory, the hyperrationality of which often makes it beguilingly acceptable to many, is the fact that it presupposes that one's opponent will read one's actions and events in the realm of nuclear weapons in the manner that one intends the opponent to. The second problem is that the actual operationalisation of deterrence, when nuclear weapons are really deployed, leads inevitably to situations where the command and control of nuclear weapons is compromised and the dangers of accidental or unauthorised launch become very high. Deterrence theory presupposes perfect command and control since its stated aim is to prevent a nuclear exchange. But the danger of deterrence is that such a level of command and control is never achieved in practice – as the experience of even the most advanced nuclear weapons powers has always shown.

WHO controlled the nuclear button in Pakistan while the coup was under way? Who had the authority to launch nuclear weapons when Nawaz Sharif was attempting to prevent Gen. Pervez Musharraf from returning to Pakistan? Would it have been the orders of the Prime Minister or the orders of the Chief of the Army Staff that would have prevailed with the individuals who physically controlled the arming, the launching and the delivery of nuclear weapons? What are the political inclinations of these individuals, and would they have been susceptible to the enticements of fringe extremist political elements in a short period of extreme instability during a forced political transition? Obviously, India's nuclear hawks have no clear answers to these questions. But in a nuclear-armed environment, the security – indeed, the very lives – of millions of Indians hangs on precise answers to these questions, now and in the future.

Undoubtedly, the nuclear theologians will attempt to dismiss these questions as unduly alarmist in the current context. It certainly appears that currently in Pakistan it is the Army that has physical control of the weapons. But according to reports in the Pakistani media, quoted by *The Times of India* (August 22, 1999) for instance, the political authority to launch nuclear weapons was to rest with the Prime Minister, while the Chief of the Army Staff was to be the strategic commander. In the event of a conflict between the political authority and the military, whose will would prevail and how would that affect the control of nuclear weapons? Did Pakistan have a mechanism in place whereby the strategic commander could not override the political authority or *vice versa*? Hardly likely, considering the technical difficulties involved in Pakistan acquiring such a capability and given the internal political constraints. It is also true that the armed forces were solidly behind Gen. Musharraf in the current coup and were hardly disposed to listen to Nawaz

Sharif. Gen. Musharraf also moved rather rapidly to assure the world that his regime would exercise nuclear restraint. But is it guaranteed that such a situation would always obtain even in the future?

It is obvious that command and control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons will always be a chancy affair. The compromising of command and control will always be a possibility that cannot be excluded. Indeed, in more extreme crises, a split in the Army would render the situation even more dangerous. If, as was the case with even the current coup, part of the internal conflict was precisely on the question of how to deal with Pakistan's disputes with India, who controls the weapons becomes a matter of great concern. Can an endemically politically unstable state, as Pakistan has been for the last few decades, endure the pressures of a crisis of the proportions of the Cuban missile crisis, scaled down no doubt to subcontinental dimensions, without its command and control giving way? The inescapable conclusion is that the lives of millions of Indians are only as secure as the weakest link in the Pakistani chain of command for its nuclear weapons. Only in the fevered imagination of India's Strangeloves, dedicated to the pursuit of nuclear weapons, could this be construed as security.

The correct first Indian response to its troubled neighbour, post-Pokhran and post-Chagai, remains the acceptance of Pakistan's oft-repeated offer to consider the non-deployment of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent.

THE oft-repeated claim that India's command and control will be more secure because of the civilian control of nuclear weapons cannot also be taken at face value, even if it soothes various representatives of Track II diplomacy from the United States. Apart from being an insult to India's armed forces, this argument suppresses the fact that the most vociferous and hawkish pressures in favour of India's nuclear weaponisation have always come from its civilian sector. The blithe disregard of strategic realities in South Asia by the pro-weaponisation lobby, whether in government or outside, is undoubtedly partly due to the virtual exclusion of the Indian armed forces from both the final decision-making loop as well as the long internal debate that led to the nuclear tests and the handling of the aftermath. And even if ultimate political authority rests with the Prime Minister, it makes command and control no more secure if the physical control of nuclear weapons lay with men in civilian clothing rather than those in the varied uniforms of the defence forces.

But even more disturbing considerations emerge if one tries to analyse more carefully the business-as-usual attitude of the nuclear hawks in India towards the implications of the coup in Pakistan. This attitude in fact has its genesis in the manner in which the Kargil conflict, a classic case of the damage done to India's security by Pokhran-II, was ultimately brought to an end. In Kargil, India's chestnuts were pulled out of the fire partly by the intervention of the U.S. As Pakistan, hoping for international intervention, prolonged the conflict beyond the time period that intelligent political and strategic considerations would have indicated, it was the pressure brought to bear by the U.S. that eventually led to a Pakistani withdrawal. This happened at a time when clearly the Indian government foresaw a long-drawn-out conflict, with high losses in terms of men and material, to regain final control of the territory occupied by the Pakistani intruders. Clearly it was also international pressure that prevented Pakistan from explicitly bringing the nuclear factor into play even though threatening noises did emerge from some quarters.

It is the self-deluding and mistaken reading of these events as a triumph of Indian diplomacy and strategy, in utilising the U.S. to contain Pakistan in the Kargil conflict and force its withdrawal, that has partly emboldened the nuclear hawks in India to produce the aggressive dIND, unmindful of its destabilising effects in the subcontinent. One of the key underlying assumptions of the doctrine is that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P-5) would automatically intervene if Pakistan attempts to raise the nuclear threat in the subcontinent. The gamble is that deterrence will work partly because the international community will not countenance any destabilisation of deterrence by Pakistan. And this is also the reason why the nuclear hawks view the coup with relative unconcern, depending on the U.S. to intervene to ensure that Pakistan continued to exercise nuclear restraint. What if the intervention of the P-5 does not work or that they are unable to intervene decisively on some occasion in the future. These are, of course, questions that only 'naive' anti-nuclear weapons campaigners would ask.

It is clearly this view that finds its echo in an editorial in *The Times of India* (October 21) calling upon the "international community, and particularly the U.S.", to "emphasise to the Pakistani military what the consequences of any nuclear adventurism are likely to be." The editorial smugly concludes: "It is to cover contingencies of this type that the Indian nuclear doctrine authored by the National Security Advisory Board talks of 'punitive unacceptable retaliation' in case of a nuclear first strike on India." Undoubtedly P-5 intervention against the offender and an Indian second strike would bring considerable cheer to the ghosts of those Indians who would have been vapourised by a first strike.

The fact that this strategy, even in the short term, would require the offering of substantial *quid pro quo* measures to the U.S., or that it opens the door to worrisome possibilities such as international intervention on the Kashmir question, has been lost sight of in the blind pursuit of nuclear weaponisation. That this attitude is at least partly official is evident from the alacrity with which the newly-elected government has resumed its dialogue with the U.S. on a broad range of issues that have been left somewhat unspecified but appear definitely to include India-Pakistan relations. Indeed, it is National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra who is the first representative to visit Washington.

It certainly appears unlikely that the serious problems that beset India-Pakistan relations can be settled in the short term. There is a huge gap that divides the two nations that it seems will be difficult to bridge without considerable patience and intense and prolonged effort. And undoubtedly the continued instability of democracy in Pakistan complicates the picture. But introducing nuclear weapons into the subcontinent or the production of aggressive nuclear doctrines based on the false assumptions of nuclear deterrence theory seems hardly the way to go about securing peace. The correct first Indian response to its troubled neighbour, post-Pokhran and post-Chagai, remains the acceptance of Pakistan's oft-repeated offer to consider the non-deployment of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent. ■

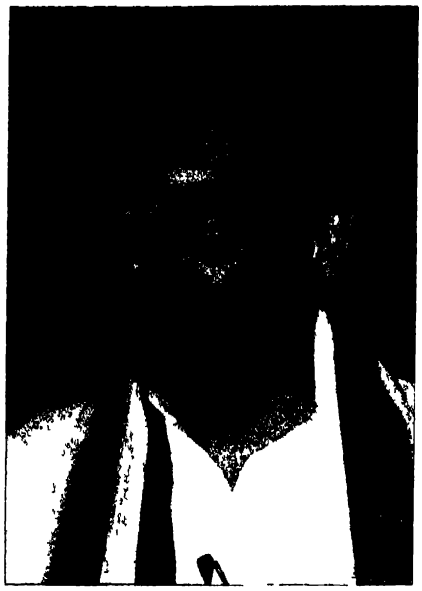
Into Act Five

The Central Bureau of Investigation files its first charge-sheet in the Bofors howitzer deal case, which is now set for trial.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

IT has fallen to the lot of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to debunk one of India's most sacred political icons, whose residual aura provides all the legitimacy that the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha today possesses. The sensitivities connected to the Bofors pay-offs scandal being so acute, any decisive movement forward in the official investigation would inevitably be construed as politically motivated, irrespective of its specific content and purpose. Prudence demanded that the CBI should, for this reason, go through a rather prolonged period of cooling off before the first charge-sheet in the case was filed. The work of preparing the first set of indictments had begun immediately after sanction to prosecute the public servants implicated in the scandal was received from appropriate quarters in April. But the intervening general elections compelled the CBI to wait, since any action taken during an intensely fought political campaign could have easily been interpreted as being partisan in its motivations.

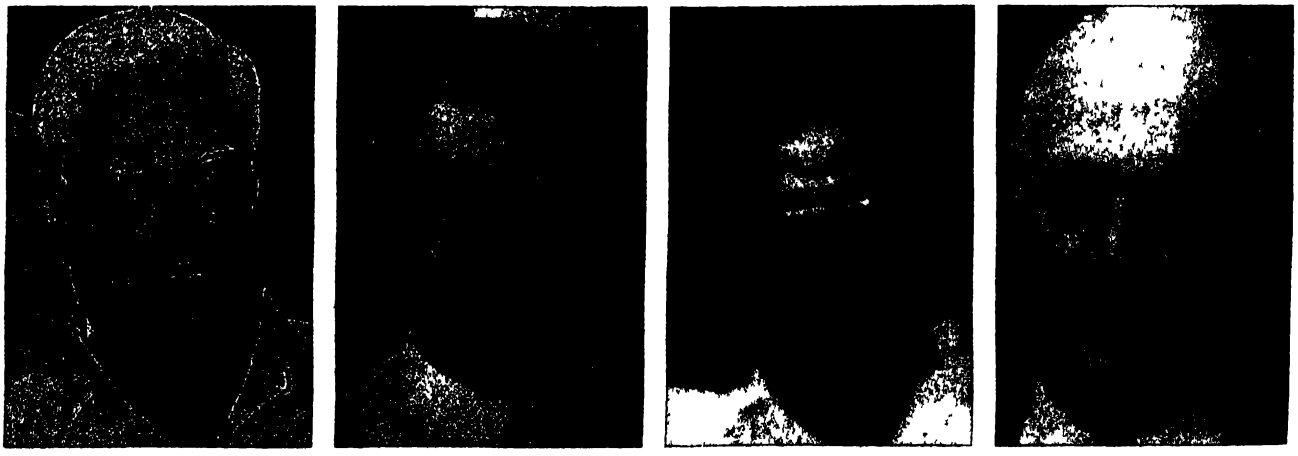
The charge-sheet that was filed before Ajit Barihoke, Special Judge for CBI cases, on October 22 is closely modelled in its essence on the report that the agency had submitted to its administrative Ministry in May 1997. The then CBI Director, Joginder Singh, had insisted in February that year – as he took delivery of the first set of secret bank documents released through the Swiss judicial system – that his investigations would be completed by the end of April. He missed the self-imposed deadline by a few days, but that can hardly be considered a serious deficiency in an investigative process that has often been dragged out for the most unsavoury of reasons. CBI officials intimately connected to the investigation today acknowledge the debt they owe to the brief period of autonomy the agency enjoyed under Joginder Singh, during the tenure of Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda.



Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He figures in the CBI charge-sheet as an accused whose name was not sent up for trial as he is no more.

For no evident reason, the mandatory sanction required for the prosecution of public servants was delayed till April this year and finally granted only selectively. Sanction was sought for the indictment of three individuals who had been public servants when the putative offences were committed – S.K. Bhatnagar, Defence Secretary in the Rajiv Gandhi Government, G.K. Arora, Principal Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office during the same period, and Madhavsinh Solanki, Minister for External Affairs in the P.V. Narasimha Rao Government. In the case of Bhatnagar and Solanki, sanction was granted in April by the appropriate authorities. The case of Arora remains indeterminate, according to CBI sources – neither has sanction been granted, nor has it been explicitly denied.

In the professional assessment of CBI



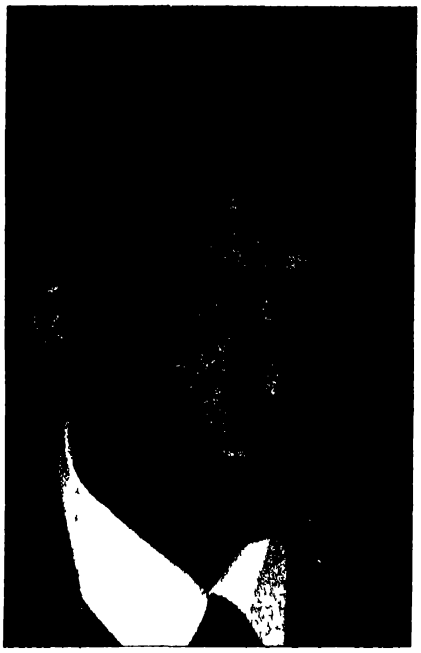
The other accused in the case are (from left): Former Bofors agent Win Ch businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi; former Defence Secretary S.K. Bhatnagar; former Bofors President Martin Ardbo.

investigators, Arora's indictment is not really essential to ensuring the integrity of their case. And Solanki's alleged offence, though serious, is of a different nature. He stepped into the fray when the judicial process in Switzerland was already well advanced and sought rather maladroitly to divert it off course by passing an anonymous note to his counterpart in that country. This makes him a party to the criminal conspiracy in its later phases. It is learnt that his indictment is imminent. He does not feature in the charge-sheet now filed, since this pertains to the earlier phases of the scandal.

PERCEPTIVE observers and chroniclers of the howitzer deal have analytically sought to interpret it in terms of four stages, each characterised by a specific mode of action. The first relates to the decision-making process on the choice of howitzer guns for the Indian Army. The second comprises the arrangements made for the receipt of illicit pay-offs from the Swedish arms vendor. The third is the official cover-up and crisis management effort by a small group in the Prime Minister's Office. The fourth is the journalistic expose and the CBI's criminal investigations, which were assisted by the Swiss Federal Police and the judiciary in both India and Switzerland.

In terms of this conceptualisation, Arora and Bhatnagar were deeply implicated in the first three phases of the scandal, though their specific roles would be simply incomprehensible if the guiding hand of Rajiv Gandhi were not reckoned with. It is not ill-will or political partisanship that impels the CBI to name Rajiv Gandhi as one of the accused in the charge-sheet, but the undeniable requirement of logical and legal completeness. As Joginder Singh aptly put it shortly after his investigation report was completed in May 1997, Bofors without Rajiv Gandhi would be like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.

Expectedly, the Congress(I) has responded with unconcealed fury to the charge-sheet. There was no evidence implicating Rajiv Gandhi in the scandal, claimed Congress(I) spokesman Kapil Sibal, shortly after briefing the party's highest executive body, the Congress Working Committee, on the legal background and implications of the CBI's move. Even the supposed proximity between the Rajiv Gandhi family and Ottavio Quattrocchi, the Italian businessman who was a long resident in India, is far from establishing an established fact, he



ANU PUSHKARNA

CBI Director R.K. Raghavan.

claimed. More ominously, a statement issued by the Congress(I) headquarters denounced the charge-sheet as an effort at "vilifying and maligning the late Rajiv Gandhi" – an action that would not be tolerated by "millions of Congressmen and women".

The emotive appeal fails to carry credibility since the legal evidence that has been marshalled by the CBI is unambiguous. Quattrocchi is known to have elbowed his way into the howitzer contract in November 1985, in the guise of a shadowy company called A.E. Services. To all appearances, this company had no previous existence, far less any knowledge of the armaments business. But for a concern with such obvious limitations, it was willing to take on onerous responsibilities. Its agreement with Bofors promised to deliver the howitzer contract signed and sealed to the Swedish firm before April 1, 1986. Failing this, its entitlement to an agreed percentage of the contract value would be rendered void.

A.E. Services' sense of self-assurance was obviously underwritten by high-level connections in the Indian government. Between November 1985 and March 1986, the Indian Army was prevailed upon to revise its preference ordering of howitzer guns that were on offer. The Bofors weapon, which featured as the second preference to a French product until November, was catapulted to the premier position. And a contract in favour of the Swedish manufacturer was signed on March 24, 1986.

In March last year, Quattrocchi had in his quest for legal exculpation played his last card. Pleading that the CBI's arrest warrant and the Interpol red-corner alert issued against him amounted to a gross infringement of his right to free movement, Quattrocchi petitioned the Delhi High Court for remedies. The CBI's counter-affidavit, based in essence on the May 1997 investigation report, frontally took on this plea, recording in graphic detail all the available evidence on the Italian businessman's culpability.

Crucial in this regard has been the deposition before an examining magistrate in Geneva by Myles T. Stott, Director of A.E. Services, whose essential function was to act as a fiduciary agent in the operation of the company's Swiss accounts. According to Stott, the "initial approach" for the Bofors-A.E. Services agreement "came from Mr. Ottavio Quattrocchi", who he surmised had "a consultancy role". A.E. Services, in turn, in Stott's understanding, was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Quattrocchi's firm CAV, and acted in the Bofors matter purely as a "trustee".

This reading is corroborated by the Swiss bank documents in the CBI's possession, which show a remittance of just over 50 million Swedish kroner (then equivalent to over $7.3 million) into A.E. Services' newly opened account at Nordfinanz Bank in Zurich on September 3, 1986. A few days later, the bulk of these funds was again transferred to an account maintained by Colbar Investments Ltd – a company registered in Panama – at the Union Bank of Switzerland in Geneva. Colbar was then controlled by Quattrocchi and his wife Maria – both of whom were in Switzerland at the time the account documents were signed. In July 1987, the funds in the Colbar account were moved to the credit of Wetelsen Overseas at the Union Bank of Switzerland. After a further transit through Guernsey in the British Channel Islands, the monies were lodged in Switzerland and Austria.

Quattrocchi's entry into the deal and his subsequent exertions in shifting vast sums of money through a tortuous course of secret bank accounts would be incomprehensible if cognisance were not taken of his proximity to the Rajiv Gandhi family. The CBI's averments in the Delhi High Court record that "the families of the then Prime Minister of India and Mr. Ottavio Quattrocchi were on very intimate terms and they used to meet frequently." Certain family photographs collected during the investigation, the CBI further claimed,

bore testimony to this proximity.

THE first hearing of the Bofors case is scheduled for November 3, when the court will be requested to take cognisance of the charges and issue summons to all the accused. It is learnt that the CBI has secured assurances of cooperation from Myles Stott, an Englishman who often takes up fiduciary management responsibilities on the basis of the impeccable reputation he enjoys. The CBI could also consider summoning a senior Delhi-based lawyer, who was instrumental in recruiting Stott's services for the Bofors deal. The diary of Martin Ardbo, president of the Swedish armaments manufacturer all through that stormy period, bears a few enigmatic references to a certain "Gandhi Truste lawyer" he was sporadically in touch with during the crisis management phase. It seems a reasonable surmise from the CBI's point of view that this could be the same lawyer who brought Stott into the deal as trustee for the A.E. Services funds.

Of the five accused in the October 22 charge-sheet, three are in relatively safe havens overseas. Quattrocchi fled the country and has been resident in Malaysia since he was identified in July 1993 as one among seven individuals who had filed appeals in the Swiss Federal Court against a lower judicial order transferring key bank documents to the CBI. W.N. ("Win") Chadha took flight in 1988, even before Rajiv Gandhi was ousted from power. As a long-serving agent for Bofors in India, Chadha had reason to feel done out of a fair share of the pickings from the deal on account of Quattrocchi's late entry. His early retreat from the arena was a recognition that he was badly exposed both by virtue of his long association with the arms manufacturer and his relative remoteness from the centres of political power. From his sanctuary in Dubai, he has repeatedly indicated his willingness to submit to CBI interrogation. But the Indian investigators have been equally insistent that they will not conduct any part of their inquiries on foreign soil.

Martin Ardbo remains a resident of Sweden and could benefit from the legal immunity conferred by the statute of limitations. CBI officials are not very clear about the pertinent legal provisions and are working on the premise that they will deal with any such encumbrance when it crops up.

Among the witnesses who could be summoned in the hearings is Arun Singh, who was Minister of State for Defence in the Rajiv Gandhi regime and a close confidant of the then Prime Minister. He and General K. Sundarji, then Chief of the Army Staff, are known to have repeatedly affirmed that the threat of cancelling the Bofors deal would quickly bring the recalcitrant arms manufacturer around to naming the beneficiaries of the illicit pay-offs. On every occasion, this seemingly reasonable position was thwarted by Defence Secretary Bhatnagar, obviously on the instructions of Rajiv Gandhi.



VIVEK BENDRE

Former CBI Director Joginder Singh.

Viewing the matter from the other side, B.M. Oza, who was India's Ambassador to Sweden during that stormy period, has recorded how he had gone out of his way to issue visas for a group of Bofors officials to visit India early in 1987, to depose before an inquiry into bribery allegations. Again, the effort at uncovering the truth behind the burgeoning scandal was scuttled by a direct intervention from the office of the Prime Minister. Oza too figures as an important witness in the case.

Frontline Editor N. Ram is another witness listed by the CBI; the series of articles that he ran in *The Hindu* between 1988 and 1989, laid open the sordid inner workings of the nexus between international arms merchants and politics. Ram has been closely tracking the official investigation since it was launched by the CBI under the directorship of Rajendra Shekhar in 1990. His inputs and expertise were extensively utilised by the agency when Joginder Singh was its Director.

OCTOBER 22 could be justifiably viewed as the inauguration of Act Five in the Bofors drama. A relatively minor theme – perhaps Scene Two in Act Five – will commence when the indictment is served on Madhavsinh Solanki for his effort to defeat the process of the law through an anonymous note of dubious provenance. But another major Act could commence when the Swiss judiciary finally disposes of a batch of appeals pending before it, relating to another set of bank accounts where the Bofors pay-offs were lodged.

It is known that the appellants in this case are the Hinduja brothers – Gopichand and Srichand – enormously influential businessmen of Indian origin, settled in London. They were identified as interested parties in the Bofors scandal as far back as July 1993, when the Swiss Ministry of Justice released the names of the individuals who were contesting the order transferring the Bofors documents to the CBI. But unlike Quattrocchi who seemingly had exhausted all his legal options by then, the Hindujas managed to take the matter further up in appeal. From the examining Magistrate's Court, they took it up to the Cantonal Court. Losing the case there, they appealed to the Federal Court. Again having suffered a mortifying defeat, they are learnt to have taken their plea to the Federal Councillor – a higher judicial official whose jurisdiction is invoked only in the rarest of cases. The CBI is confident that the Hindujas will win no sustenance from this quarter. But being unsure of the time-frame involved, it has decided to proceed with one round of indictments and file additional charge-sheets when further evidence becomes available.

Indian politics may have plumbed fresh depths since Bofors exploded on the scene as a powerful metaphor for corruption in public life. But the Swedish arms manufacturer's name – since effaced on account of a series of corporate takeovers and supplanted by the relatively untainted appellation of Celsius – continues to evoke deep resonances. Above all, Bofors is about the democratic principle of accountability. It is about a democratically elected leader squandering an enormous fund of public goodwill through sheer arrogance of power, trampling upon every process of accountability and subverting institutions in his effort to evade responsibility.

L'affaire Bofors still remains far from its final consummation. But the mere fact that it has been committed to trial represents a much needed affirmation of the resilience of the rule of law in India. ■

■ GOVERNMENT

A balancing act

Among the several factors that influenced the constitution of a 70-member Ministry at the Centre, the most important one is the need to strike a balance between regional representation and political aspirations within the ruling coalition.

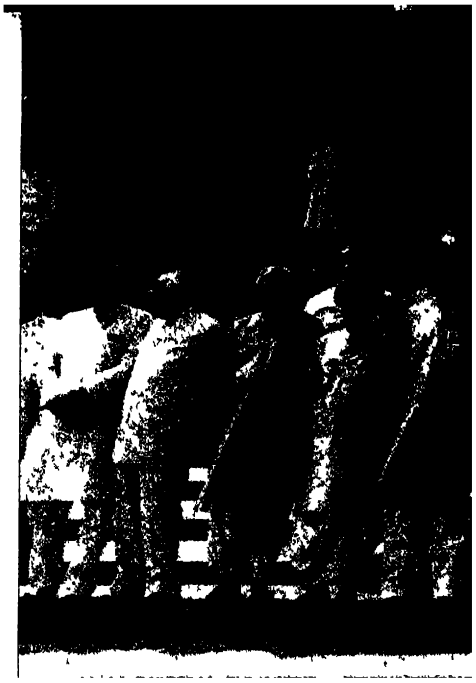
V. VENKATESAN
in New Delhi

THE swearing in of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and 69 members of his Council of Ministers by President K.R. Narayanan on October 13 at Rashtrapati Bhavan stretched into nearly three weary hours. Despite the weariness, however, for senior leaders of the ruling coalition, the day marked the celebration of a successful democratic exercise, especially, as some of them pointed out, in the light of the fact that in neighbouring Pakistan, a military coup had replaced a democratically elected government the previous day.

The Prime Minister's advisers appeared to have more faith in numerology than in the arithmetic of the 13th Lok Sabha in the matter of ensuring Vajpayee's longevity in office. Even though it was believed that the number 13 had proved unlucky for Vajpayee during his earlier tenures – his first term in office lasted 13 days, his second lasted 13 months – he chose October 13 for the swearing-in ceremony since his close aides assured him that 13 would prove lucky for him this time.

Leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) met the President on October 11 and apprised him of Vajpayee's election as the leader of the alliance. They informed him that the alliance's own strength in the House of 543 was 275 and that since the Telugu Desam Party (the TDP is not a constituent of the NDA) had conveyed its decision to support Vajpayee, its 29 members should also be taken into consideration while determining the parliamentary support for Vajpayee. The President, after ensuring himself that Vajpayee would command majority support in the Lok Sabha, appointed him Prime Minister and invited him to recommend the names of other Ministers.

The NDA's 275 members come from both pre- and post-poll allies of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Its pre-poll constituents are: BJP (182 seats in the Lok Sabha), Biju Janata Dal (10), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (12), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (4), MGR Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (1), Pattali Makkal Katchi (5), Indian National Lok Dal (5), Janata Dal (United) (20), Trinamul Congress (8), Shiromani Akali Dal (2), Shiv Sena (15), Loktantrik Congress (2), Himachal Vikas Congress (1), and one independent, Maneka Gandhi. The post-poll constituents are: National Conference (4), Manipur State Congress Party (1), Sikkim Democratic Front (1) and Mizo National Front (1). Two of the BJP's pre-poll allies, the Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress and the Jantantrik Bahujan Samaj Party, failed to win any seats.





SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee being sworn in by President K.R. Narayanan in the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on October 13.

FOR Vajpayee, putting together a viable governing formation was no easy task. The TDP, with which the BJP had seat adjustments in Andhra Pradesh, decided to support the NDA government from the outside. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for Vajpayee, who was already under pressure from his own party as well as its allies in the matter of ministerial berths. He made no attempt to persuade the TDP to reconsider its decision although many of its 29 MPs did have ministerial ambitions. Being the second largest party in the ruling coalition, the TDP would have had to be allotted important portfolios.

When asked to comment on the size of his Ministry, Vajpayee maintained that it.



Vajpayee with his Council of Ministers outside Rashtrapati Bhavan.

was not huge; he said that he had constituted a 70-member Ministry because he was prompted by the compulsions of coalition government and because he wanted to give representation to as many of his coalition partners and as many regions of the country as possible. The BJP's coalition partners have increased in number from 13 in the previous Lok Sabha to 18 now (including Maneka Gandhi). Home Minister L.K. Advani defended the size of the Ministry by saying that it conformed to the ceiling recommended by the Administrative Reforms Commission. Way back in the 1960s, the ARC had recommended that the size of the Union Council of Ministers not exceed 11 per cent of the combined strength of the two Houses of Parliament, which is 793.

Vajpayee went about his task of ministry formation in a confident manner since he believed that his 30-plus majority in the Lok Sabha would discourage any recalcitrant ally from challenging him. He sought the allies' views on who should be included in the Cabinet but told them to accept whatever was offered to them finally. During the run-up to the ministry formation, leaders of the BJP and its allies told the media that it was the Prime Minister's prerogative to choose the Ministers and that they would accept whatever was offered to them. However, some of them did canvass for particular portfolios.

Vajpayee, who initially planned to start with a 50-member Ministry, was subsequently forced to increase the size.

Under the guise of ensuring representation to all regions and classes, the BJP itself sought berths for several of its veteran leaders, including O. Rajagopal and Bangaru Laxman, both of whom lost the Lok Sabha elections. Vajpayee was forced to make an exception to the norm that those who lost the elections should not be inducted into the Ministry. Both Rajagopal and Bangaru Laxman are members of the Rajya Sabha and thus they qualify for appointment as Ministers. They were inducted as Ministers of State.

However, Sushma Swaraj, formerly Delhi Chief Minister, Union Minister and party spokesperson, failed to make it to the Cabinet. Sushma Swaraj lost to Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi in Bellary. The BJP did not find it necessary to treat her defeat as an exception, as it did in the case of Rajagopal and Bangaru Laxman. Sushma Swaraj had apparently been told by the party leadership that if she lost in Bellary, she would be considered for a Rajya Sabha seat. However, she is now being considered for a senior party post. Although an obviously aggrieved Sushma Swaraj was present at the swearing-in ceremony, her subsequent meeting with Ramakrishna Hegde, another disgruntled leader, has raised questions about her future plans.

Arun Jaitley, the BJP's spokesperson during the recent elections, has been inducted as Minister of State with independent charge although he is not a member of either House. The elevation of Jaitley, who hails from Delhi, is attributed to the fact that he played a crucial role in the party's victory. He is rated highly within the party. (Jaitley will, in all probability, be elected to the Rajya Sabha within the next six months.)

Surprisingly, only one of the seven BJP MPs from Delhi, Jagmohan, has made it to the Cabinet. This has caused consternation since the BJP's victory in all the seven seats in Delhi was impressive. Indeed, even on October 10, former Chief Minister of Delhi Sahib Singh Verma claimed that he was a "sure" entrant into the Ministry. Vajpayee's decision to keep him out is attributed to certain "compulsions".

While Sahib Singh Verma and another aspirant for a ministerial berth from Delhi, V.K. Malhotra, who defeated the Congress(I)'s Manmohan Singh, attended the swearing-in ceremony and gave expression to their disappointment, Verma's former rival and veteran leader Madan Lal Khurana chose to stay away. Khurana held a Cabinet berth in Vajpayee's Ministry after the 1998 elections, but resigned after the BJP's rout in the November 1998 Assembly elections in Delhi. Vajpayee chose to retain Jagmohan despite media reports that he was unhappy with Jagmohan's style of functioning during his earlier tenure, as Communications Minister. Apparently, Vajpayee's decision to retain him and drop Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh baiters such as Khurana and Sikander Bakht was a result of pressure from the RSS. (It is rumoured that Sikander Bakht, whose term in the Rajya Sabha is likely to end shortly, may be offered a gubernato-

rial posting.) The exclusion of Bakht, the only Muslim Minister in Vajpayee's previous Cabinet, however, has led to misgivings. Significantly, he neither attended the swearing-in ceremony nor spoke to the media about the issue.

THE big surprise, however, was the exclusion of Ramakrishna Hegde, senior Janata Dal (United) leader and former Commerce Minister. The J.D.(U) won three seats from Karnataka. Only one of the three winners, V. Srinivas Prasad, who belongs to the Hegde group, was inducted into the Ministry, as a Minister of State. Hegde's name was in the list of probables drawn up by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) initially. However, Hegde's detractors in the ruling alliance appear to have ganged up against him and forced the Prime Minister to drop him. The BJP's Karnataka unit had not taken kindly to Hegde's success in enabling the entry of the J.D.(U) into the NDA, which forced the former into a losing combination in the State. This cost the BJP dearly in Karnataka as seen from the results of both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Although the BJP's Karnataka unit opposed any understanding with the JD(U), Advani, who initially stood by the State unit, gave in to pressure from Hedge and Defence Minister George Fernandes. It appears that while the BJP was thankful to the J.D.(U) in Bihar for helping it win more seats, it was in search of scapegoats for its debacle in Karnataka. Hegde was an obvious choice.

An angry Hegde alleged that Fernandes had not consulted him before forwarding to the Prime Minister the list of party nominees for ministerial berths. "It is not the question of my non-inclusion I protest against, but the way I was treated. That is what has hurt my followers," he told *Frontline*. He claimed that he would have gladly abided by the Prime Minister's decision if he had been consulted while finalising the list of the Ministers. "Neither the Prime Minister nor Fernandes has contacted me so far," he said, when asked whether they had sought to assuage his feelings. Hegde, however, reiterated his support to the Prime Minister and said that he would not destabilise the Government. According to Hedge, Srinivas Prasad refused to accept Vajpayee's offer. "He did not want to go to the swearing-in ceremony," said Hegde. "It was I who persuaded him to go, as otherwise it would send the wrong signals."

Four of the 17 J.D.(U) MPs from Bihar – Ram Vilas Paswan, Fernandes, Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav – have been given Cabinet berths. Another member, Digvijay Singh, has been made a Minister of State. Yet the J.D.(U) is unhappy. Prabhunath Singh, who represents Maharajganj in Bihar, held a press conference and voiced his unhappiness over not being included in the Ministry. Claiming that the four senior leaders had conspired to deny due representation to Rajputs, he threatened to cause a split in the J.D.(U), even while supporting Vajpayee. He was backed by Jai Narain Prashad Nishad, another J.D.(U) MP from Bihar and who was a Minister in the United Front Government. (Prabhunath Singh was a dissident leader in the Samata Party before it merged with the J.D.(U).) He has since met Hegde and made common cause with him. The J.D.(U) Ministers have failed to pacify Hegde and Prabhunath Singh. Leaders of the BJP, for their part, washed their hands of the J.D.(U) muddle, claiming that the Prime Minister simply went by the list submitted by the J.D.(U) leader in the Lok Sabha, Fernandes. Fernandes, however, refused to accept responsibility for the discontent and said that Ministry formation was the Prime Minister's prerogative.

The Vajpayee Ministry has 11 Ministers from Bihar (five of Cabinet rank and six Ministers of State), the highest representation for any State. The high level of representation given to the J.D.(U) in order to pacify its senior leaders has caused tension within and without the J.D.(U) in the State where Assembly elections are due in six months. Of the 11 Ministers, six belong to the BJP; only one of them has been given Cabinet rank. It remains to be seen whether the high representation given to Bihar will aid or mar the alliance's prospects in the Assembly elections.

Tamil Nadu is represented by eight Ministers, three of whom are of Cabinet rank, two are Ministers of State with independent charge, and three Ministers of State. For the ruling coalition, which has as many as six parties of Tamil Nadu, which together account for 26 MPs, there appears to be no option but to recognise the important role played by the State in making or breaking Union governments. The Prime Minister seems to have constituted the entire Ministry in one go rather than promise future expansions to accommodate other claimants. This has seemingly satisfied the MPs from Tamil Nadu although there is some dissatisfaction over the allotment of portfolios (see separate story).

There are two Ministers of State representing the Muslim community: Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, the only Muslim candidate of the BJP to win in this election (he won from Kishanganj in Bihar), and Omar Farooq, the N.C. representative from Srinagar.

There are eight women in the Ministry, including one of Cabinet rank, Mamata Banerjee.

VAJPAYEE has more or less succeeded in rewarding MPs from States in which the NDA fared better this time. Party-wise, he has rewarded those with more than four MPs in the Lok Sabha. Parties that have fewer than four seats, such as the Himachal Vikas Congress and the MGR ADMK, have not been allotted ministerial berths. However, one of the Rajya Sabha members of the Shiromani Akali Dal, which has only two seats, was offered a berth. The party declined the offer owing to opposition from its senior leader Surjit Singh Barnala, thus depriving Punjab of representation in the Ministry. The Manipur State Congress' lone MP, Chaoba Singh, has been inducted as Minister of State on the recommendation of Mamata Banerjee. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been given a fair representation, apparently in acknowledgment of these sections' support to the NDA.

The INLD, led by Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, did not evince interest in joining the Union Government despite winning five seats. Both Chautala and Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal are critical of the recent increase in the price of diesel, announced by the Centre. One of the BJP's five MPs from Haryana, I.D. Swami, has been made a Minister of State. The INLD-BJP alliance won all the 10 Lok Sabha seats from Haryana, each taking five. Subhash Maheria, a Jat from Rajasthan, who defeated senior Congress(I) leader Balram Jakhar in Sikar, has been inducted as a Minister of State.

APART from Vajpayee there are 25 Cabinet Ministers, seven Ministers of State with independent charge, and 37 Ministers of State. As many as 46 of the 70 Ministers belong to the BJP: despite their sizable presence, its allies have got only one-third of the berths.

The Ministry-making exercise appears to have been undertaken with a view to consolidating the gains made by the BJP and thereby seeking to expand its reach. It remains to be seen whether the BJP's allies will help the party take its agenda forward. ■

A cautious approach

The composition and character of the new Council of Ministers reflect the Prime Minister's decision to play it safe despite the fact that the National Democratic Alliance enjoys a majority.

V. VENKATESAN

THE 1999 elections will be remembered for two things. One, it was the first time since Indira Gandhi's election in 1971 that an incumbent Prime Minister has been returned to power. Second, it was the first instance when Lok Sabha elections were fought predominantly on the strength of prime ministerial candidates.

Although the comfortable majority secured by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has freed Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee from pulls and pressures from various quarters as was the case during his previous term in office, he does not seem to want to take undue risks. The composition and character of his new Ministry, in which he has chosen to retain most of the Ministers in his previous Ministry, reflect his cautious approach. The only obvious risk he took was the dropping of his previous Ministers for Industry and Commerce, Sikander Bakht and Ramakrishna Hegde respectively. This time around, Heavy Industries, Public Sector Departments and Small-Scale Industries have been separated from the Industry portfolio. The Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises Ministry has been allotted to former Maharashtra Chief Minister and Shiv Sena Member of Parliament Manohar Joshi, a first-time Cabinet Minister at the Centre. Vasundhara Raje Scindia, who was the Minister of State in the External Affairs Ministry in the previous government, has been elevated as Minister of State with independent charge of Small-Scale Industries. She will also assist the Prime Minister in handling the Ministries of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, the Department of Energy and the Department of Space. The Industry portfolio has been given to Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) nominee Murasoli Maran. Maran, who also holds the Commerce portfolio, will have two Ministers of State, Omar Farooq Abdullah and Dr. Raman, to assist him.

Several of the senior Ministers in Vajpayee's previous government have retained their portfolios. They are: Home Minister L.K. Advani, Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, Defence Minister George Fernandes, Urban Development Minister Jagmohan, Power Minister P.R. Kumaramangalam, Textiles Minister Kashiram Rana, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment with independent charge Maneka Gandhi.

Among the Ministers of State, Bandaru Dattatreya (Urban Affairs), Debendra Pradhan (Surface Transport) and Babulal Marandi (Environment and Forests) have retained their portfolios.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was apparently keen that the Defence Ministry be given to a BJP leader, preferably Advani. Vajpayee overruled the suggestion, perhaps because he felt that moving George Fernandes from the Defence Ministry at this juncture – in the backdrop of India's victory in the Kargil War – would send out wrong signals. Ministers of State have been appointed in both the Home and Defence Ministries. While there are two Ministers of State for Defence, Hiren Pathak (BJP MP from Ahmedabad) and Bachi Singh Rawat (BJP MP from Almora, Uttar Pradesh), one Minister of State, Vidya Sagar Rao (BJP MP from Karim Nagar, Andhra Pradesh), has been appointed to the Home Ministry.



Senior Ministers including George Fernandes (left) and L.K. Advani have retained the portfolios they held in the previous Ministry.

Both the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the DMK vied for Finance, the most coveted portfolio. Although TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu did not want his party to join the Government, he was apparently keen on Andhra Pradesh Governor and former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India C Rangarajan getting the portfolio. However, this suggestion was not accepted since business houses and various industries associations, such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), apparently told the Prime Minister that they were keen on Yashwant Sinha continuing as Finance Minister. The RSS too backed Sinha.

The DMK, which initially showed an interest in the Finance portfolio going to Maran, withdrew when it realised that Yashwant Sinha was the favoured choice within the coalition. Maran and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi later pointed out that since the incumbent Finance Minister had won from Bihar, he was the obvious choice. The DMK apparently believed that Maran would, as compensation for not getting the Finance portfolio, be asked to head a high-profile Ministry, probably titled Economic Affairs. Instead, Maran got a revamped Industry and also Commerce

M. Kannappan of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) was made Minister of State with independent charge of the Non-Conventional Energy Sources Ministry, while N.T. Shanmugham of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), also a Minister of State with independent charge, was entrusted with the Health and Family Welfare portfolio. The DMK's T.R. Baalu was made a Cabinet Minister, in charge of Environment and Forests, while A. Raja, the party's youth wing leader, was appointed Minister of State for Rural Development.

Petroleum and Natural Gas, a portfolio the DMK wanted for one of its nominees, was given to BJP MP and former Minister of State Ram Naik, who was elevated to Cabinet rank. E. Ponnuswami of the PMK was made a Minister of State under Ram Naik, while Ginjee Ramachandran of the MDMK a Minister of State under Kashiram Rana. Although Vajpayee was willing to make Vaiko a Cabinet Minister, the latter declined the offer and let his juniors in the party assume charge as Ministers.

There is a latent feeling among the MPs from Tamil Nadu that the State has failed to secure important portfolios. (In the previous Government, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which was then an ally of the BJP, held the portfolios of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, Banking, Personnel, and Surface Transport.)

Rangarajan Kumaramangalam lost the Parliamentary Affairs portfolio to Pramod Mahajan. The Information and Broadcasting portfolio, which Mahajan held in the previous Ministry, was given to Arun Jaitley, with independent charge. Pramod Mahajan has two Ministers of State under him: Shriram Chauhan and Faggan Singh Kulaste. Besides, he is assisted by the Biju Janata Dal's (BJD) Dilip Ray (Minister of State for Steel with independent charge; he is a Rajya Sabha member) and Santosh Gangwar (Minister of State for Science and Technology). Apart from the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry, Mahajan has also been allocated Water Resources. Bijoya Chakravarty is the Minister of State for Water Resources. As Information and Broadcasting Minister in the previous Vajpayee Government, Mahajan was embroiled in a controversy over his alleged misuse of government-controlled media. Because of his high-profile image and his proximity to Vajpayee, it was believed that he would retain the Information and Broadcasting portfolio. Vajpayee's decision was apparently aimed at clipping his wings.

Ananth Kumar, who held the Civil Aviation portfolio in the previous Vajpayee Ministry and has now been given Culture, Youth Affairs and Sports, is seemingly disappointed. Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal (United) has got Civil Aviation. Other JD(U) leaders have also been rewarded: Nitish Kumar and Ram Vilas Pawan have been given Surface Transport and Communications respectively.

THE Ministry of Steel and Mines has been bifurcated. Despite opposition to his continuance in the BJD, Dilip Ray has managed to become the Minister of State with independent charge of Steel, while BJD president Naveen Patnaik has been left with Mines and Minerals. Coal was taken away from Ray; Patnaik had to give up Steel.

The allocation of the Railways portfolio to Mamata Banerjee was not unexpected since she had openly asked for it when her party, the Trinamul Congress, decided to join the previous Vajpayee Ministry just before its collapse. She shares her responsibilities with Digvijay Singh of the J.D.(U), who is Minister of State for Railways. Another Trinamul Congress leader, Ajit Panja, has been appointed Minister of State for External Affairs.

Manohar Joshi and Suresh Prabhu of the Shiv Sena have been given Cabinet berths, while Balasaheb Vikhe-Patil, another Sena leader, has been made a Minister of State. Suresh Prabhu has been moved from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, which he headed in the previous government, to the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, which was previously headed by Surjit Singh Barnala. Vikhe-Patil will report to Yashwant Sinha in the Finance Ministry. The Shiv Sena Ministers did not take charge on October 14, apparently under instructions from their chief, Bal Thackeray, who wanted to put pressure on the BJP. The Shiv Sena-BJP combine fell 20 seats short of a majority in the Maharashtra Assembly elections. The BJP did not evince any interest in the alliance staking its claim to form the government before tackling the numbers issue, and this apparently annoyed Thackeray. However, following the BJP's decision to go along with the Shiv Sena in Mumbai, the Ministers took charge on October 15. The Shiv Sena's spokesperson in Mumbai, however, said that his party was dissatisfied with the portfolios allotted to its nominees.

There are a number of first-time Ministers in the Cabinet. Juel Oram, the BJP's Orissa unit president, has been made a Cabinet Minister and put in charge of Tribal Affairs, a new Ministry carved out of the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry. Oram, who belongs to a Scheduled Tribe, has been instrumental in mobilising the support of the Scheduled Tribes for the BJP in successive elections. Sunderlal Patwa, former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, who won from Hoshangabad, has been made Minister for Rural Development. Shanta Kumar, former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, is Minister for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution. This is the first time that Himachal Pradesh, which has only four Lok Sabha seats, has received Cabinet-level representation at the Centre. The BJP-HVC alliance won all the four seats in the State. Shanta Kumar will be assisted by Ministers of State V. Srinivasa Prasad, a J.D.(U) member from Karnataka.

The Prime Minister's Office had decided to announce the portfolios on October 14, a day after the Council of

Ministers was sworn in. However, when it learnt that the proposed delay had given rise to rumours and confusion, it released the list on the night of October 13.

ONCE again the BJP had to give up the post of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha in favour of a party that is part of the coalition but is not part of the government. G.M.C. Balayogi, TDP MP and Speaker of the 12th Lok Sabha, was the unanimous choice of the ruling coalition and the Opposition Congress(I). The post of Deputy Speaker was likely to go to the Congress(I)'s P.M. Sayeed, who held the post in the 12th Lok Sabha, following a consensus reached among all political parties. The BJP had hoped that in the event of the Speaker's post going to a party that is not part of the government, it would be able to win the post of the Deputy Speaker. However, when it saw that its allies, particularly the Trinamul Congress, were not in favour of this idea, it resigned itself to endorsing Sayeed's candidature once again.

INSTEAD of settling down to serious business, the newly formed government still seems to be obsessed with the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. The NDA had in its election manifesto promised to amend the Constitution suitably in order to prevent persons of foreign origin from occupying high constitutional posts. Constitutional amendments need the support of two-thirds of the members of the Lok Sabha. The NDA is, however, way behind the two-thirds figure. In order to overcome this hurdle, Law Minister Ram Jethmalani has hinted at an amendment to the Citizenship Act, which can achieve the same objective and can be passed with a simple majority in the Lok Sabha.

Similarly, sections of the NDA have suggested that the stability of the new Government can be ensured by amending the Lok Sabha Business Rules to ensure that a motion expressing lack of confidence in an incumbent Prime Minister can be admitted only if it is accompanied by a constructive vote of confidence in an alternative leader. Both have to be passed simultaneously. Otherwise, the incumbent Prime Minister will continue in office. The NDA manifesto also promised an amendment to the Constitution to ensure a full five-year term for the Lok Sabha.

These are serious issues that can be addressed only by evolving a consensus across the political spectrum. It needs to be seen how far the new Government will succeed in its efforts in this regard. ■

POLITICS

A leadership consolidation

Sonia Gandhi's decision to lead the Congress(I) in the Lok Sabha is perceived as a move to make her control over the party complete.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in New Delhi

ON October 19, a day before the 13th Lok Sabha began its first session, the Congress(I) announced that Sonia Gandhi would be the Leader of the Opposition in the House in addition to her being the chairperson of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party (CPP). With this, the latest flag-bearer of the Nehru-Gandhi family gave out two distinct political messages. First, she was ready to lead her party in the battles in the country's highest legislative body in spite of her oft-highlighted lack of experience in parliamentary practice. Second, despite carrying the opprobrium of having led the Congress(I) to its worst ever electoral performance (of winning only 112 seats in the Lok Sabha against the previous strength of 141) she was determined to wield control over all sections of the party, including its parliamentary wing.

Before the October 19 announcement there was a suggestion in the party that Sonia Gandhi confine herself to the role of the CPP chairperson, which does not involve active participation in day-to-day parliamentary proceedings, and leave the Lok Sabha leadership to a veteran like Narain Dutt Tiwari. Advocates of this line pointed to the possibility of many contentious issues coming up before the new Lok Sabha. These issues, they feared, might throw up personal questions involving Sonia Gandhi and her family – such as the Bofors howitzer scandal and a bill to bar citizens of foreign origin from holding the posts of President, Vice-President and Prime Minister – and cause embarrassment to her. According to them, it would have been a different story had the Congress(I) come to power and Sonia Gandhi led the government. In such a situation, it was argued, the leader, though "inexperienced", could have faced Parliament with the help of many an experienced ministerial colleague.

Evidently, Sonia Gandhi has decided to ignore this advice and take the bull by the horns. The merit or otherwise of this step would be clear only eventually. Undoubtedly, her performance will be watched and scrutinised by her political opponents as well as by her own partymen. Her style of functioning and her dependence on a coterie have come under criticism from a number of partymen, including Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) members. They fear that her functioning as the Leader of the


SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi.

Opposition will expose her limitations.

Any failure on the part of Sonia Gandhi to match the leaders in the Treasury benches, led by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, would only discredit her and cause dissidence in the party. Several senior leaders, some of them CWC members, fear that failure in the House could even lead to her eventual ouster from vantage positions in the party.

According to a non-political person considered close to 10 Janpath, Sonia Gandhi herself is fully aware of these possibilities. The same source added that this could well be the beginning of a process that would enable her to distance herself from the coterie of persons such as CWC member Arjun Singh, party general secretaries Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Oscar Fernandes, and her personal secretary Vincent George. The source said that Sonia Gandhi is keen to "shed the image of being a prisoner of the coterie". In his perception, as Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi would be impelled to have greater day-to-day involvement with party activists and members of Parliament. This in turn would help bring down her dependence on the coterie.

Sonia Gandhi's rejection of Manmohan Singh's resignation as the leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha is seen by sections of the party as a beginning in this direction. It is no secret in party circles that several leaders close to 10 Janpath were unhappy about the choice of Manmohan Singh as a candidate for the Lok Sabha polls and the way he was projected an alternative prime ministerial candidate. Reports submitted to the All India Congress(I) Committee by many local party units in Manmohan Singh's constituency of South Delhi have alleged sabotage by a couple of MLAs close to Arjun Singh. According to a Delhi Congress(I) leader, the alleged saboteurs' motive was to finish the former Finance Minister politically because he had announced during the run-up to the elections that he would resign from the Rajya Sabha whatever the South Delhi verdict. "By rejecting his resignation Sonia Gandhi has put paid to their plans," the leader said.

It is becoming increasingly clear that sections of the Congress(I) leadership are no longer ready to accept Sonia Gandhi's acquiescence to the activities of the coterie. The first indication of this came from former party president Sitaram Kesri, who minced no words in blaming what he called an Arjun Singh-led clique for the party's debacle. Kesri told *Frontline* that this group was basically responsible for thrusting the no-coalition idea on the party, which was unrealistic. He added that the coterie rode roughshod over the party organisation and systematically violated inner-party democratic principles. A case in point, according to Kesri, was the expulsion of former CWC members Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar. These leaders were not served with show-cause notices as ordained by the party constitution, nor were they given an opportunity to explain their stand. Kesri said that he and A.K. Antony had opposed this "violation of democratic principles" at the time of the expulsion but to no avail.

Kesri, however, absolved Sonia Gandhi of any responsibility for the party's poor showing and said that with the emergence of Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi the coterie's influence over the party was on the wane. Kesri's stand finds support from a large section of senior leaders, particularly CWC members Rajesh Pilot and Antony.

However, Kesri's hope that Priyanka and Rahul would emerge as political entities strong enough to free the leadership from any influence could be misplaced. For, Sonia Gandhi herself has given sufficient indications that she does not foresee an immediate political career for any of her children. This is clear from her decision to retain Amethi and resign her Bellary seat. Had Sonia Gandhi retained Bellary and vacated Amethi, it would have led to Priyanka or Rahul contesting from the constituency, considering the affinity that people of Amethi have for the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Sonia Gandhi has also initiated a process of analysing the reasons for the party's election debacle. According to CWC member Madhavrao Scindia, the attempt would be to find out why the party failed to improve its tally in spite of the increase in its vote share. He said that it was clear that the party failed to capitalise on what he called improvements in the organisational network, brought about by Sonia Gandhi's leadership during the last 17 months.

The exercise, which was scheduled to begin at the CWC meeting on October 22 and continue at State-level discussions, could lead to a reorganisation of the AICC and some State committees before the organisational elections, which are due next year. Already the general secretaries of the AICC have resigned, paving the way for reorganisation. The efforts will undoubtedly be aimed at enhancing Sonia Gandhi's control over the party. ■

■ POLITICS

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Chandigarh

IN an appropriately medieval style, the warlords of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) establishment are gathering around the ruins of Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal's political empire, surveying what might be plundered from its remains. In the wake of the SAD's humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, the immediate threats to Badal's position come from senior party figures furious with his perceived poor leadership, and corruption. But even more serious are the signs of a renewed struggle for control of the SAD's political apparatus by the Golden Temple's religious establishment, one that could have serious consequences for the State in the months to

Akal Takht Jathedar Puran Singh sparked off the battle in the second week of October, as news of the SAD debacle began to sink in. On October 9, Puran Singh attended religious rituals marking the deaths of General A.S. Vaidya's assassins, Harjinder Singh Jinda and Sukhdev Singh Sukha. Sukha and Jinda were hanged seven years ago for the murder. Addressing a congregation at Gadli village near Amritsar, Jinda's home-town, the Akal Takht Jathedar described the two assassins as *quami shaheed* (martyrs for the faith). They were, he claimed, "the pride of the community". "Instead of appealing for mercy, they went to the gallows with smiling faces."

If Puran Singh's political position left anything to the imagination, his choice of company during the rituals did not. Newly elected MP and SAD (Amritsar) faction leader Simranjit Singh Mann was by the Jathedar's side. Mann claimed that the voters of Sangrur had brought him to power to punish the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee's (SGPC) decision not to allow a remembrance at the Golden Temple of Operation Bluestar. Bluestar, described by the Sikh Right as *ghallugara divas* (holocaust day), was at the centre of both Puran Singh's and Mann's polemic, with both loudly endorsing revanchist preacher Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Bhindranwale, Puran Singh said, was a "true follower of Sikhism who fought bravely to defend the Golden Temple".

The gathering at Gadli was joined by the massed ranks of the Sikh Far Right.

Battles in Punjab

The ruling Shiromani Akali Dal's electoral debacle has spurred the Akal Takht into renewing its struggle to control the State apparatus.

Baba Thakur Singh, the head of Bhindranwale's Damdami Taksal seminary, Bhindranwale's wife Pritam Kaur, her son Inderjit Singh, and relative and former Akal Takht Jathedar Jasbir Singh Rode were all present. Representatives of human rights organisations associated with communal organisations in Punjab, notably former Punjab and Haryana High Court Judge Ajit Singh Bains and Major-General (retd.) Narinder Singh also came to the meeting. Interestingly, however, Puran Singh's predecessor in office, Ranjit Singh, and his key political rival, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, chose to stay away from the commemoration meeting.

Signs of the SAD's political decline had pushed the Golden Temple establishment into a series of skirmishes with the political apparatus that supports it. Shortly after Om Prakash Chautala took over as Haryana Chief Minister in August, an arcane theological dispute broke out over the practice of granting *siropas*, the ceremonial honours bestowed upon devotees at the Golden Temple. SGPC president Jagir Kaur had presented a *siropa* to Chautala in the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple, provoking outrage among a cross-section of the religious establishment. Such honours had in the past been available to any devotee for a sum of Rs.101, but the practice had reportedly been terminated by the SGPC after worshippers objected to the idea that religious honours could be made available for a price.

Following Chautala's *siropa*, a cross-section of the Sikh religious establishment wrote to Jagir Kaur, on October 7, demanding to know what rules governed the grant of such honours in the Golden Temple's sanctum sanctorum. It was the first time the Akal Takht had ever sought an explanation in writing from the SGPC president. It is not clear why the clergy waited until reports of Badal's dismal showing were in to express their anger, but it is unlikely that the two events were unrelated. Even more significant, Badal's trusted lieutenants in the religious establishment, notably the Jathedar of the Keshgarh Sahib Takht (seat), Manjit Singh, also signed the letter.

Puran Singh's decision to attend the Gadli meeting, and the skirmishes that preceded it, mark a clean break between the Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh religious authority, and the SAD establishment – and it is not, it might be noted, happening for the first time. SGPC president Jagir Kaur, a former Tourism and Culture Minister in the Badal Cabinet, took office after the Badal-controlled SGPC deposed Tohra on February 10 this year. The decision was made in the wake of a series of battles against Badal which were initiated by Ranjit Singh, with Tohra's evident blessings. Ranjit Singh himself was removed from the Jathedar's post by the SGPC in mid-March. Tohra bitterly attacked Ranjit Singh's sacking, claiming that the Jathedar could only be removed by a Sarbat Khalsa, a general assembly of believing Sikhs.

The dominant Badal faction, however, paid little attention to these protests, leading to a split in the SAD. Tohra was left loudly, but ineffectually, decrying Badal as a reincarnation of both Duryodhana and Kansa. For centrists in the SAD, Ranjit Singh's removal from office marked the end of one of the most difficult confrontations ever with the Golden Temple establishments. Ranjit Singh had presided over a theocratic subversion of the relatively liberal cultural ambience that Badal's ascendancy was premised on. Akal Takht edicts banned the conduct of marriages in hotels and wedding halls, opposed Sikh women riding motorcycles and scooters wearing crash helmets, and attacked an assortment of supposed heretics. In some cases, bloody attacks were made on people perceived to be opponents of the Akal Takht.



M. LAKSHMANAN

Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal.

One problem, however, remained. Watchful of the consequences of defying the Sikh Far Right, nobody was willing to step into Ranjit Singh's shoes. Puran Singh alone was willing to take up the job. A one-time close associate of Bhindranwale, Puran Singh had been sacked along with five other high priests in May 1988 on the basis of a terrorist-sponsored Sarbat Khalsa. The Sarbat Khalsa also saw the removal of the then Jathedar, Rode, and marked the appropriation of direct control over Sikh religious institutions by armed groups. Puran Singh, like Ranjit Singh, had considerable appeal to Far Right groups in Punjab, and his choice was clearly shaped by Badal's desire to ensure that religious fundamentalists did not group themselves behind Tohra.

But the forces that drive Akali communal politics ensured that matters did not end there. For one, centrists in the SAD were themselves driven by the need to establish their religious credentials. On January 30, Badal shared a platform, for the first time since taking office, with a group associated with the Khalistan movement, the Sikh Students Federation (SSF). At the meeting, Badal lavished praise on SSF leader Harminder Singh Sandhu – a top terrorist close to Bhindranwale – who was killed in a police encounter in 1990. The SSF returned the favour to Badal, by issuing a resolution attacking Tohra. Jagir Kaur, for her part, stunned students at a Women's Day function in Jalandhar by asserting that the answer to sexual violence was for women to dress conservatively and keep their heads covered.

Puran Singh, however, was hard-pressed to establish that by taking over from Ranjit Singh he had not disowned his core constituency. This April, audiences attending festivities to mark the ter-



Giani Puran Singh offers prayers at the Akal Takht on February 15, the day he took over as Jathedar of the Akal Takht.

centenary of the founding of the Khalsa order were witness to the riveting spectacle of the Chief Minister and his Cabinet members having themselves baptised as Amritdhari Sikhs, true believers in the eyes of the conservative religious establishment. Puran Singh's baptism fiat provoked not a little anger from some SAD centrists, but there was little they could do about it. The move came amidst allegations by Tohra that Badal and several other SAD leaders drank liquor, violating party rules which mandate that its president and all working committee members be Amritdhari Sikhs.

While most observers were only mildly amused by the incident of Badal and his cabinet seeking absolution after confessing their sins, a prerequisite for the baptism ceremony, its real implications were far wider. Badal had shown himself to be subservient to the Akal Takht's authority, and Puran Singh had established his supremacy over the SAD's political establishment. The ground had been laid for a renewal of the hostilities which [illegible] with Ranjit Singh's elevation to as Akal Takht Jathedar. Most [illegible]tant, since the collective baptism [illegible]n the wake of Tohra's allegations, the SAD centrists had conceded that the religious Right, despite the former SGPC chief's eviction from office, could continue to shape the terms of political discourse in the party and outside it.

WHERE do events go from here? With Badal enfeebled by his crippling Lok Sabha defeat, he is unlikely to be able to force a confrontation with the Akal Takht and win as he did just seven months ago. Although Tohra made no significant electoral gains, the Lok Sabha results established that the Sikh Right can draw away just enough votes to inflict crippling losses on the SAD. Badal and the SAD establishment he commands are therefore likely to seek some form of accommodation with the religious Right. Politicians like Mann, in turn, could seek to bring about such an accommodation to their own benefit. The fact that Tohra chose not to attend the Gadli meeting could be an indication of a possible rapprochement on such lines. Mann's own election-time moderation is also unlikely to be an abiding one, as his renewed endorsement of Bhindranwale illustrates.

Enfeebled by his crippling Lok Sabha defeat, Badal is unlikely to be able to force a confrontation with the Akal Takht and win as he did just seven months ago.

One decisive test, it seems probable, will be the coming elections to the SGPC; Jagir Kaur has announced that it will be held before November 30. While SGPC elections in the past have often been held behind schedule, Kaur has promised that legal mandates requiring of both executive committee and its president to seek a mandate in November will be respected. Already enfeebled by the none-too-well-disguised discontent of top SAD leaders, the SGPC elections will be a key test of legitimacy for Badal. Should Tohra put up a serious challenge to Badal's authority, the Chief Minister could respond by protecting his flanks through either covert or overt alliances with chauvinist organisations such as Mann's SAD(A). What consequences that will have for Punjab is not difficult to imagine. ■

The BJP's new social bloc

An analysis by CSDS based on the electoral outcome and the findings of a nation-wide post-election survey.

YOGENDRA YADAV
with SANJAY KUMAR
and OLIVER HEATH

THE results of the 13th Lok Sabha elections mark the completion of a process that has brought about the Bharatiya Janata Party's rise to power, a process that began with the 10th Lok Sabha elections in 1989 and has continued uninterrupted since

As was argued in the first part of this analysis *(Frontline,* November 5), the results of the recent elections do not point to a clear victory for the BJP, or for that matter for any other national party Yet in more than one sense the BJP has completed one leg of a remarkable political journey Its performance in Goa, Assam and a few other States at the geographical periphery symbolises the geographical expansion that the BJP has gone through, at the end of this round of elections, there are very few States – Kerala, for instance – where the BJP or at least one of its allies is not one of the main competitors in the electoral arena Its alliance with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu completed the process of its political expansion from a party that was once considered a political 'untouchable" to one that is acceptable to everyone across the ideological spectrum, except the Congress(I) and the Left parties

Both these expansions were preconditions for the third process of social expansion the BJP's changeover from being seen as a party of the urbanised and of the Bania-Brahmin to becoming a party with a wider social base The journey was not without its share of problems and retreats its uneven performance in this election testifies to that fact. More important the BJP did not carry out this journey on its own terms Quite early on, it realised that it was on a new turf It was forced to come to terms and negotiate with a regionalised polity and the democratic upsurge of the "shudras" That negotiation process is far from over and its outcome is still an open question But the BJP s arrival as a party that today heads a coalition that is seen to be less frag-

About the survey

THE findings reported in this article and the State-wise analyses that follow are based on a post-election survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi and co-sponsored by *Frontline* The survey formed part of the National Election Study series conducted by the CSDS, a unique nationwide survey based on a strict selection of sample from the electoral rolls

In this series, the same group of electors, comprising a national representative sample, were approached after each of the last three general elections and face-to-face interviews conducted to find out their voting behaviour and political opinions and attitudes. Retaining the same sample, after making minor adjustments to accommodate new voters and factors such as migration, makes it possible to study change over time by comparing the results

The survey was carried out in 105 parliamentary constituencies – it covered 419 polling stations in 210 Assembly segments in 20 States and Union Territories. A total of 9,111 electors were interviewed in their homes in the week after each phase of polling The last round of the survey was completed on October 5, the day before the counting began The constituency-wise results of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections have been taken from the Web site of the Election Commission and recomputed by the CSDS data unit.

In order to promote greater transparency in survey reporting, the CSDS and *Frontline* would like to share with readers some background information about the survey

The social composition of the respondents in this survey is as follows 49.3 per cent women, 18 3 per cent Dalits, 7.9 per cent Adivasis, 10 3 per cent Muslims, 77.8 per cent rural voters, 41 per cent uneducated voters and 6.7 per cent graduates. There is thus an over-representation of rural voters and an under-representation of Muslim voters. In terms of reported voting, the sample percentages (actual results in brackets) are: the BJP and its allies 38.8 (40.8), the Congress(I) and its allies 36.7 (33.8), the Left 7.6 (8 0) and the Bahujan Samaj Party 3.1 (4.2). The sample size for each State and significant discrepancies, if any, have been mentioned in the analysis for each State.

The survey was designed and coordinated at the national level by Prof. V.B. Singh (Principal Coordinator), Sanjay Kumar (National Coordinator) and Yogendra Yadav, all from the CSDS A network of scholars worked with the CSDS in designing and executing the survey in different parts of the country: Dr. K C Suri (Andhra Pradesh), Prof A.K. Baruah and Dr. Sandhya Goswami (Assam and other Northeastern States), Rajendra Ravi (Bihar), Prof. Peter deSouza (Goa), Dr. P.M. Patel (Gujarat), Dr Jitendra Prasad (Haryana), Prof. T.R. Sharma (Himachal Pradesh and Punjab), Dr Sandeep Shastri (Karnataka), Prof. G. Gopa Kumar (Kerala), Dr. Ram Shankar (Madhya Pradesh), Prof. Suhas Palshikar (Maharashtra), Dr. S. N. Misra (Orissa), Dr Sanjay Lodha (Rajasthan), Prof. G. Koteshwar Prasad (Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry), Dr. Pradeep Kumar, V.K. Rai and Dr. A.K. Verma (Uttar Pradesh) and Prof. A.K. Chaudhuri (West Bengal) The members of the central team at the CSDS are: Himanshu Bhattacharya, Mona Gupta, Oliver Heath, Sudhir Hilsayan, K.A.Q.A. Hilal, Bhaskar Jha, Angad Kumar, Kanchan Malhotra, Anindya Saha and Chitrali Singh. ■

ile than at least four previous governments perhaps occasions stock-taking to get a long-term view of what this journey has meant for India's democratic polity.

The BJP's rise to power is related to a fundamental process of change that goes beyond routine electoral victories and defeats and the mechanics of government formation and alteration. In its multi-pronged attempts to win an electoral majority and create for itself a somewhat stable support base, the BJP has created a new social bloc, a new coalition of various social groups, that now lays claims to political power. The BJP's attempt to become the 'natural party of governance' has resulted in a new kind of majoritarianism, which is deeper and subtler than what both its spokespersons and its critics would allow for. It is not a simple Hindu majoritarianism. Although religious symbolism has been a trademark of the BJP's mobilisational strategy, and religious exclusions continue to mark the boundaries of the new social constituency, religion is not one of the principal faultlines in the creation of this new social bloc. The new social bloc is formed by the convergence of traditional caste-community differences and class distinctions. It may be an exaggeration to say that the BJP represents the rebellion of the elite, but it is nevertheless true that its rise to political power has been accompanied by the emergence of a new social group that is defined by an overlap of social and economic privileges.

It is important to interpret the signals of the 1999 verdict in the light of this process. For an obsession with the game of numbers or the business of alleged vote banks can draw attention away from the larger picture. Since the official data on the elections are not very helpful in learning about the social basis of the voters' choices – of who voted for whom – we shall mainly use here the post-poll survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and co-sponsored by *Frontline*. This survey is part of a longer series of National Election Studies conducted by the CSDS and is one of the few sources of reliable data with a social science perspective and which allows one to see the current picture in a historical perspective.

All the major formations retained most of their votes, more than in the past

From-To	Cong(I)+	BJP+	Left	BSP	NF/UF*
1998-99	79	76	77	81	23
1996-98	53	63	61	41	36
1991-96	53	65	68	56	53

*The National Front / United Front vote of the earlier elections is compared to that of its constituents who are not aligned today either with the Congress(I) or the BJP

The Congress(I)'s and BJP's allies gain votes from all directions, while the United Front loses to all

From votes in Lok Sabha 1998	To vote Lok Sabha 1999 (figures as percentage of 1998 votes)						
	Cong(I)	Cong(I) allies	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Cong(I)	78	2	6	4	2	—	6
Cong(I) allies	16	63	—	13	—	—	6
BJP	11	—	81	3	1	—	3
BJP allies	7	12	1	56	1	—	3
Left	4	1	3	13	77	1	—
BSP	8	—	2	1	—	81	4
UF	15	3	7	44	—	1	23

BJP depends more on its allies down the Hindu social order

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Hindu upper caste	21	46	14	7	1	2
Hindu-dominant peasant caste	31	30	22	4	1	10
Hindu upper OBC	35	21	23	2	2	12
Hindu lower OBC	36	19	23	10	1	6
Adivasi	49	19	12	7	0	3
Dalit	40	12	10	11	13	5
Upper Muslim	59	6	9	9	1	14
Lower Muslim	58	2	9	12	3	11
Sikh	17	9	44	0	1	4
Christian	64	10	14	9	0	0

BEFORE one looks at the precise shape and nature of the new social bloc, let us first take a look at the overall picture of flow of votes between the 1998 elections and the latest round. In the 1990s, elections in India have witnessed a high level of churning of votes. While the overall vote shares of the major parties do not undergo any dramatic change, a very large number of voters change their voting preferences from one election to another. In this respect, however, Elections '99 have proved very different from the previous two elections. All the major parties have been able to retain the support of a large chunk of those who voted for them in 1998.

But one must not read too much into these figures. These are provisional 'recall'-based figures that are liable to being scaled down after checking out carefully. Also, the recent round of elections were held within 20 months of the previous elections and without any major change in the pattern of electoral alignments at the all-India level. Yet the figures do indicate a greater crystallisation of voter preferences. It is not clear if this phenomenon will endure and lead to a deeper institutionalisation of the party system in the face of the social churning that is taking place. But it does suggest that the process of creation of a social bloc may have reached a certain stage of completion.

A closer look at how votes changed hands between 1998 and 1999 does not support the suggestion made by some commentators that voters are drifting towards a bipolar choice. Most of the gains made by the BJP-led front came from the erstwhile United Front and the allies of the Congress(I). But these votes did not flow directly to the BJP: they accrued to its allies. If anything, in a direct exchange of votes, the Congress(I) gained from the BJP more than it lost to it (11 percentage points gained, 6 percentage points lost). The Bahujan Samaj Party and the Left parties retained the support of a very high percentage of their voters, but largely because their base is not expanding to a considerable extent. The U.F's votes were fragmented and went either to the BJP's allies, the Congress(I) or to several regional parties. This fragmentation prepared the ground for the creation of the new social bloc by the BJP.

A look at the division of votes along caste and community lines gives one an idea of the shape of this new social bloc. The ten-fold classification used here is not the most refined one, and certainly does not do justice to State-level configurations, but it does give a more elaborate description of the community basis of voting than is usually available.

The first point to note is the difference between the support base of the BJP and that of its allies. Together, the BJP and its allies secure the support of 60 per cent of upper-caste Hindus and 52 per cent of the dominant Hindu peasant castes (which are not classified as Other Backward Classes) such as Jats, Marathas, Patidars, Reddys and Kammas. But between the BJP and its allies, the relative share of the allies goes up as one moves down the social hierarchy from the upper castes to the lower OBCs. This is a new pattern, as compared to 1998 and earlier elections. Since the 1998 elections, the BJP-led alliance's share of votes from among the second, third and the fourth categories has gone up by nearly 10 percentage points each. And the BJP's own share among these "middle castes", as compared to those of its allies, has declined from about two-thirds to one-half or even less. The lower the category, the lower the BJP's contribution to the vote share of the alliance. It is not that voters have shifted from the BJP to its allies in the 1999 elections. It is just that regional and political expansion has brought in new middle-caste parties such as the DMK, the Janata Dal (United) and the Telugu Desam Party and clarified the tendency inherent in the BJP's rise to power.

The vote share of the BJP-led alliance drops among Adivasis and Dalits. Although both these figures are higher this time as compared to the 1998 elections, it is clear that these groups are not the primary constituents of the new social bloc. The figures go down even further when one turns to the minorities. The BJP has maintained a fair share of the votes of Sikhs ever since the community became disillusioned with the Congress(I) following the anti-Sikh riots in 1984; but the BJP inspires little confidence among Muslims and Christians.

One needs to look at subtle changes here. Throughout this decade, the vote share of the BJP-led alliance among Muslims has grown, even if only slowly; in the 1999 elections, the share reached a two-digit figure. At the same time, the BJP's own share of votes of Muslims has declined compared to 1998, and is concentrated among Ashrafs. The increase in the alliance's vote share among Muslims is entirely owing to allies such as the TDP, the Trinamul Congress and the DMK. Similarly, in the BJP-led front, the allies account for more than half of the votes of Christians.

The Congress(I), on the other hand, improves its vote share as one moves down the social hierarchy. It has the support of only 21 per cent of upper-caste Hindus, but its vote share among the dominant peasant castes is about 31 per cent. Its vote share declines among the OBCs, but its allies' support base among these sections makes up for it. Compared to 1998, the Congress(I) has lost support among the dominant peasant groups such as Jats and Marathas, but has gained greater support among both the categories of OBCs. The Congress(I) gets the biggest share of the votes of Adivasis, Dalits, Muslims and Christians. Compared to 1998, the Congress(I)'s vote share among Adivasis has declined by four percentage points; there appears to have been a decline in its vote share among Dalits as well, but its allies make up for this.

Among the two sections of Muslims (upper biradari and lower biradari), the vote share of the Congress(I) and its allies has gone up by about 10 percentage points; the Congress(I)'s gains are principally among the upper biradari Muslims, while much of the gains from among lower biradari Muslims came from allies, mainly the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). This indicates a general return of the minorities' faith in the Congress(I); this is confirmed by the fact that the party's vote share among Christians and Sikhs has increased by about eight percentage points. A small but significant section of the Sikh community has returned to the Congress(I) after a long time.

However, the Congress(I) has not been able to consolidate the support of the lower sections (except in the case of Muslims and Christians) the way the BJP and its allies have consolidated the sup-

Among Hindus, religiosity has very little relationship to vote

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Non-worshippers	30	19	29	10	9	7
Occasional worshippers	33	21	17	11	5	7
Regular worshippers	35	26	18	5	1	7

The poorer the voter, the lower the vote for the BJP, and vice versa for the Congress(I)

Economic status	Cong(I)	Cong(I) allies	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Very high	31	2	40	12	4	0	6
High	30	2	32	17	6	1	6
Middle	33	4	27	16	5	2	6
Low	32	5	19	19	6	4	8
Very low	34	6	13	17	11	5	8

Caste and class hierarchy reinforce each other in favour of the BJP

Caste/Community	Class (percentage of those who'll vote for the BJP)				
	Very high	High	Middle	Low	Very Low
Hindu upper caste	47	42	44	39	22
Hindu-dominant peasant caste	37	33	36	21	12
Hindu upper OBC	23	27	19	20	14
Hindu lower OBC	28	18	19	15	16
Adivasi	53*	44*	22	17	11
Dalit	26*	23	17	11	7

Both caste and class converge in BJP's support base

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties	All
Upper strata	34	69	49	28	13	39	45
Lower strata	66	31	51	72	87	61	55

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port of the upper castes The Left parties and the BSP challenge the Dalit vote of the Congress(I), while a host of regional parties such as the Samajwadi Party, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Tamil Maanila Congress challenge the OBC and Muslim vote of the Congress(I)

While religion is a marker of social community especially for the minorities political loyalties in India are not defined by religious practice This stands in sharp contrast to several European democracies where church-attendance or otherwise explains political and ideological cleavages A classification of Hindus in these surveys by their religious practice or otherwise does not give very firm clues to their voting pattern The vote for both the BJP and the Congress(I) shows a mild and positive relationship to the regularity of worshipping, while it is the other way round for the Left parties and the BSP But then that is also because there is a relationship between belonging to the upper and middle castes and worshipping regularly Interestingly, 41 per cent of the Hindus who vote the Left worship regularly The same figure is substantially lower for the BSP

From caste-based and community-based cleavages, we can now turn to the economic dimension of the emerging social bloc, its class structure The table shows how clearly the BJP's vote is related to class The poorer the voter, the lesser are the chances of voting for the BJP The BJP vote share among the poorest of the population is about one-third of what it gets among the upper classes The BJP's allies do not share this profile, for they tend to do better among the middle category In that respect there is no significant difference in the BJP's support base as compared to 1998

Education reinforces the class effect, to the advantage of BJP

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Graduate and above	28	34	17	6	2	6
Matric/ +2	31	29	19	6	2	7
Up to 9th	36	22	17	10	3	7
Illiterate	42	17	17	6	4	8

Media exposure also works in the same direction, though less intensely

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Highly exposed	30	30	21	7	1	6
Moderate	35	25	19	8	1	5
Less	39	18	17	8	4	9
None	41	18	14	6	6	8

The Congress(I) is evenly spread, while the BJP draws more from cities

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Rural	37	20	17	9	4	7
Urban	38	27	17	3	2	8

Age does not make much difference to voting pattern

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Up to 25 years	37	23	17	6	4	7
26 to 35 years	36	22	16	8	4	7
36 to 45 years	35	20	18	8	3	8
46 to 55 years	41	21	16	7	2	7
Above 55 years	37	21	18	7	3	8

It is back to old days, Congress(I) enjoys a big lead among women

	Cong(I)+	BJP	BJP allies	Left	BSP	Regional parties
Men	34	23	17	7	4	7
Women	38	20	17	8	3	7

If the Congress(I) and its allies are taken together, it appears that their profile is the opposite of that of the BJP But when the allies are seen separately, it is clear that two of them, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and the RJD, have a pronounced lower class support base, while the Congress(I) support to them does not make for any clear pattern This absence of any pattern is owing to the fact that the class patterns of Congress(I) voting in different States go in different directions and eventually cancel each other out at the national level As is to be expected, the Left parties and the BSP enjoy greater support among the poorest voters

Till now we have seen the caste effect and the class effect independent of each other But as every student of Indian society knows, there is a considerable convergence of the two systems of stratification at the top and the bottom In other words, the upper caste people tend to be mainly upper class and people belonging to the lowest caste in the Hindu social order tend to be among the poorest Yet it cannot be said that there is complete overlap here Class and caste cleavages represent two independent yet overlapping principal cleavages of the Indian social order We have seen that the BJP tends to attract the voters from the upper segment of both these divisions

The data also shows that the caste hierarchy and the class hierarchy reinforce each other in contributing to support for the BJP Among the upper castes or the dominant peasant castes, for example, the vote share for the BJP goes down as we move from the upper classes to the lower classes The same is true for different classes among Adivasis and Dalits The pattern for the OBCs is not very neat at the lower ends but supports the basic reading offered here Conversely, if we focus on the lower classes and move from Dalits to upper caste, the vote share for the BJP tends to go up Accordingly, the highest chances of voting for the BJP obtain in the group that is both upper class and upper caste, and the lowest among the lowest class Dalits.

This convergence of class and caste in voting for the BJP can be understood more clearly by drawing a diagonal line across the caste-class divide. The line sep-

arating those who vote BJP in greater numbers than average and those who do not is also roughly the line separating the socially and economically privileged from the underprivileged. Those included in the "upper strata" of this caste-class divide include all the upper caste Hindus irrespective of their class. As we come down the social ladder, we exclude the lowest class and then the lower classes as well from the "upper strata" thus defined. Among the Adivasis, only those who belong to the two upper classes qualify for the "upper" caste-class strata, and among Dalits, only the highest quality thus. This line excludes all the minorities irrespective of their class. If we divide the entire electorate along these lines of "upper" and "lower" caste-class strata, we can see a composite picture of the new social bloc.

The table presents the proportion of each party's voters from the two strata, rather than the vote share for different parties as in all other tables. In all, 45 per cent of our electors fall in the "upper strata" and 55 per cent in the "lower strata". The BJP, however, draws as much as 69 per cent of its votes from these 45 per cent voters. Its allies are a little less lop-sided, but they also draw more than a proportionate share of votes from this privileged group. All the remaining parties depend more on the lower strata for their votes. This is, of course, more true of the Left parties and the BSP than of the Congress(I) .

This social bloc formed by the two principal cleavages of caste and class is reinforced by several auxiliary divisions that more or less overlap with the caste-class divisions. A look at the educational background of the voters shows that the education effect works in the same direction and to a similar degree as class. As one goes up the educational ladder, the odds of voting for the BJP go up very sharply. The votes for the BJP's allies are fairly evenly distributed while there is a clustering in the middle for the Left parties. This pattern had already been established before the last elections and has remained more or less unchanged. While a good deal of the education effect is accounted for by the social class factor, for education is largely a function of the class someone is born in, there seems to be a milder and independent education effect after controlling for caste-class. In both the upper and the lower strata, the Congress(I) vote falls and the BJP vote rises with increase in levels of education.

The effect of reading newspapers, listening to the radio and watching television is very closely related both to education and to class. No wonder, the BJP does better among those who are more exposed to the media. In this case the BJP's allies too seem to be gaining significantly from media exposure. As in the case of education, the media exposure effect is not entirely explained by caste-class background. Within the upper stratum, differences in media exposure produce significant differences in voting for the BJP and its allies. Clearly, greater education and greater media exposure by themselves seem to be drawing voters away from the Congress(I). The same is not true of the Left parties, the BSP and other regional parties, who also get more than the average level of vote among the under-privileged.

Right from its inception, first the Jan Sangh and then the BJP has drawn greater support from the urban areas. The same pattern continues, although the gap has kept changing from four percentage points in 1991 to 12 points in 1996, before plateauing to six points in 1998 and seven this year. This gap does not indicate, however, that the BJP has no rural base. On the contrary, of every hundred votes it gets, as many as 73 come from the villages, only slightly below what the Congress(I) draws from the villages. Earlier, the Congress(I) used to get a higher level of votes in rural areas. In this decade, however, Congress(I) has also done marginally better in rural areas. The main political base of the Left parties is in the rural areas. But over the years, the gap between their rural and urban votes has increased because of their shrinking urban appeal in West Bengal. Urbanity by itself does not seem to introduce a new dimension to political preference. Within the upper and lower strata, the vote for BJP does not vary much.

The sudden rise of the BJP in the early 1990s had opened for the first time a noticeable generational divide. Among the youngest of voters, the BJP secured four percentage points more votes than among the oldest. The Congress(I) showed a contrary pattern. By 1996 the gap had narrowed to 2.5 percentage points and this time it virtually disappeared. It seems the gap was more a result of the BJP's newness than any generational divide.

Unlike in Western democracies, age or generation identity has not been a significant factor in Indian elections. The sudden rise of the BJP in the early 1990s had opened for the first time a noticeable generational divide. Among the youngest of voters, the BJP secured four percentage points more votes than among the oldest. The Congress(I) showed a contrary pattern. By 1996 the gap had narrowed to 2.5 percentage points and this time it virtually disappeared. It seems the gap was more a result of the BJP's newness in many parts of the country than any generational divide. The BJP does marginally better among the youngest and the Congress(I) among the middle aged. The Left has consistently done a little worse among young voters as compared to the middle aged.

Traditionally, the Congress(I) used to witness a fairly big gender gap, with support for it among women being five to six percentage points more than among men. The sudden decline of the Congress(I) and the rise of the BJP had reduced that gap considerably by the beginning of this decade. The gap started increasing again in 1996 when the Congress(I) enjoyed a 1.2 percentage point lead. By last year the gap had doubled to 2.7 points in favour of the Congress(I) and 4.7 points against the BJP. While in the case of the BJP the gap has decreased a little, the gender gap for the Congress(I) and its allies stands at five percentage points, as high as during the good old days of Congress(I) dominance. In the case of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the BSP, the gender profile has not undergone any change all these years.

It is not clear how the revival of the gender gap should be interpreted. It is all too easy to read it as conclusive evidence of a revival of the Congress(I) or to dismiss it as yet another sign that the Congress(I) gets the votes of the uninformed and the less politicised. At the

same time, it may be too premature to link it to women's attitudes to the policies of the Congress(I) or the BJP. It calls for more careful research, especially because this is happening at a time when women's political participation is growing. At this stage we can only view it as another independent dimension of social hierarchy, where the privileged section supports the BJP.

To sum up, the 1999 electoral verdict points to a fundamental reworking of the social basis of party politics in India. The first four decades of the Congress(I) system in one form or the other were characterised by political mobilisation that cut across fundamental social cleavages. In its various incarnations and local variants, the rainbow social coalition of the Congress(I) did not include all the sections quite equally. But it did not follow any one faultline of society. The decline of the Congress(I) and the rise of the BJP to power created the possibility of a new kind of cleavage-based politics, one that draws on the overlap of cleavages based on caste and class. It is not caste-based or class-based in any simple sense: it is woven around the ideology of nationalism and involves a reworking of *Jati* and sectional divisions. Nonetheless, it is built around a "master cleavage" of caste-class privileges. Its end-product is a new social bloc, one with soft edges and blurred boundaries. Verdict '99 marks the arrival of this new social bloc.

To be sure, the arrival does not guarantee its durability or even survival, let alone its continued electoral success. The new social bloc is still quite fragile and yet to jell. In many ways it is a very artificial product, more a result of a highly skillful working of the logic of our electoral system and caste-community configurations in their regional setting by the BJP leadership than a harmonious coming together of various groups. As noted above, there is a definite tension among the social profiles of the BJP and its allies. But at present it helps the BJP bring groups to its new social bloc that would not have otherwise come its way. It is not clear how well the BJP will be able to manage this tension. It is also not clear if the party will succeed in mobilising enough numbers from outside this group so as to ensure the creation of an electoral majority out of a numerical minority.

This analysis naturally begs the question: if the privileged can form a bloc, why not the underprivileged? Do the recent elections and political indicators point in that direction? In a sense the decline of the "catch-all" Congress umbrella opened up the possibility of the political consolidation of the underprivileged as it did for the privileged. This decade has enriched that possibility, for we have witnessed a participatory upsurge of the lower orders of society. One needs to take note of the extraordinary fact that India is perhaps the only contemporary democracy where the poor and the socially underprivileged participate in politics more than the elite.

At the same time, various factors have worked against the realisation of this potential and resulted in the fragmentation of what could have become a counter-bloc. First, it is always more difficult to consolidate the underprivileged, for their access to information and action is limited. Second, the regionalised nature of our polity works against the coming together of these sections on a national political platform, leaving it open for the BJP to incorporate a group like the Pattali Makkal Katchi through localised negotiation. Finally, the absence of an organised party-political nucleus that would initiate such a consolidation prevents the potential from turning into a reality.

Can the Congress(I) perform that role? On the face of it, the findings presented above might suggest that the Congress(I) is already well on its way to creating a counter-bloc. It is after all the party that gets the largest support from among the underprivileged. At the same time we need to remember that the Congress(I) does not draw the lower strata of caste-class as fully as the BJP does for the upper class-caste. The national level figures for the Congress(I) hide various contrary trends at the State level. The Congress(I) draws the underprivileged towards it in Karnataka, has an unclear profile in Andhra Pradesh and represents the better-off in Kerala. Besides, when the Congress(I) gets the votes of the lower strata it comes more by default than by design.

There is a residual quality to the Congress(I) vote. The social support it gets is more often than not merely the mirror image of the social profile of its opponent. The creation of a counter-bloc of the underprivileged would need more than a happy coincidence. It would require a painstaking building of social alliances and political coalitions, within or without the party. It would also require forging a new vision and overhauling the organisation to allow it to act as the vehicle of this historical process. For the existing Congress(I) party, it is a very tall order indeed. ■

CSDS Team

Uttar Pradesh: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	76	10	14.8
BJP	77	29	27.6
BSP	85	14	22.1
Ind.	610	1	3.6
LKD(Ajit)	7	2	2.5
L.C.	4	2	1.5
S.P.	84	26	24.0
SJP(R)	2	1	0.5

THE verdict in Uttar Pradesh surprised the pollsters and political analysts, and it continues to surprise the psephologists even after the final figures are in. There is a paradox in the verdict: the BJP and its allies have secured 31.2 per cent of the votes, some nine percentage points down from last year but only a fraction below what they secured in the 1991 and 1996 parliamentary elections. Yet the BJP won only 29 seats (32, if the allies' seats are added) compared to between 50 and 60 seats it has secured in the past. For the Samajwadi Party, the result is even more paradoxical: it lost nearly five percentage points in terms of its vote share since the 1998 elections, but its seats tally has gone up from 20 to 26. The BSP recorded only a marginal increase in its vote share, from 20.9 to 22.1 per cent, but its seats tally rose from four to 14. The surprising element about the Congress(I) is that normally under the Indian electoral system one would not expect a party securing 17.3 per cent of the votes (including its allies) to win any seats. However, the Congress(I) romped home with 12 seats (including the tally of its ally, the Rashtriya Lok Dal). The first-past-the-post system that normally rewards the biggest party and punishes the rest does not seem to have worked that way in U.P. The party with the highest vote share, the BJP, won only 30 seats; the second and third highest-vote-share parties, the S.P. and the BSP, made major gains in terms of seats. In fact, even the fourth and lowest seat-share-party, the Congress(I), won a significant number of seats.

Conventionally, such a paradox would be explained by the Index of Opposition Unity (IOU). It was assumed that an increase in the IOU against the BJP would explain the sharp decline in its seats tally.

A paradoxical verdict

But nothing of that sort took place in U.P. this time. There were no Opposition alliances, barring a minor seat adjustment between the Congress(I) and the RLD. In fact, the State-wide IOU came down from 53 per cent to 49 per cent between the 1998 and 1999 elections. It is not true to say that the BJP won big victories but lost narrowly. Its average margin of victory is smaller than its average margin of defeat. It is also not the case that the BJP accidentally lost a large number of seats by a very small margin. If anything, luck favoured the BJP: it won 12 seats by less than 10 per cent of the votes, while the S.P. and the BSP won only six seats each in this category. That is why U.P. remains a puzzle even after the verdict is fully known.

Part of the answer to this puzzle lies in the two other figures given in the table showing the vore share. This time two things worked against the BJP. In the past the BJP won over 50 seats with a fairly low vote share because its gap *vis-a-vis* the next most popular party, the Janata Dal or the S.P., used to be more than 10 percentage points. This time, like in 1996, the gap narrowed to only 7 percentage points. But unlike in the 1996 election, there was much greater resort to tactical voting at the constituency level. We find that this time the extent of constituency-level consolidation of votes against the BJP has been at its highest, more than 8 percentage points higher than last time.

To sum up: the BJP's votes fell, and even though its main opponent also lost votes, the gap between the two narrowed; the gap was much lower at the constituency level where it actually matters, thanks to a higher level of polarisation of votes against the BJP at that level.

The other part of the answer lies in the region-wise break-up of the verdict. What looks like a difference of seven percentage points between the BJP and its main rival at the State level translated into a very different picture at the regional level. In the two small regions of Uttarakhand and

Performance of BJP: Lok Sabha elections, 1991-1999

	1991	1996	1998	1999
Vote share of BJP and allies	32.8	33.4	40.1	31.2
Seats won by BJP and allies	51	52	62	62
Gap between vote share of BJP and next party	11.2	7.9	11.9	7.2
Index of Opposition unity against BJP	45.1	47.3	52.7	49.4
Measure of tactical voting against BJP*	12.9	8.1	4.9	13.8

**It measures the gap between the IOU at the State level and the average IOU at the constituency level in the State.*

Assembly segments in the Lok Sabha elections, 1999

	BJP+	S.P.	BSP	Cong(I)	Others
Uttarakhand	13	0	0	7	0
Ruhelkhand	21	14	6	7	--
Western	20	7	13	18	0
Bundelkhand	1	4	10	4	0
Central	21	41	18	13	--
Central-East	27	23	22	4	2
Poorvanchal	30	39	11	3	5
Total	128	128	82	42	7

Note: Table is based on 408 Assembly segments; the break-up for the remaining 19 segments is not yet available.

Class and vote '99

Class	Cong(I)	BJP+	BSP	SP
Very rich	18	55	2	12
Rich	23	48	8	14
Middle	22	39	10	21
Poor	15	34	21	22
Very poor	21	23	34	17

Caste matters... but not as much as in 1998

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	BSP	SP
Brahmin	13	77	2	5
Rajput	19	74	1	5
Other upper caste	16	76	5	--
Yadav	2	11	4	77
Other OBC	20	29	13	22
Jatav	13	6	74	4
Other SC	39	13	39	8
Muslim	40	12	5	40

SP voters jump ship to Congress

Lok Sabha 1998 → Lok Sabha 1999					
	Cong(I)+	BJP+	BSP	SP	Others
Cong(I)+	79	6	4	7	2
BJP+	7	85	2	4	3
BSP	9	2	84	2	4
SP	22	8	5	59	6
Others	14	11	9	3	63

Note: Total sample size is 1314. The survey has over-estimated vote share for BJP and allies by nearly 4.4 per cent and under-estimated the vote share for SP by 5.8 per cent.

Education and vote '99

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	BSP	SP
Graduate plus	17	57	11	10
Matric/ +2	17	44	10	20
Up to 9th	19	35	19	18
Illiterate	22	27	25	19

[illegible]

[illegible]	Cong(I)				BJP+				S.P.				BSP			
	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
[illegible]	1	+1	43.9	+17.8	3	-1	40.9	-7.3	0	0	5.8	-1.0	0	0	6.7	-2.7
[illegible]	2	+2	43.8	+8.2	4	-2	44.5	+2.4	3	-1	29.7	-8.8	1	+1	22.6	+3.8
[illegible]	1	+1	29.3	+22.8	7	-8	31.4	-11.0	1	+1	14.0	-6.8	1	+1	23.6	+4.6
[illegible]	1	+1	15.2	+10.2	0	-4	27.5	-8.1	0	0	24.1	-3.5	3	+3	28.9	+1.8
[illegible]	2	+2	18.2	+7.6	0	-9	29.8	-8.2	11	+5	28.8	-3.8	2	+1	22.8	+0.8
[illegible]	1	+1	12.6	+8.2	6	-2	28.2	-8.5	5	-1	28.8	-5.4	4	+2	22.8	+0.8
[illegible]	0	0	14.5	+8.7	5	-5	28.7	-14.8	6	+2	28.0	-5.5	3	+2	23.8	-0.6
[illegible]	[illegible]		17.1	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	31.2	-8.9	[illegible]	+6	24.0	-4.7	14	+10	22.1	+1.2

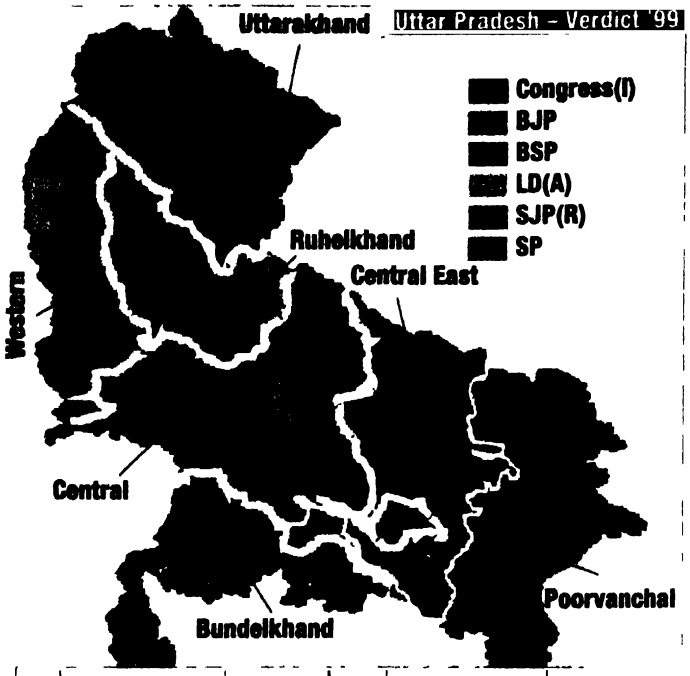
Bundelkhand it trailed behind the Congress(I) and the BSP respectively in the matter of vote share. It lost all the four seats in Bundelkhand, while it won three out of four seats in Uttarakhand with narrow margins. In western U.P. the BJP's vote share was barely two percentage points over that of the Congress(I)-RLD combine, which won four seats there. In Poorvanchal, the area bordering Bihar, it trailed behind the S.P. by two percentage points. The BJP's vote share fell most sharply in this region while it could contain its seat loss to only four. It was ahead of the S.P. in Central and the Central East, but only by 1.5 and 2.5 percentage points respectively. Despite this slender lead the BJP lost as many as nine seats in the Central region where Sakshi Maharaj worked to defeat it.

As a result of all these factors, U.P. witnessed much closer triangular and quadrangular fights at the constituency level than the State-wise averages might indicate. Take for example the Ghatampur result: the BSP won this seat by securing 1,56,582 votes followed by the S.P. with 1,56,477 and then the BJP with 1,55,987 votes. In all, the results in 22 seats hinged on less than 10 per cent of the votes. As many as 50 seats changed hands in this election. Of the BJP's victories, 10 were in constituencies it had lost last time. Despite its overall gains, the S.P. lost 10 of the 20 seats it had won last time.

AN interesting thought experiment: what would have happened if the Assembly elections in U.P. were held simultaneously? This time the Election Commission has made Assembly segment-wise results available in record time and we can actually answer this question. The BJP would have performed much worse than in the Lok Sabha polls. It led in only 117 segments, and needed its allies' strength to surpass the S.P.'s figure of 128. The BSP would have improved its position and so would have the Congress(I). But the Congress(I) still has a lot of ground to cover before it can convert its extraordinary feat of making an 11 percentage point gain in the vote share into an increase in the number of seats. Unless the political alignments change, trends point to a hung Assembly in U.P. where every party is way off the majority mark.

Between the 1998 and 1999 elections most parties managed to retain about 80 per cent of their votes, with the notable exception of the S.P., which lost as much as 22 per cent of its votes to the Congress(I).

IN Uttar Pradesh, 49 per cent of the respondents agreed with the statement that one should vote the same way as the rest of the members of one's community do, which figure is a remarkable 14 percentage points higher than the national average. With the exception of the Congress(I), each party enjoyed almost unrivalled support from a particular *Jati*. The BJP collected 77 per cent of the Brahmin vote and 68 per cent of the Rajput vote. However, as it was also particularly popular with the other upper castes, these figures should not be treated as anomalous *Jati* occurrences but as part of a wider caste-



No.	Constituency	Winner
1.	Tehn Garhwal	BJP
2.	Garhwal	BJP
3.	Almora	BJP
4.	Nainital	Cong(I)
5.	Bunor (S.C.)	BJP
6.	Amroha	BSP
7.	Moradabad	LT Cong
8.	Rampur	Cong(I)
9.	Sambhal	S.P.
10.	Budaun	S P.
11.	Aonla	S.P
12.	Bareilly	BJP
13.	Pilibhit	Ind
14.	Shahjahanpur	Cong(I)
15.	Khen	S.P.
16.	Shahabad	BSP
17.	Sitapur	BSP
18.	Misrikh (S.C.)	S.P.
19.	Hardoi (S.C.)	LT Cong
20.	Lucknow	BJP
21.	Mohanlalganj (S.C.)	S.P.
22.	Unnao	S P.
23.	Rae Bareli	Cong(I)
24.	Pratapgarh	Cong(I)
25.	Amethi	Cong(I)
26.	Sultanpur	BSP
27	Akbarpur (S.C.)	BSP
28.	Faizabad	BJP
29.	Bara Banki (S.C.)	S.P.
30.	Kaiserganj	S.P.
31.	Bahraich	BJP
32.	Balrampur	S.P.
33.	Gonda	BJP
34.	Basti (S.C.)	BJP
35.	Domariaganj	BJP
36.	Khalilabad	S.P.
37.	Banasgaon (S.C.)	BJP
38.	Gorakhpur	BJP
39.	Maharajganj	S.P.
40.	Padrauna	BJP
41.	Deoria	BJP
42.	Salempur	BSP
43.	Ballia	SJP(R)
44.	Ghosi	BSP
45.	Azamgarh	S.P.
46.	Lalganj (S.C.)	BSP
47.	Machhlishahr	S.P.
48.	Jaunpur	BJP
49.	Saidpur (S.C.)	S.P.
50.	Ghazipur	BJP
51.	Chandauli	S.P.
52.	Varanasi	BJP
53.	Robertsganj (S.C.)	BJP
54.	Mirzapur	S.P.
55.	Phulpur	S.
56.	Allahabad	BJP
57.	Chail (S.C.)	BSP
58.	Fatehpur	BSP
59.	Banda	Cong(I)
60.	Hamirpur	BSP
61.	Jhansi	BSP
62.	Jalaun (S.C.)	BJP
63.	Ghatampur (S.C.)	Cong(I)
64.	Bilhaur	S.P.
65.	Kanpur	S.P.
66.	Etawah	S P.
67.	Kannauj	S.P.
68.	Farukhabad	S.P.
69.	Mainpuri	S.P.
70.	Jalesar	S.P.
71.	Etah	S.P.
72.	Firozabad (S.C.)	BJP
73.	Agra	BJP
74.	Mathura	BJP
75.	Hathras (S.C.)	BJP
76.	Aligarh	BJP
77.	Khurja (S.C.)	BJP
78.	Bulandshahr	Cong(I)
79.	Hapur	LD(Ajit)
80.	Meerut	Cong(I)
81.	Baghpat	LD(Ajit)
82.	Muzaffarnagar	BSP
83.	Kairana	BJPP.
84.	Saharanpur	BJP
85.	Hardwar (S.C.)	BSP

based support base. However, in the cases of the BSP and the S.P. specific *Jatis* show voting behaviour markedly different from the other castes in their "set". Close to 80 per cent of the Yadavas voted for the S.P., which was over 50 percentage points more than the level of support that the remaining OBCs gave the party. Similarly, 74 per cent of the Jatavas voted for the BSP, compared to just 39 per cent of the other Scheduled Castes.

The Congress(I)'s expansion seems to have come from the lower castes. In 1998, its only major segment of support came from among non-Jatav S.Cs, of whom 42 per cent voted for it. Although the Congress(I) managed to retain support among the non-Jatav S.Cs even in 1999, its support increased noticeably also among the Jatavas and the other OBCs (non-Yadav), by 8 and 13 percentage points respectively. The Muslim vote is evenly split between the Congress(I) and the S.P., but the CSDS survey does not show any significant support for the BSP among Muslims.

The percentage of people who had made up their minds on whom to vote for a few days before the election was higher in U.P. at 44 per cent than the nationwide average of 36 per cent. The proportion of people who made up their minds before the campaign started was also significantly lower here, by 15 percentage points, than nationally. Dalits, Muslims and non-Yadav OBCs were by far the most likely groups to make up their mind late. This finding supports the hypothesis that these groups played the most important role in resorting to tactical voting against the BJP.

THE tables relating to class and education both serve to reinforce the fact that the BJP is very much the party of the elite. The very rich are more than three times as likely to vote the BJP than the very poor, and graduates and above are more than twice as likely to vote for the party than illiterates. However, the lower sections of society are far more evenly dispersed between the different parties.

The 1999 result in U.P. thus does not portend any early end to the political churning process; further volatility seems likely before any clear alignments can emerge. If anything, the revival of the Congress(I) and the unforeseen rise in the fortunes of the S.P. makes for a nearly unique situation of four-party system in U.P., a result that sharply diverges from the general trend in most other States towards a bipolar pattern. ■

'Split factor' decides the outcome

CSDS Team with
SUHAS PALSHIKAR

A SIMPLE arithmetical calculation shows that if a split had not taken place in the Congress(I) and the various parties had got the same vote share they did in this election, the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party, would have won just nine Lok Sabha seats from Maharashtra, and the Congress(I) alliance's tally would have been 39, instead of the final figures of 28 and 11 respectively. This alone would have changed the majority equation in Parliament, with the national verdict looking much different from what it does today. This demonstrates once again how an electoral verdict is as much an artifact of party managers and the first-past-the-post system as it is a product of the changing mood of the electorate.

The results did not come as a surprise. Both the Congress(I) and the breakaway Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) knew that the split could prove to be suicidal. Yet, each of them hoped that it would be able to claim a sufficiently large chunk of votes to defeat the Shiv Sena-BJP combine. However, as it turned out, there was no hidden hand to save them from the consequences of the split. The Congress(I) and the NCP together cornered 58 per cent of the popular vote: 33.3 per cent for the Congress(I) and its allies, and 25.1 per cent for Sharad Pawar's NCP and its allies. The split of votes between the two brought the Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) in the State to 63, down from 88 in last year's elections. This drop of 25 percentage points in the IOU is enough to explain the verdict. Maharashtra's is a classic case of the "split factor" rather than the "swing factor" deciding the outcome of the elections.

Indeed, it is surprising that the Shiv Sena-BJP combine did not gain more than it did from this huge split. After having consolidated the gains made in its surprise victory in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the Shiv Sena-BJP combine fared poorly in the elections last year, losing in terms of both votes and seats. It lost another 4 percentage points of votes this year – less than it was expected to lose – but added 18 seats to its kitty. It could have gained more, but for the fact that the split worked unevenly in different parts of the State. The split hurt the Congress(I) the most in Vidarbha, where it had won all the 11 seats last time. Although the NCP took only 15 per cent of the votes here and the IOU was 67, it was enough for the Shiv Sena-BJP combine to take six seats. In Mumbai and Konkan, the Shiv Sena-BJP combine retained its supremacy with a little help from the split in the Congress(I). In the north and in Marathwada – the two regions that recorded the highest increases in turnout – the NCP effectively demolished the Congress(I) by making it lose 4 seats in each region, without being able to pick up any seats for itself. It was only in Sharad Pawar's stronghold of western Maharashtra that the NCP was able to translate its vote share into seats. The Congress(I) was the spoiler here But since the Shiv Sena-BJP combine finished a poor third, the split did not seem to have hurt the NCP very much.

Maharashtra: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	42	10	29.7
BJP	27	13	21.2
NCP	39	6	21.6
Shiv Sena	22	15	16.7
JD(S)	2	1	0.9
PWP/P T	2	1	0.9
RPI	3	1	1.4
BBM	4	1	2.1

Some analysts had hoped that voters may succeed where the leaders failed, that many voters would resort to tactical voting by choosing the stronger of the candidates from among the Congress(I) and the NCP in order to defeat the candidates of the ruling alliance. The Lok Sabha results show that while the electorate certainly did not favour the combine, its voting choice was not based solely on that consideration. The rivalry between the Congress(I) and the NCP was as fierce as the competition between the Shiv Sena-BJP and non-Shiv Sena-BJP political forces.

This was not the first time that Pawar contested in Maharashtra as a non-

Congress(I) candidate. Between 1980 and 1985 he was out of the Congress(I) fold. In the 1980 and 1984 Lok Sabha elections he managed to get for his party 11.8 and 12.1 per cent of the votes and one and two seats respectively. In the 1980 and 1985 Assembly elections his Congress(S) managed to get 20.5 and 17.8 per cent votes and 47 and 54 seats respectively. It is indeed creditable that Pawar has managed to retain his base. He obviously needs to do better to support his national ambitions.

At the Assembly level, the overall verdict appears to be a near repeat of the 1995 verdict, with the BJP and the Shiv Sena losing a few seats each. A closer look reveals that a good deal of churning has taken place. Of the 288 seats, only 133 have been retained by the same party that won in 1995. The figure goes up to 166 if one includes the 33 seats the Congress(I) has now lost to the NCP. The Congress(I) could retain only 28 of the 80 seats it won in 1995. The BJP and the Shiv Sena did a little better and retained 41 and 52 of their seats respectively.

The regional patterns also show a subtle change. The Congress(I) has improved its position significantly in Mumbai and Vidarbha. Its performance in Mumbai is noteworthy since it differs from the trend of the Lok Sabha results. The NCP won a majority of its seats from western Maharashtra at the cost of the Congress(I) and independents who were backed by Pawar in 1995. The number of independents fell from 45 to 12.

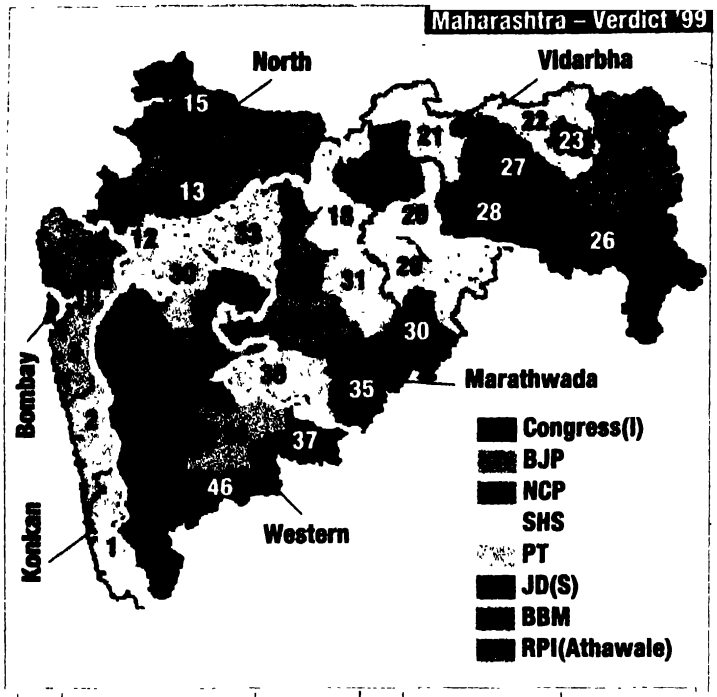
Although there was a lot of speculation about how much of the Congress(I)'s vote Sharad Pawar would take away, the CSDS survey shows that the most likely quantum is somewhere around one-third. Sharad Pawar was thus unable to do what Mamata Banerjee succeeded in doing in West Bengal – split the Congress(I) evenly down the middle. On the other hand, despite an undistinguished term in government, the Shiv Sena-BJP combine was able to hold on to a considerable percentage of those who had voted for it in 1998.

Thee Shiv Sena-BJP combine did not do as well in being able to make those who voted for it in the Lok Sabha elections to do so in the Assembly elections. Whereas 88 per cent and 93 per cent of the people who voted for the BJP and the Shiv Sena respectively in the Assembly elections also voted for the combine in the Lok Sabha elections, the retention rate is not nearly as high when looked at from the other direction. From among those who voted for the combine in the Lok Sabha elections, only 74 per cent voted for it in the Assembly elections. The BJP voters were bigger 'ticket splitters' than the Shiv Sena voters.

Maharashtra's voters are not as polarised along caste lines as those in many other States – except at the lower end of the caste hierarchy. Instead of different groups aligning with different alliances, each caste group seems to be getting divided among the three coalitions. The Maratha and Kunbi vote, which was firmly behind the Congress(I) last time, was fragmented among the Shiv Sena-BJP combine, the Congress(I) and the NCP this time. Since 1990, the Shiv Sena and the BJP have been trying to attract the traditional Congress(I) votes, and to some extent they seem to have succeeded in this. Thanks partly to the Shiv Sena and partly to the split in the Congress(I), they now occupy the space in the middle, and fare well among the Kunbis and other OBCs. They continue to fare badly among the Dalits and Adivasis, and particularly with Muslims, virtually none of whom voted for them. Interestingly, the BJP and the Shiv Sena have rather different social profiles.

During the campaign, the NCP was criticised for trying to unite the four Ms: Marathas, Malis, Mahars and Muslims. It succeeded in this partly, but an analysis of its voter composition shows that the NCP bears an indelible Maratha mark. The Muslim vote was split almost evenly between the Congress(I) and the NCP: 46 per cent for the Congress(I) and 40 per cent for the NCP. As usual, the composition of Congress(I) voters was pretty balanced. However, since its support base spans across all social groups, the Congress(I) lacks a specific social identity. This is fine when a party is on the upswing, but problematic when it is on the decline.

Despite the much-vaunted claims by



No.	Constituency	Winner	No.	Constituency	Winner
1.	Rajapur	Shiv Sena	25.	Chimur	BJP
2.	Ratnagiri	Shiv Sena	26.	Chandrapur	Cong(I)
3.	Kolaba	P.T.	27.	Wardha	Cong(I)
4.	Bombay South	BJP	28.	Yeotmal	Cong(I)
5.	Bombay South Central	Shiv Sena	29.	Hingoli	Shiv Sena
6.	Bombay North Central	Shiv Sena	30.	Nanded	Cong(I)
7.	Bombay North East	BJP	31.	Parbhani	Shiv Sena
8.	Bombay North West	Cong(I)	32.	Jalna	BJP
9.	Bombay North	BJP	33.	Aurangabad	Shiv Sena
10.	Thane	Shiv Sena	34.	Beed	BJP
11.	Dahanu (S.T.)	BJP	35.	Latur	Cong(I)
12.	Nasik	Shiv Sena	36.	Osmanabad (S.C.)	Shiv Sena
13.	Malegaon (S.T.)	JD(S)	37.	Sholapur	Cong(I)
14.	Dhulia (S.T.)	BJP	38.	Pandharpur (S.C.)	RPI (Athawale)
15.	Nandurbar (S.T.)	Cong(I)	39.	Ahmednagar	BJP
16.	Erandol	BJP	40.	Kopargaon	Shiv Sena
17.	Jalgaon	BJP	41.	Khed	NCP
18.	Buldhana (S.C.)	Shiv Sena	42.	Pune	BJP
19.	Akola	BBM	43.	Baramati	NCP
20.	Washim	Shiv Sena	44.	Satara	NCP
21.	Amravati	Shiv Sena	45.	Karad	NCP
22.	Ramtek	Shiv Sena	46.	Sangli	Cong(I)
23.	Nagpur	Cong(I)	47.	Ichalkaranji	NCP
24.	Bhandara	BJP	48.	Kolhapur	NCP

Region	Seats	Turn-out 1999	Change over 1998	Congress(I)+ Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP+Shiv Sena Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	NCP+ Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
Konkan	5	47.9	+2.8	0	-1	24.6	-12.3	4	+1	43.2	-2.7	1	0	27.7	+10.0
Bombay	6	44.9	-5.5	1	-2	39.0	-8.6	5	+2	48.5	+0.9	0	0	7.6	-5.0
North	6	62.2	+10.2	1	-4	30.8	-21.4	4	+3	37.4	-5.4	1	+1	28.5	+28.5
Vidharbha	11	65.8	+1.9	5	-6	39.4	12.4	6	+6	41.4	-0.6	0	0	15.1	+15.1
Marathwada	8	69.7	+6.5	2	-4	33.0	-16.2	6	+4	41.3	-3.3	0	0	22.2	+21.9
Western	12	67.5	+6.2	2	-9	29.9	-26.0	3	+2	27.0	-9.1	7	+7	40.8	+40.7
Total	**48**	**61.1**	**+4.0**	**11**	**-26**	**33.3**	**-17.2**	**28**	**+18**	**38.1**	**-4.1**	**9**	**+8**	**25.1**	**+21.6**

the Shiv Sena that it has received the support of the lower sections of society, the combine is very much a party of the elite. It fared well among the upper classes and the educated. The reverse was true for the NCP and the Congress(I). However, the index for media exposure shows an effect over and above the pattern for class and education. Whereas the lowest classes and the least educated were pretty much equally divided between the Congress(I) and the NCP, the Congress(I) showed a clear lead among the least informed members of society, receiving 41 per cent of the vote from those who have no media exposure.

The usual story of more women than men voting for the Congress(I) and *vice versa* for the BJP is as true for Maharashtra as it is elsewhere in the country. The NCP, however, scored pretty much equally among both the sexes.

The Congress(I) lost to the NCP particularly badly in the rural areas. The rural verdict was split almost evenly among the three main players. The Shiv Sena-BJP combine did substantially better in the urban areas, which comes as no surprise.

Despite Sharad Pawar's vehement stance against Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, her standing in the popularity stakes as the choice for Prime Minister did not suffer too badly. Overall, 26 per cent of the respondents named her as being their choice for Prime Minister, which was more or less on a par with the national average. However, 19 per cent of the sample felt that she was an unsuitable candidate because of her foreign origin. This figure was higher among the Shiv Sena-BJP combine voters at 31 per cent, than it was with NCP voters at 22 per cent.

The elections have thrown up a complex picture of emerging political loyalties which defies the easy bifurcation of the State polity into two rival political camps. This fragmentation removes the possibility of a formation of the weaker and deprived social groups into an electoral bloc. Just as there are no winners and losers in the elections from Maharashtra, there appear to be no progressives and reactionaries in State politics anymore. ■

Region-wise tally in the Assembly elections 1999 (Gains/losses compared to 1995 Assembly elections)

Region	Total	Congress(I) Won	Gain/ Loss	BJP+Shiv Sena Won	Gain/ Loss	NCP Won	Gain/ Loss	Others Won	Gain/ Loss
Konkan	31	1	-2	20	-1	4	+4	6	0
Bombay	34	12	+11	19	-11	1	+1	2	-1
North	36	8	-2	17	+2	7	+7	4	-7
Vidharbha	66	27	+10	28	-5	5	+5	6	-11
Marathwada	46	10	-2	25	+1	6	+6	5	-5
Western	75	18	-19	14	-1	36	+36	7	-16
Total	**288**	**76**	**-4**	**123**	**-15**	**59**	**+59**	**30**	**-40**

Sharad Pawar fails to do a 'Mamata'

Lok Sabha 1998 — Lok Sabha 1999	Cong(I)	BJP+	NCP+	Other
Cong(I)+	57	10	32	1
BJP+	7	79	12	1
Other	10	17	61	10

Note: *Sample size is 1030.*

BJP-Shiv Sena could not repeat Lok Sabha success in Assembly polls

Lok Sabha 99 — Assembly 99	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
Cong(I)+	78	3	8
BJP+	10	74	6
NCP+	11	5	65

Community and vote (Who voted for who)

	Cong(I)+	BJP	Shiv Sena	NCP+
Maratha	25	13	28	32
Other upper caste	32	31	16	17
Kunbi	19	17	32	31
Other OBC	32	20	27	19
Dalit	62	4	8	26
Adivasi	38	15	7	29
Muslim	53	0	1	46

The lowest classes are divided between Congress and NCP....

Class	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
High	28	47	23
Middle	33	51	15
Low	37	32	28
Very low	34	28	35

....and so are the illiterates

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
Matric and above	25	55	16
Upto 9th	36	38	24
Illiterate	35	29	34

But those not exposed to media vote Congress more

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
High exposure	25	57	16
Moderate	31	49	19
Less	32	32	31
None	41	25	33

In gender terms

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
Male	29	42	27
Female	36	34	26

In regional terms

	Cong(I)+	BJP+	NCP+
Urban	35	49	16
Rural	33	35	31

Congress(I) dominates in all regions

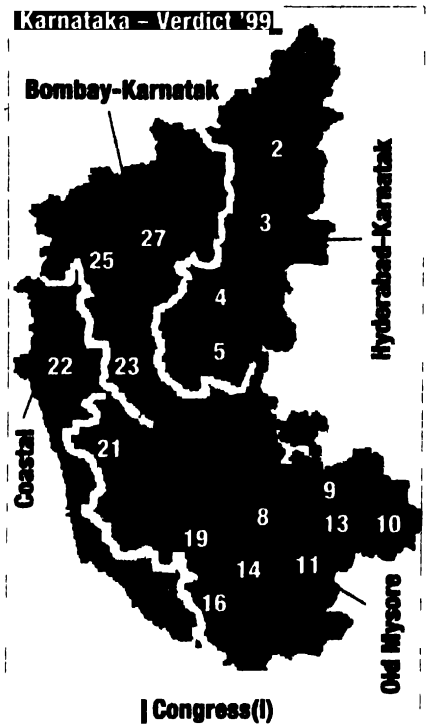
CSDS Team with
SANDEEP SHASTRI

Karnataka: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	28	18	45.4
BJP	19	7	26.9
JD(U)	10	3	12.3

THE 1999 elections marked a comeback for the Congress(I) in all regions of Karnataka. The party avenged its humiliating defeat in the 1994 Assembly elections, when it was relegated to the third position. Although it recovered some of the ground in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, it finished only second, way behind the Bharatiya Janata Party-Lok Shakti combine. This time the Congress(I) snatched 10 seats from the BJP and the Lok Shakti and two from the Janata Dal, and conceded two of its seats to the BJP and one to the Janata Dal (United). Surprisingly, no pollster anticipated the massive nine-percentage-point swing of votes in favour of the Congress(I). Despite a near-perfect seat adjustment for the Lok Sabha elections, the half-hearted BJP-JD(U) alliance lost more than eight percentage points of the popular vote that had gone to the BJP-Lok Shakti alliance last year. Clearly, the addition of the Janata Dal faction led by J.H. Patel brought nothing but discredit to the alliance. The Janata Dal (Secular), led by former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda drew a blank: its leaders faced humiliating defeats. However, with more than 10 per cent of the vote share, it remains a force capable of acting as a spoiler.

The Congress(I) showed its dominance in all the regions including the coastal districts, which had emerged as BJP strongholds in the 1990s. In the Bombay-Karnatak region in the north, where Lingayats were expected to support the BJP-led alliance, the Congress(I) got the same share of votes and seats as its main rival. While Sonia Gandhi's candidature may not have changed the verdict in the entire State, it seems to have had some [illegible] in Hyderabad-Karnatak. The voter [illegible] jumped by nearly seven percentage points and the Congress(I) registered a 12.7 per cent swing in its favour. The Congress(I) won the majority of the Assembly seats in all the districts except Bidar, where communal polarisation may have worked against it. As in its heyday, the Congress(I) has its vote spread more or less evenly across the State, while the BJP-JD(U) combine has weakened in Hyderabad-Karnatak and Old Mysore. It is in the largest southern region of Old Mysore that the BJP alliance suffered its worst loss – four seats and 15 percentage points of its vote share. Despite a spectacular entry into the electoral arena in 1991, the BJP remains a marginal political force, with the rural constituencies continuing to elude it.



No.	Constituency	Winner
1	Bidar (S C)	BJP
2	Gulbarga	Cong(I)
3.	Raichur	Cong(I)
4.	Koppal	Cong(I)
5.	Bellary	Cong(I)
6.	Davangere	BJP
7	Chitradurga	JD(U)
8	Tumkur	Cong(I)
9	Chikballapur	Cong(I)
10.	Kolar (S.C.)	Cong(I)
11.	Kanakapura	Cong(I)
12.	Bangalore North	Cong(I)
13.	Bangalore South	BJP
14.	Mandya	Cong(I)
15.	Chamarajanagar (S.C)	JD(U)
16.	Mysore	Cong(I)
17.	Mangalore	BJP
18.	Udipi	Cong(I)
19.	Hassan	Cong(I)
20.	Chikmagalur	BJP
21.	Shimoga	Cong(I)
22.	Kanara	Cong(I)
23.	Dharwar South	Cong(I)
24.	Dharwar North	BJP
25.	Belgaum	Cong(I)
26.	Chikkodi (S.C.)	JD(U)
27.	Bagalkot	Cong(I)
28.	Bijapur	BJP

The Assembly elections confirmed the dominance of the Congress(I) in all the regions. The most spectacular are the party's gains in the Old Mysore region, where its position improved from 10 seats in 1994 to 61 seats, mostly at the cost of the undivided Janata Dal. Overall, the Congress(I) snatched 69 seats from the undivided Janata Dal and 17 from the BJP. While the BJP made marginal gains elsewhere, it lost seven seats in the coastal region, where it first established its base in the State. It retained only 22 of the seats it won in 1994. The two Janata Dal factors have very little to show except losses. The JD(U) can take delight in the fact that it got more seats than the JD(S) even in Old Mysore.

The flow of votes as revealed by the CSDS survey shows that this turnabout happened in three ways: the Congress(I) retained much more of the 1998 vote share than the BJP-JD(U) combine; it snatched more votes from its rivals than they took from it; and the JD(U) failed to fetch for the BJP-JD (U) alliance more than half the 1998 vote share of the Janata Dal. JD(S) and the Congress(I) each succeeded in taking away one quarter of its 1998 vote, and thus sealed the fate of the BJP-JD(U) combine.

Voting simultaneously for different parties in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections is not a new phenomenon in Karnataka. Evidently, such voting did not take place on a large scale this time, but it was high compared to Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Once again, the BJP-JD(U)

Karnataka: Region-wise analysis, Lok Sabha elections 1998

Region	Seats	Turn-out 1998	Change over 1996	Congress(I) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP+JD(U) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	JD(S) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
Hyderabad-Karnatak	5	63.3	+6.6	4	+1	53.7	+12.7	1	-1	40.6	-8.1	0	0	6.8	-16.4
Bombay-Karnatak	6	68.3	+4.8	3	+2	46.8	+10.7	2	-2	45.5	-0.9	0	0	6.6	-8.4
Old Mysore	14	63.4	-4.1	9	+4	44.8	+8.2	5	-1	37.1	+2.5	0	-3	13.9	-11.3
Coastal	3	70.5	+1.2	2	+2	49.0	+8.3	1	-2	47.5	-2.4	0	0	3.2	+1.3
Total	28	64.9	0	18	+9	45.4	+9.2	10	-6	40.4	+2.0	0	-3	10.6	-11.2

alliance suffered The two parties fought against each other in a number of Assembly constituencies and could not transfer nearly a quarter of its Assembly-level vote share to their Lok Sabha candidates Although the alliance picked up one-third of the JD(S) vote share in the Assembly elections, that was not enough The Congress(I) fared a little better in this regard

The key to the Congress(I) s success was its ability to reconstruct the classic rainbow coalition as in the days of D Devaraj Urs It trailed the BJP-JD(U) among Lingayats and other upper castes and the numerically insignificant Scheduled Tribes But that was more than made up by an impressive showing among the lower castes and classes It not only took away a handsome slice of the Janata Dal's Vokkaliga vote, but enjoyed strong support among the lower sections of the Other Backward Classes, the Scheduled Castes and Muslims

The Congress(I) also regained some of its traditional support base The poorer the voter, the greater the odds of a vote in favour of the Congress(I) Conversely, the BJP and its allies performed better among the richer sections The contrast is particularly striking at the two ends of the class divide The BJP and its allies have enjoyed a lead of 21 percentage points over the Congress(I) among the rich

Region-wise tally in the Assembly elections, 1999
(Gains/losses compared to 1994 Assembly elections)

	Seats	Congress	BJP	JD (U)	JD(S)*	Others
Bombay-Karnatak	49	26 (+17)	8 (+3)	5	2 (-26)	5 (+1)
Coastal	24	16 (+12)	6 (-7)	0	0 (-4)	2 (-1)
Hyderabad-Karnatak	40	26 (+16)	8 (+3)	4	4 (-15)	0 (-6)
Old Mysore	112	61 (+51)	26 (+5)	9	5 (-58)	13 (-7)
Total	224	131 (+96)	44 (+4)	18	11 (-103)	20 (-15)

Note: *The seats of the undivided Janata Dal are compared here to JD(S), and not JD(U).

Congress snatched a quarter of the BJP+ and JD votes of 1998

1998 — 1999	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Congress(I)	81	16	2
BJP+	27	69	3
Janata Dal	24	49	22

Note: Sample size is 474

Ticket splitting between the Assembly and the Lok Sabha elections

Assembly — Lok Sabha	Cong(I)	JD(S)
Congress(I)	82	2
BJP+	19	4
JD(S)	12	57

Congress had a decisive lead among Dalits and

	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Upper caste	29	48	19
Vokkaliga	45	31	21
Lingayat	39	55	4
Other OBC	57	37	10
Dalit	62	29	6
Muslim	39	50	10
Others	56	42	2

The poorer the voter, greater the vote for Congress

Class	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
High	34	55	11
Middle	42	44	11
Low	46	44	8
Very low	69	22	8

Education effect goes in the same direction as class

	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Graduate	19	69	13
Matric/ +2	34	53	9
Upto 9th	47	42	8
Illiterate	59	32	7

Decisive edge for the Congress among women

	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Male	44	47	6
Female	55	33	9

BJP leads in cities, while Congress dominates villages

	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Rural	52	39	8
Urban	36	44	18

Critical edge for the BJP and allies among younger voters

	Cong(I)	BJP+	JD(S)
Upto 25 years	46	46	7
26 to 35 years	50	39	10
36 to 45 years	46	40	10
46 to 55 years	60	34	3
Above 55 years	48	45	7

and the super-rich, while the Congress(I) has a whopping 47-point lead among the poorest.

A profile of the voter based on the factor of education shows that access to education accentuates the class effect. The same pattern is repeated in the gender and rural-urban divides. The edge that the Congress(I) enjoys among women and rural voters is much higher in Karnataka than in the rest of the country. The higher urban vote reported for the JD(S) appears odd; the high figure is perhaps due to a greater degree of sampling error for smaller formations. All is not well with the Congress(I), though. The age profile of voters reveals that the Congress(I) is more popular among older voters while the BJP and its allies enjoy an edge among younger voters.

A STUDY associated with the CSDS survey and carried out by researchers at the Department of Political Science, Bangalore University, reported that the most popular choice for Chief Minister was S.M. Krishna of the Congress(I), with the support of 28 per cent of the respondents. B.S. Yediyurappa of the BJP was the choice of 26 per cent; J.H. Patel of the JD(U) was favoured by 10 per cent.

The Congress(I) also regained some of its traditional support base. The poorer the voter, the greater the odds of a vote in favour of the Congress(I). Conversely, the BJP and its allies performed better among the richer sections.

At least 54 per cent of the respondents were dissatisfied with the Janata Dal government. Also, 56 per cent felt that northern Karnataka had been neglected. Among the respondents from northern Karnataka, 84 per cent felt that the region had been neglected.

The essence of the lessons from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka is that governance matters. The anti-incumbency factor is not a knee-jerk action, nor a foregone conclusion, but a response to the performance of people who have been handed the reins of power. ■

A triumph of alliance arithmetic

CSDS Team with
K.C. SURI

Andhra Pradesh: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	42	5	42.8
BJP	8	7	9.1
TDP	34	29	40.7
MIM	1	1	1.4

IT is easy to read too much into the victory of the Telugu Desam Party led by N. Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh. After all, Chandarababu Naidu can claim to be one of the few undisputed winners of the 1999 elections. As compared to the 1998 elections, his party has increased its vote share and seats tally; to that extent, his visibility and political clout have increased. The TDP under him may not have swept the Assembly elections as it did under N.T. Rama Rao in 1994, but Chandrababu Naidu is one of the few Chief Ministers in recent years to have withstood and triumphed over the tide of anti-incumbency that the media have made much of. The TDP's tally of 29 Lok Sabha seats made it not only the biggest of the BJP's allies, but also the fourth largest party in the Lok Sabha.

Yet the TDP's victory is rather less dramatic when seen in terms of vote share. The vote share of the TDP-BJP combine was only seven percentage points more than the Congress(I)'s vote share in the entire State. The Congress(I)'s vote share in fact went up by over four percentage points as compared to the 1998 parliamentary elections, in which it fared rather well. However, the State witnessed straight contests this time and the spread of votes was relatively even for both the parties; in such a situation, even a small margin translated into an overwhelming victory for the TDP-BJP combine in terms of seats.

This is what made the alliance with the BJP a key factor in the TDP's success. The BJP's vote share of 9 per cent this year perhaps understates its role, for it was forced by Chandrababu Naidu, a hard bargainer, to settle for a meagre share of seats. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, the BJP made a big entry in Andhra Pradesh by securing nearly 10 per cent of the popular vote. Its fortunes declined marginally in 1996. It performed well in 1998: it won four parliamentary seats and secured 18 per cent of the popular vote. The TDP's alliance with the BJP enabled it to more than make up for the losses from the severing of its ties with the Left parties; it also gave the TDP an edge over the Congress(I). The TDP-BJP combine's vote share (nearly 50 per cent) matches the combined vote share of the TDP and the BJP in 1998. If the BJP had not contested as an ally of the TDP and had fared even half as well as it did in 1998, the TDP might well have faced defeat.

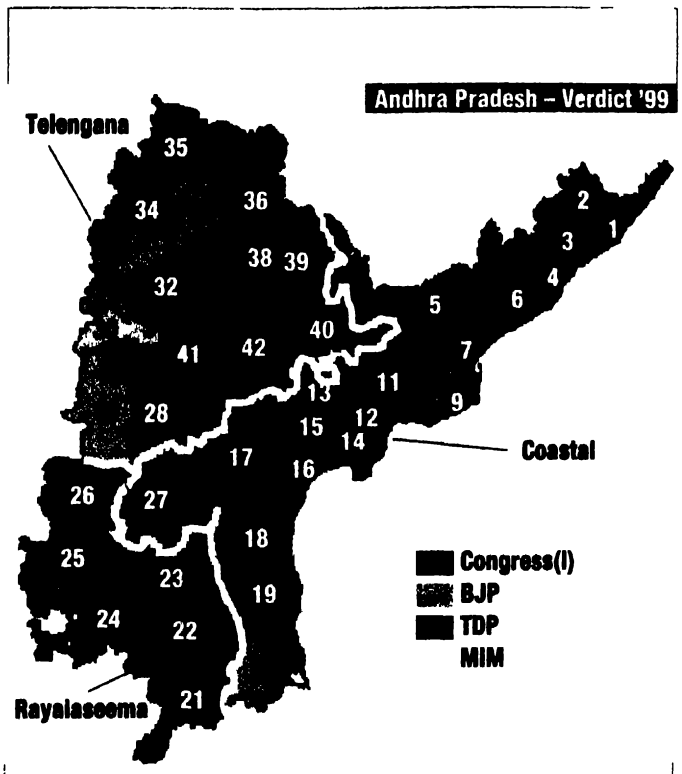
The TDP-BJP combine won comprehensively in all the three regions. Even in Rayalaseema, the last remaining bastion of the Congress(I), the TDP-BJP combine took four seats from the Congress(I) and improved on its vote share over 1998. In Telengana, considered the region where the BJP is the strongest, the TDP-BJP's combined vote share fell by three percentage points since 1998, but it managed to finish well ahead of the Congress(I). This is the region where the Left parties secured a reasonably good share of the popular vote. This is also the first election since 1984 that the Left parties did not contest as part of a broader alliance, and their performance this time has not been good. In the coastal region, the TDP-BJP combine won all but two seats.

An analysis of the Assembly election results shows that the TDP dominates in almost all the regions. Although the decision to break with the Left parties and team up with the BJP cost the TDP 20 seats in the Telengana region, it retained its hold over coastal Andhra and fared better than the Congress(I) in Rayalaseema. The Left parties suffered

Region	Seats	Turn out 1999	Change over 1998	Cong(I)+ Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	TDP+BJP Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	CPI-CPI(M) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
Telengana	15	65.0	-0.4	2	-2	40.5	+8.0	12	+4	46.9	-2.8	0	-1	5.1	-2.9
Coastal	21	69.4	+2.3	2	-11	43.7	+2.2	19	+12	51.7	+0.3	0	-1	1.8	-1.8
Rayalaseema	6	66.6	+4.7	1	-4	46.3	+1.3	5	+4	50.7	+3.1	0	0	0	-5.7
Total	**42**	**67.6**	**+1.6**	**5**	**-17**	**42.8**	**+4.4**	**36**	**+20**	**49.6**	**-0.5**	**0**	**-2**	**2.8**	**-2.7**

the most significant losses this time. The Congress(I) made marginal gains in Telengana and elsewhere, as compared to 1994, when it drew a blank. In all, the TDP retained 141 of the seats it had won in 1994, passed on eight seats to the BJP, and won back 15 from the Left parties, its former allies. The Congress(I) retained only 10 of the 26 seats it had won in 1994, but took 65 from the TDP and 15 from the Left parties.

A carefully crafted alliance and a successful transfer of votes was thus crucial to the TDP's victory. The CSDS survey data show just how successful the vote transfer from the BJP and the TDP to the new combine was, notwithstanding the dissatisfaction in the State unit of the BJP over the terms of the alliance. In the matter of holding on to its own share of votes in the 1998 elections, the Congress(I)'s performance was the best. It also took away a significant slice of the votes of the BJP and the TDP. The TDP, which retained 85 per cent of its 1998 votes, could not win over many votes from the Congress(I) but it managed to offset its losses by adding 82 per cent of the BJP votes of 1998 to the combine's votes. It also captured the majority of the votes secured in 1998 by the CPI and the CPI(M), its allies at that time. As in the case of Bihar, excessive dependence on alliances rendered the Left parties vulnerable.



No.	Constituency	Winner	No.	Constituency	Winner
1	Srikakulam	TDP	22	Rajampet	TDP
2	Parvathipuram(S.T)	TDP	23	Cuddapah	Cong(I)
3	Bobbili	Cong(I)	24	Hindupur	TDP
4	Visakhapatnam	TDP	25	Anantapur	TDP
5	Bhadrachalam(S.T.)	TDP	26	Kurnool	TDP
6	Anakapalli	TDP	27	Nandyal	TDP
7	Kakinada	TDP	28	Nagar Kurnool(S C)	TDP
8	Rajahmundry	BJP	29	Mahbubnagar	BJP
9	Amalapuram(S.C)	TDP	30	Hyderabad	MIM
10	Narasapur	BJP	31	Secunderabad	BJP
11	Eluru	TDP	32	Siddipet(S C)	TDP
12	Machilipatnam	TDP	33	Medak	BJP
13	Vijayawada	TDP	34	Nizamabad	TDP
14	Tenali	TDP	35	Adilabad	TDP
15	Guntur	TDP	36	Peddapalli(S C)	TDP
16	Bapatla	TDP	37	Karimnagar	BJP
17	Narasaraopet	Cong(I)	38	Hanamkonda	TDP
18	Ongole	TDP	39	Warangal	TDP
19	Nellore(S.C.)	TDP	40	Khammam	Cong(I)
20	Tirupati(S.C.)	BJP	41	Nalgonda	TDP
21	Chittoor	TDP	42	Miryalguda	Cong(I)

In the Assembly elections, both the TDP-BJP combine and the Congress(I) retained more than 90 per cent of the votes that they secured in the Lok Sabha elections.

Underlying the TDP-BJP's successful coalition was the forging of a new social coalition of the upper and the middle castes The addition of BJP votes strengthened the TDP's position among the upper castes and the peasant OBCs, besides consolidating its traditional Kamma votes. These gains more than compensated for the loss of the votes of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes owing to the break with the Left parties, and of Muslims, who shifted their allegiance to the Congress(I). Even so, the TDP-BJP combine enjoyed more support than the Congress(I) did among adivasis; the TDP's share of votes of Muslims is one of the highest for any ally of the BJP.

The class profile of the TDP-BJP combine shows an uneasy coming together of the upper classes (who predominantly support the BJP) and the lower classes (who support the TDP). The Congress(I) fared well among the middle class but was squeezed from the upper end by the BJP and the lower end by the TDP.

CSDS Team with
G KOTESHWAR PRASAD

Region-wise tally in the Assembly elections, 1999 (Gains/losses over Assembly elections 1994)

	Seats	TDP	BJP	Congress	Left	Others
Telengana	107	49(20)	8(+5)	42(+36)	2(-19)	5(-3)
Coastal	134	99(-7)	3(+3)	28(+18)	0(-11)	4(-3)
Rayalaseema	53	31(-10)	1(+1)	21(+11)	0(-2)	0(0)
Total	**293***	**179(-37)**	**12(+9)**	**91(+65)**	**2(-32)**	**9(-6)**

Note *Election not held in Seerpur Assembly constituency of Telangana*

The BJP votes of 1998 did get transferred to TDP in 1999

1998	1999		
	Cong(I)+	TDP+	Left+allies
Congress(I)	91	8	---
BJP	19	82	---
TDP	14	85	---
Left+	7	51	35

Note State sample size is 828

The social coalition of TDP-BJP

	Cong (I)	TDP+
Upper Caste	33	65
Reddy*	70	28
Kamma*	7	90
Kapus	46	54
Peasant OBC	36	64
Lower OBC	42	47
Dalit	64	33
Adivasi	32	43
Muslim	64	30

*Note *denotes that the sample size for the group is too small to allow very confident reading*

Flow of votes from Lok Sabha to Assembly elections

Lok Sabha	Assembly		
	Cong(I)+	TDP+	Others
Congress(I)	91	5	4
TDP+	4	95	1
Others	3	5	92

TDP has lost its edge among the women voters

	Cong(I)	TDP+	Left allies
Male	46	49	5
Female	43	49	5

Congress squeezed from both ends

Class	Cong(I)	TDP+
High	47	49
Middle	54	42
Low	42	52
Very low	39	50

TDP is older than it thinks

	Cong(I)	TDP+	Left allies
Upto 25 years	48	47	3
26 to 35 years	43	49	6
36 to 45 years	39	52	6
46 to 55 years	53	40	6
Above 55 years	43	52	4

Tamil Nadu: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	11	2	11 1
BJP	6	4	7 1
CPI(M)	2	1	2 4
AIADMK	24	10	25 7
DMK	19	12	23 1
PMK	7	5	8 2
MDMK	5	4	5 9
MGR ADMK	1	1	1 5

IF Tamil Nadu threatened to be a psephologist s nightmare this time, the exit poll disaster of 1998 was not the only reason The basic alliance arithmetic of the State was written afresh between the elections of 1998 and 1999 So much so that it is difficult to fix a benchmark from where gains and losses can be calculated In 1998, the alliance led by the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which included the Bharatiya Janata Party, swept the polls it won 30 of the 39 seats on the basis of a lead of merely five percentage points over the rival front, which comprised, among others, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) The Congress(I) fought independently and ended up empty handed, with just 4 8 per cent of the vote

By the time 1999 elections were held, political merry-go-round had turned full cycle If the new alliances were to be judged by the performances of their individual components in the 1998 elections, the starting point for the AIADMK-Congress(I) combine was 33 8 per cent of the vote, while the new DMK-BJP front started with an advantage, at 39 3 per cent of the vote The TMC-led third front could be assumed to have been left with 21 9 per cent

Region	Seats	Turn -out 1999	Change over 1998	Won
North	23	58.1	0	4
West	5	57.2	+0.5	5
South	11	58.1	-0.1	7
Total	39	58.0	+0.1	19

Unlike in Karnataka, the Congress(I) could not reconstruct its base among the poorest sections

During the campaign, TDP leaders repeatedly claimed that the party enjoyed the overwhelming support of women and young voters The survey findings do not support this claim Young voters were equally divided between the TDP and the Congress(I) If anything, the TDP does best among the middle-aged, who perhaps acquired their right to vote about the time the TDP first came to power in dramatic circumstances, in 1983 Similarly, the TDP, which earlier drew a greater share of its support from women than from men, now enjoys about the same proportion of votes across the gender divide The rural-urban divide does not explain much of the difference, for the TDP enjoys the same lead in both areas The Left parties have their traditional source of support in the villages

The survey reveals that as compared to voters in many other parts of the country, voters in Andhra Pradesh are more politicised, more confident, and more attuned to regional politics At the same time, 75 per cent of TDP voters expressed a preference for A B Vajpayee as Prime Minister About 47 per cent of the voters claimed that they had finalised their voting choice much before the campaign began ■

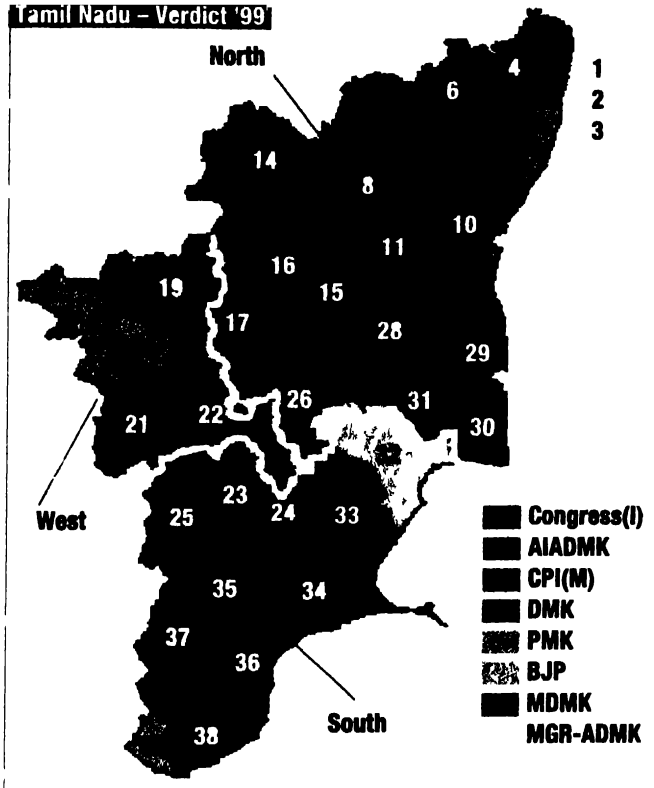
No major shift in popular mood

The final results show a much higher vote share for both the AIADMK-Congress(I) and DMK-BJP fronts, gained at the expense of the TMC However, the final figure of a 5 5 percentage-point gap between the vote shares of the two fronts was exactly what it was at the starting point In other words, the final verdict seems to have had more to do with better alliance-making by the BJP than any major shift in the popular mood

The gap between the vote shares of the two major fronts was to the tune of 8 per cent in the northern region, the largest in the State The DMK and its allies won 19 of the 23 seats here Six of the seats they won were wrested from the rival fronts The AIADMK-led alliance could have ended up in a much worse situation if it were not lucky enough to save seven seats in the southern region despite trailing behind the DMK-led front in the matter of vote share by around two percentage points in each case In the western region, the gap narrowed down to less than one percentage point, and the two fronts shared the honours

In all only 17 out of the 39 seats changed hands in what appears to be a complete turnabout The AIADMK was of course the biggest net loser it conceded 10 of its 18 seats to the DMK-led front and could win back only two The DMK retained all the five seats it had and added seven seats and three percentage points in terms of votes The TMC lost all its three seats, two to the Congress(I) and one to the BJP At 9 3 per cent of the popular vote share, the TMC-led front is nowhere in terms of seats, but retains enough clout to act as a spoiler

As seats changed hands, so did votes The 1999 elections in Tamil Nadu represented an unusual phenomenon of voters changing their voting preferences as the alliances got forged afresh The Congress(I) carried most of its meagre vote share to its new alliance So did the DMK, except that its share was not meagre and was not entirely its own The TMC is virtually born anew, shedding most of the votes it won in 1998 The 1998 vote of the AIADMK front appears to have got split between the alliances led by the DMK and the AIADMK this time But this is more apparent than real, for the voters only continued to vote for the same party which had changed sides Significantly, the direct



No.	Constituency	Winner	No.	Constituency	Winner
1	Madras North	DMK	21	Pollachi(S C)	MDMK
2	Madras Central	DMK	22	Palani	AIADMK
3	Madras South	DMK	23	Dindigul	AIADMK
4	Sriperumbudur(S C)	DMK	24	Madurai	CPI(M)
5	Chengalpattu	PMK	25	Periyakulam	AIADMK
6	Arakkonam	DMK	26	Karur	AIADMK
7	Vellore	PMK	27	Tiruchirapalli	BJP
8	Tiruppattur	DMK	28	Perambalur(S C)	DMK
9	Wandiwash	PMK	29	Mayiladuturai	Cong(I)
10	Tindivanam	MDMK	30	Nagapattinam(S C)	DMK
11	Cuddalore	DMK	31	Thanjavur	DMK
12	Chidambaram(S C)	PMK	32	Pudukkottai	MGR ADMK
13	Dharmapuri	PMK	33	Sivaganga	Cong(I)
14	Krishnagiri	DMK	34	Ramanathapuram	AIADMK
15	Rasipuram(S C)	AIADMK	35	Sivakasi	MDMK
16	Salem	AIADMK	36	Tirunelveli	AIADMK
17	Tiruchengode	MDMK	37	Tenkasi(S C)	AIADMK
18	Nilgiris	BJP	38	Tiruchendur	DMK
19	Gobichettipalayam	AIADMK	39	Nagercoil	BJP
20	Coimbatore	BJP			

Tamil Nadu: Region wise analysis of Lok Sabha elections 1999

AIADMK+Congress(I)			DMK+				TMC+				Others			
Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
-8	41.9	+6.8	19	+6	49.7	+3.8	0	-1	6.9	-10.7	0	-1	1.47	-2.9
0	46.8	+17.5	5	0	46.7	-1.7	0	0	5.9	-16.6	0	0	1.85	+0.77
0	39.1	-6.4	1	+1	51.6	+21.4	0	-2	16.5	-6.4	0	-1	2.77	-12.3
-8	41.3	+7.4	25	+11	47.1	+7.8	0	-3	9.3	-16.9	0	-2	1.84	-5.0

Voters shifted loyalties as the parties changed alliances

1998	1999		
	AIADMK+	DMK+	TMC+
Congress(I)	72	14	11
AIADMK+	44	43	11
DMK+	12	71	15

Note Sample size in Tamil Nadu is 721
The survey underestimated the AIADMK and the Congress votes and over-estimated the TMC-P T. votes This error is reflected in all the tables, though this is unlikely to affect the conclusions about social basis of parties

The new alliances forged new social coalitions

	AIADMK+	DMK+	TMC+
Upper caste*	27	70	3
Thevar	34	64	1
Vanniyar	32	61	7
Chettiyar	33	64	0
Other OBC	40	52	8
Arundhatiyar & Chakkiliyar	22	20	54
Other S.C.	47	32	15
Muslim*	63	33	4
Christian*	50	46	0

*Note: *Sample size too small to allow confident generalisation*

DMK-BJP front depends more on the upper class support

	AIADMK+	DMK+	TMC+
High	30	65	3
Middle	36	59	6
Low	27	54	17
Lowest	42	30	25

Education reflects class divisions

	AIADMK+	DMK+	TMC+
Graduate	28	69	4
College	25	65	8
Middle	40	47	11
Illiterate	35	36	27

Jayalalitha-Sonia combine draws more women

	AIADMK+	DMK+	TMC+
Male	32	52	14
Female	38	46	15

shift of votes between the two traditional rivals, the DMK and the AIADMK, was negligible. Much of the flow took place via the allies, such as the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), which changed sides between the two elections. The viability and success of this vote transfer make coalition politics in Tamil Nadu function in a much less arbitrary fashion than elsewhere. It is not surprising that at 34 per cent, Tamil Nadu has a much higher acceptance for coalitions than the national average of 21.

AS the internal composition of the three main fronts changed substantially between the previous two elections, their respective social bases also went through major transitions. Between 1998 and 1999 members of the upper castes and of the Thevar community united behind the DMK-BJP front while the Vanniyars too shifted their loyalty to this front. The formation of the AIADMK-Congress(I) alliance facilitated a consolidation of the Muslim vote. However, it could not lead to a consolidation of the Scheduled Caste vote, as the TMC's alliance with Puthiya Thamizhagam (P.T.) took away the support of the majority of Arundhatiyars and Chakkiliyars. The Congress(I), which fought on its own in 1998, had fairly uniform support in terms of different communities, barring Christians. It did not, therefore, carry with it any exclusive vote bank when it joined the AIADMK-led front.

There is a clear gender divide in terms of support for the two main fronts. The DMK-BJP front is more popular with men than it is with women, and the reverse is true for the AIADMK-Congress(I) front.

INTERESTINGLY, the major parties carry their class profile to the alliance they join. Last year the AIADMK-BJP front had a stronger base among the lower classes and the DMK-TMC combine was supported more by the upper classes. This time the AIADMK-Congress(I) alliance inherited the lower-class profile while the DMK-BJP combine showed an upper class profile. The only change is the entry of the TMC combine, which took away some of the poorest from the AIADMK. Clearly, the national parties in Tamil Nadu take over the basic cleavages of Dravidian politics depending on which ally they team up with. Voting by the levels of education shows the same pattern as in class, for education is largely a function of class. Again, the highly educated mostly support the DMK-BJP, while the AIADMK front and the TMC-P.T. both compete with each other for the votes of the least educated.

There is a clear gender divide in terms of support for the two main fronts. The DMK-BJP front is more popular with men than it is with women, and the reverse is true for the AIADMK-Congress(I) front. But the six-point gap is not as big as one would expect from a front that was jointly led by two women, Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi.

THE preferred choice for Prime Minister reveals that the voters of either of the main fronts are firmly behind their national allies' prime ministerial candidate. More than four-fifths of the AIADMK front's voters named Sonia Gandhi while nearly 90 per cent of the DMK alliance mentioned Vajpayee – surprisingly high figures given the secondary role of the Congress(I) and the BJP in their respective alliances in Tamil Nadu. The large percentage of TMC voters who nominated Sonia Gandhi as their choice for the top spot indicates that the party continues to occupy some of the Congress(I) space.

The distinctiveness of Tamil politics has not been eroded by the presence of national political parties in the State. Nationally, 50 per cent of the voters believe that they should be loyal to their own region first, and then to India. However, in Tamil Nadu 78 per cent put their own region first. One must therefore read the gains that the BJP made in the State with caution. ■

A race between traditional rivals

CSDS Team with
G. GOPA KUMAR

THE outcome of the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala reflects continuity rather than change. Notwithstanding media speculation about a possible shock to the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) owing to organisational problems, the overall tally of seats was the same as in 1998 – 11-9 in favour of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Last year's results had shown that the LDF was in a rather precarious position: a mere three percentage-point swing from the LDF to the UDF would deprive it of all its seats. This time the UDF's vote share did go up by about one percentage point and the LDF's vote share declined by about the same measure. However, this did not translate into any net loss of seats for the LDF. The swing was more pronounced in the central region of the State, where the LDF lost one seat However, it gained one seat in the north where the decline in the BJP's vote share upset the balance.

Once again, the BJP failed to win a single seat in the State. In fact its vote share declined by four percentage points, a net decline even if one includes the vote share of its ally, the Janata Dal (United). It seems that for some time to come Kerala will remain the only major State where the BJP or its allies do not matter in the electoral race.

In this round of elections, four seats changed hands. Kollam, where the Republican Socialist Party won in 1998, went to the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Congress(I) wrested two seats – Thrissur and Adoor – from the CPI, which left the latter unrepresented from Kerala. The Kerala Congress (Joseph) and the CPI(M) wrested one seat each from the Congress(I). All but one of the LDF's nine seats are now held by the CPI(M).

Kerala: Party Position 1999

Party	Contested	Won	Vote share (%)
Cong(I)	17	8	39.4
CPI(M)	12	8	27.9
IUML	2	2	5.3
KEC	1	1	2.4
KCM	1	1	2.3

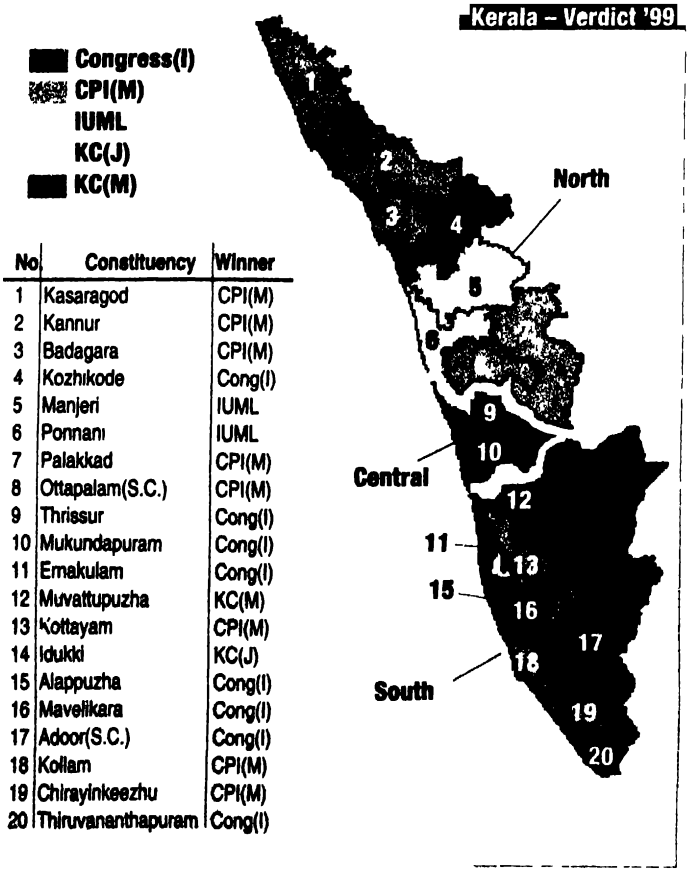
A look at the flow of votes between 1998 and 1999 shows that voter loyalty has remained stable since the 1998 elections. There is, of course, nothing new about it. Party loyalties are far stronger in Kerala than in many other States. The extent to which the main parties were able to retain their support base is staggering: 94 per cent for the UDF, 92 per cent for the LDF and 89 per cent for the BJP. Even before the campaign started, about 51 per cent of the voters had made up their minds about whom they would vote for. This was nearly 20 percentage points higher than the national average.

Party loyalty is not, however, to be taken for granted. The two main fronts canvassed hard, reaching out (in the CSDS sample) to 95 per cent of the electorate. A small percentage of voters shifted from the LDF to the UDF and *vice-versa*. There was, however, a bigger shift from the BJP to the LDF.

One of the features of the party system in Kerala is that a stable social alliance underlies both the dominant fronts. The extent of voter polarisation on caste-community lines is higher than in most other States.

One of the features of the party system in Kerala is that a stable social alliance underlies both the dominant fronts. The extent of voter polarisation on caste-community lines is higher than in most other States. This round of elections saw no major change in the pattern. The UDF, of which the Indian Union Muslim League and the Kerala Congress (Mani) are constituents, enjoys greater support among Muslims and Christians. This time, about three-fourths of these sections of the minorities appear to have supported the UDF. The LDF's support base is made up largely of the backward classes and the Scheduled Castes. It secured the support of the majority of voters from the Ezhava community and three-quarters of voters of the Scheduled Castes and

Kerala – Verdict '99



No.	Constituency	Winner
1	Kasaragod	CPI(M)
2	Kannur	CPI(M)
3	Badagara	CPI(M)
4	Kozhikode	Cong(I)
5	Manjeri	IUML
6	Ponnani	IUML
7	Palakkad	CPI(M)
8	Ottapalam(S.C.)	CPI(M)
9	Thrissur	Cong(I)
10	Mukundapuram	Cong(I)
11	Ernakulam	Cong(I)
12	Muvattupuzha	KC(M)
13	Kottayam	CPI(M)
14	Idukki	KC(J)
15	Alappuzha	Cong(I)
16	Mavelikara	Cong(I)
17	Adoor(S.C.)	Cong(I)
18	Kollam	CPI(M)
19	Chirayinkeezhu	CPI(M)
20	Thiruvananthapuram	Cong(I)

Very few votes changed hands between the two elections

1998	1999		
	UDF	LDF	BJP
UDF	94	4	1
LDF	5	92	1
BJP	0	11	89

Note: *Sample size is 381.*

Once again, caste-community

	UDF	LDF	BJP
Nairs	29	39	31
Ezhavas	34	54	12
Dalits/Adivasis	12	78	9
Other Hindus	51	40	8
Muslims	75	24	0
Christians	74	23	0

And a sharp class divide

	UDF	LDF	BJP
High	53	28	12
Middle	47	43	8
Low	53	36	4
Lowest	36	59	3

the Scheduled Tribes. As expected, the BJP picked up most of its votes from the upper rungs of the Hindu social hierarchy, in particular, from the upper-caste Nair community.

Yet political alignment in Kerala is not just caste- or religion-based. There is an equally sharp alignment on class lines; this cuts across community-based divisions and is more pronounced at the two extremes. The LDF vote is concentrated among the lower classes. It is twice as popular among the poorest as it is among the well-to-do. The profiles

Greater preference for the BJP among the educated

	UDF	LDF	BJP
Matric and above	48	31	14
Upto Matric	46	46	3
Below Primary	47	46	3

UDF does very well among women voters

	UDF	LDF	BJP
Male	39	46	13
Female	52	40	7

Both the major alliances are ageing, not the BJP

	UDF	LDF	BJP
Upto 25 years	44	34	22
26 to 35 years	44	42	11
36 to 45 years	45	46	8
46 to 55 years	48	43	10
Above 55 years	52	41	7

of the UDF and the BJP are radically different; these two formations draw support from those who belong to the upper classes. There is, however, one exception to this: the UDF does better among those sections that are just one rung above the lowest.

Unlike elsewhere in India, the class pattern is not directly reflected in the educational profile and the voting pattern. Both the major fronts get similar support across the education divide. The LDF draws less of its support from among the well educated, while the BJP gets most of its votes from this group.

The gender disparities in respect of support for the UDF are striking. Across the country the Congress(I) is traditionally supported by more women than men; in Kerala the difference on this count between the genders is 13 percentage points. Both the LDF and the BJP thus do better with male voters.

The age profile of supporters of the various parties is illustrative. The UDF enjoys greater support among the elderly; the LDF secures much of its votes from among the middle-aged. Both of them fare rather less well with young voters than with voters in other age groups. The BJP, on the other hand, appears to have the most significant appeal among the youngest among voters. If this trend continues for some years, both the major fronts will have something to worry about.

The survey reveals that Kerala is the only State where Vajpayee figures third in the ranking in respect of voters' preference for Prime Minister. Sonia Gandhi was preferred by 41 per cent of those surveyed, Jyoti Basu by 20 per cent and Vajpayee by 19 per cent. The support that Jyoti Basu enjoys also indicates that the LDF voters' preference is governed by political consideration rather than regional considerations.

In Kerala the competition is principally between the LDF and the UDF, with the BJP nowhere in the picture. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the Central government. Fifty per cent of the respondents said they were not at all satisfied with its performance, compared to the national average of 25 per cent. The BJP also faces the most strident opposition in Kerala, with 11 per cent of the electorate stating that it would never consider voting for it – significantly higher than the 'negative vote' secured by any other party, either regionally or nationally. There is a high level of opposition to many of the BJP's favourite issues, from Kargil and Pokhran to building a temple at Ayodhya. ■

Region	Seats	Turn -out 1999	Change over 1998	UDF				LDF				BJP			
				Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
North	8	71.9	+0.5	3	-1	46.7	+1.8	5	+1	43.8	+0.1	0	0	8.5	-0.0
Central	3	69.1	-1.9	3	+1	49.5	+2.2	0	-1	41.9	-2.8	0	0	5.3	-2.5
South	9	68.9	-1	5	0	46.3	-0.5	4	0	44.1	-1.4	0	0	8.2	-2.6
Total	20	70.2	-0.5	11	0	46.9	+0.9	9	0	43.7	-0.9	0	0	7.6	-1.6

The CTBT setback

The rejection of the CTBT by the U.S. Senate is a blow to American leadership of the global arms control initiative.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

IN a "letter of transmittal" calling for the U.S. Senate's "advice" and "consent to ratification" of a global treaty banning nuclear explosive testing, President Bill Clinton referred to the pact arrived at in 1996 as "a signal event in the history of arms control". Elsewhere he used more eloquent phraseology. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), he said, is the "longest sought and hardest fought prize" in the history of global arms control.

The U.S. Senate, dominated for all of Clinton's tenure by the Republican Party, seemed oblivious to these virtues. Having received a formal request for ratification in September 1997, it chose the path of evasion. Jesse Helms, the arch-conservative chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, simply refused to schedule a hearing on the CTBT, fatuously insisting that his priorities were elsewhere. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, another conservative Republican, served as a powerful accomplice to Helms all through this endeavour.

Towards the end of September, shortly after the United Nations Secretary-General announced his intention to convene a meeting of "states parties" to facilitate the early entry into force of the CTBT, the Senate Republicans roused themselves to frenetic activity. Displaying a sense of urgency that caught the Clinton administration unawares, Helms and Lott insisted on rushing the treaty to the floor of the Senate by October 12.

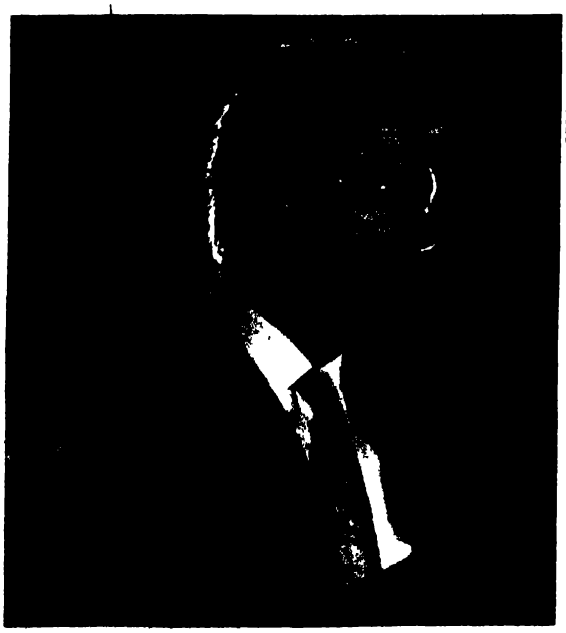
What followed was farce of a high order. On October 14, after a discussion that was accurately described by *The New York Times* as "ludicrously compressed", the U.S. Senate rejected the CTBT by a margin of 51 to 48. The ratification of international treaties requires a two-thirds legislative majority in the U.S. The CTBT was denied even the small, if symbolic, solace of a simple majority.

The last days of the CTBT reflected all the lack of civility that has come to characterise relations between the Clinton presidency and the legislative branch. When it became evident that the Senate Republicans were working towards defeating the treaty, anxious officials from the government went to work to get the vote postponed. The Senate Republicans were amenable to a postponement on one condition – the vote would be deferred if the Clinton administration were to agree never again to bring forward the treaty for consideration. As a prominent Senator from the Democratic Party put it: it was a choice between hemlock and arsenic. Yet a deal was impossible even on these rather skewed terms, since the rules of procedure empower any one Senator to block the cancellation of a vote once it is scheduled.

After the vote, a grim-faced Clinton denounced the Senate for its "reckless and partisan" approach to a treaty of epochal significance. He also vowed to keep up the quest for a complete ban on nuclear explosive testing: "This agreement is critical to protecting the American people from the dangers of nuclear war. It is, therefore, well worth fighting for. And I assure you, the fight is far from over."

Liberal circles in the U.S. have reacted with alarm at the Senate's action, which they see as embodying a new spirit of armed isolationism. It is a mood that is an unstable amalgam of mutually irreconcilable attitudes. The only previous instance of the U.S. Senate rejecting an international treaty with global security implications was when it turned down the Versailles Treaty in 1919. That spirit of isolationism has today been compounded with a certain military arrogance, the confidence that the U.S. can literally shoot itself out of any tight spot.

In these renditions, the rejection of the CTBT by the U.S. Senate is a mortal blow to American leadership of the global arms control initiative. "The Senate's action... is a destructive abdication of U.S. leadership on arms control and other international issues," said *The New York Times*. Since this is a perspective that has been offered even by the key allies of the U.S. and by disarmament lobbies, it is well worth a serious evaluation. This requires, at the minimum, an appreciation of the function that the CTBT played in the global architecture of power.



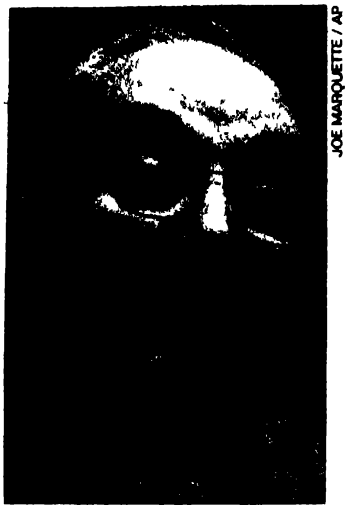
GREG GI

President Bill Clinton at a press conference after the Senate's rejection of the CTBT.

UNTIL 1995, the U.S. remained a recalcitrant element in the multilateral negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament towards a nuclear test ban treaty. The U.S. military establishment was keen that explosions up to a yield of 10 kilograms should be free of all restraints. Hawks in strategic circles were similarly insistent that an easy "opt-out" clause should be inserted, which would enable the U.S. to withdraw from all treaty obligations within a definite timeframe.

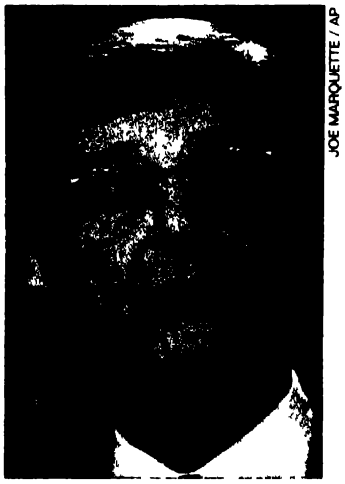
The story since then can be recounted in the words of Robert Bell, who has been responsible as Clinton's top adviser on nuclear security matters for shaping the new contours of U.S. policy: "In January of 1995 we made some

very hard decisions within the Clinton administration with respect to the content of our comprehensive test ban negotiating position. ... (This was) because we had come to the conclusion that without the change we would not have prevailed in winning the indefinite and unconditional extension of the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty). There were a lot of news stories being written through 1995 that said, in effect, we were losing this battle and that the NPT was going to go down. There is no question in my mind that if we had sustained the policy of the two previous administrations and refused to negotiate a comprehensive test ban in any forum, the Conference on Disarmament or otherwise, we would not have gotten the NPT extended."



JOE MARQUETTE / AP

Jesse Helms, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.



JOE MARQUETTE / AP

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott.

In early-1998, with intimations of the Republican intent to scuttle the CTBT, Bell issued an explicit warning: "If the Senate should reject or refuse to act on the CTBT, I believe we put at risk the NPT."

Fresh hints of turbulence are already evident. At the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, it was agreed that the "states parties" would undertake a comprehensive review in April-May 2000. Three meetings of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) towards this review conference have been held since 1997. The last PrepCom held in May in New York was a fractious affair, with several of the signatories calling in question the sincerity of the nuclear weapons states (NWSs) in negotiating a framework for disarmament as they are obliged to under Article VI of the treaty. A new grouping of nations that spans the traditional polarities of the Cold War – the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) – issued a warning at the "faltering" pace of "efforts to implement all the obligations of the NPT".

In scarcely concealed disdain at the renewed call for an accelerated programme of disarmament, the head of the U.S. delegation to the PrepCom dismissed those "trying to identify a new agenda" when there is an "existing agenda that remains to be completed". That agenda, as formulated by the U.S. administration, can be reduced to three key components – entry into force of the CTBT, the resumption of the strategic arms reduction process with the Russian Federation under the framework of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), and multilateral talks under the auspices of the Conference on Disarmament for a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT).

Viewed against this background, the U.S. Senate's rejection of the CTBT represents a much needed closure. Since the START process has long been deadlocked and the FMCT shows no sign of getting off the ground, the American disarmament agenda is now effectively defunct.

In the U.S. narration, the bilateral arms reduction process involving itself and Russia has been blocked by the failure of the Russian Duma to ratify START-II. This interpretation glosses over the fact that the votes necessary for ratification had been lined up in the Duma on at least three occasions. On every single occasion, the possibility of ratification was dispelled by aggressive American actions on the global strategic chessboard.

In 1997, the U.S. administration brusquely overrode Russian objections to clear the way for the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to the doorsteps of that beleaguered country. The elaborate pretence that NATO expansion was not targeted at Russia obviously failed to carry any conviction. The insincerity of the flattery that was used then – about Russia being too large and mighty a country to be part of NATO – did not make things any more comfortable. The provocative expansion of the alliance that has since authored a new doctrine in aggressive militarism came just when the Duma was due to take up START-II for ratification. Angered by the U.S.' insincerity and its insensitivity towards Russia's security concerns, the Duma deferred consideration on the matter then.

Another setback came last December with the bombing of Iraq by the U.S. and the U.K. Infuriated by the U.S. arrogance and its obvious disregard of world opinion, the Duma officially pronounced that START-II was dead. In the following month, the Russian armed forces exulted in the announcement of a series of subcritical nuclear tests in the Arctic region. Since they do not generate an explosion, these tests are in conformity with the obligations of the CTBT. Such tests have been used repeatedly by the U.S. since the CTBT was signed, as part of the "Stockpile Stewardship and Management Programme" – a multi-billion dollar project to maintain the American nuclear arsenal in a state of advanced preparedness.

In January this year, the U.S. announced that it was setting in train preparations for the deployment of a national missile defence (NMD). U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen set out two criteria to determine when the deployment would take place: the availability of technology and the existence of a missile threat from a "rogue state".

Under the Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) Treaty signed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1972, both sides are committed to not putting in place a missile defence system. The understanding behind this is simple – both sides must be equally vulnerable to the other side's attack, since deterrence would otherwise lose its potency as a doctrine. If one side were to seek to introduce a missile defence system, the other side would be compelled to multiply enormously its offensive capability, in order to maintain the balance of terror where it was before.

Cohen was at pains to emphasise that NMD deployment would not be intended to counteract the Russian missile threat. In this sense, he claimed, there would be no fundamental breach of the ABM Treaty. In case there was an element of dissonance between the requirements of NMD deployment and the terms of the ABM treaty, said Cohen, he

would expect Russia to accept the necessary amendments to the agreement. If not, then the U.S. would consider withdrawing from its obligations under the ABM Treaty.

Russia was not convinced then and U.S. actions in the Balkans heightened concerns in the Duma later. In April, at the height of the war of aggression in Yugoslavia, Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree on developing and deploying tactical nuclear weapons. This follows the reversal in 1998 of the country's "no first use" policy and its decision in March to use nuclear arms in the defence of its territory and its allies.

Concurrent suggestions by the U.S. that it would consider deploying a "theatre missile defence" (TMD) system in Taiwan, have raised hackles in China. A direct consequence of the January announcements on missile defence systems has been a persistent impasse at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. After having closed the year 1998 with ad hoc committees on a fissile material cutoff and negative security assurances, the Conference has failed all through this year to even begin negotiations. The Chinese delegation, for instance, has brought up the issue of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, arguing with great credibility that they need to be addressed along with the fissile material cutoff and negative security assurances.

INDIA for its part has maintained an uncharacteristically low profile on this front since the Pokhran blasts last year. Official spokesmen have claimed that the U.S. Senate's rejection of the CTBT makes no material difference to the Indian position, which is still premised upon the centrality of evolving a domestic political consensus. There is, however, an unmistakable sense of relief in official circles that the new concord with the U.S. over fighting terrorism will not be held hostage by the CTBT.

In seeking this new relationship, India has abandoned its commitment to global nuclear disarmament. At the Conference on Disarmament, India finds itself in the unlikely company of the U.S. and Israel in insisting that existing fissile material stockpiles should not be covered by a cutoff treaty. After a series of uncoordinated interventions in the recent past, India under the leadership of Prime Minister A..B. Vajpayee seems intent today on petitioning the masters of the global nuclear imperium for the privileges of a nuclear weapons state. ■

Nuclear contradictions

Japan's reactions to nuclear issues, specifically the CTBT, appear to be prompted more by a need to perpetuate the global military balance as it stands now, than by a desire to avoid a recurrence of the events of 1945.

F.J. KHERGAMVALA
in Tokyo

"Japan may be in a unique position to play a role of global importance now... because Japan is by far the wealthiest, strongest country in the world without a nuclear programme."

"If the Japanese go to the Chinese and say, 'don't start testing', go to the Indians and say 'don't start testing again'..."

– U.S. President Bill Clinton

IT is not too often that Japan's domestic media and the foreign media reflect similar opinions on matters relating to that country. However, the September-end accident in a uranium processing plant at Tokaimura, about 160 km from Tokyo (*Frontline*, November 5), prompted such a reaction. The accident confirmed once again that Japan's culture and structure does not allow for rapid crisis management. The mishap brought to mind the events that followed the Kobe earthquake of January 1995. Although authorities put into effect a bold plan to contain the damage and stem the leakage on the night of September 30, the 300,000 people of Tokai and the surrounding areas had to undergo a 17-hour nightmare under a proverbial mushroom cloud. Further, even now, none of them know whether they have been affected, and if yes, the extent to which they have been affected.

After visiting the site of the accident, experts from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency expressed surprise at the "primitive" nature of the accident in an otherwise technologically-advanced country.

The past few weeks have indeed been bad for Japan, with several myths stemming from its overall nuclear culture, perceived or otherwise, and its policies being exploded in the international arena. Particularly galling to the Government of Keizo Obuchi and to those who have shaped the country's security doctrine was the fact that the U.S. Senate defeated the Clinton administration's effort to delay a vote on the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). It was, to borrow from one of Japan's financial imperatives, a "comprehensive Big-Bang" that blasted Japanese diplomacy into reality. As much as the defeat silenced the Clinton administration's moral crusade against countries such as India and Pakistan, so did it scuttle Japan's nuclear diplomacy and perhaps spark a debate on a review of its probably hidden plans on an autonomous nuclear deterrent.

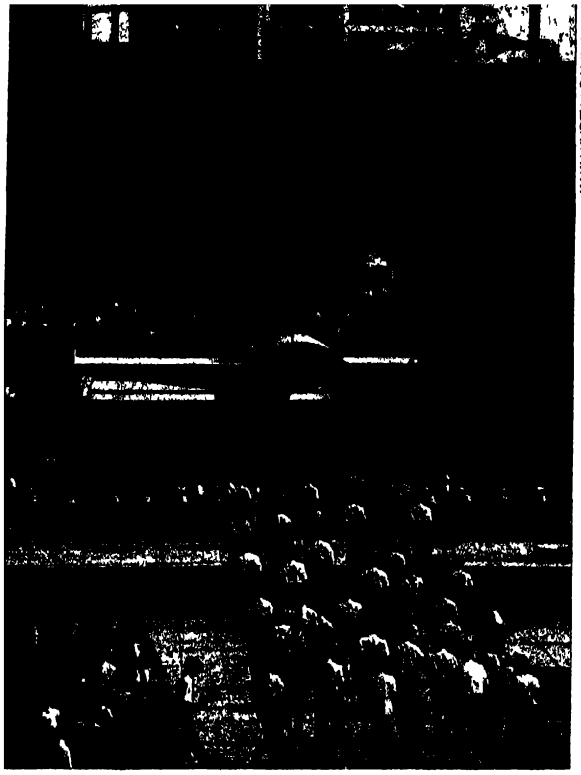
But let us first deal with a few myths and realities in the light of the Tokai mishap and the CTBT impasse.

Myth 1 and reality: Japan is the only country in the world against which a nuclear weapon has been used. For over 50 years, Japan has tried to fool its own people and the rest of the world into believing that this terrible tragedy underpins its national policy on nuclear-related issues as well as its domestic power generation planning. Japanese politicians and diplomats do not bat an eyelid while writing speeches that talk about "Japan, the only country to be destroyed by a nuclear weapon..." And so it happened once again this year. The country's outgoing Foreign Minister, Masahiko Koumura, who as Chairman presided over the "Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty" in Vienna in October, used these same words to uphold Japan's demand that the critical 44 nations sign and ratify the CTBT.

The reality is that while responding to nuclear tests by other countries such as France, China, India and Pakistan (but not the U.S), Japan has repeatedly

invoked the moral aspect of the injuries suffered by Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945. But successive governments have based their policies not on the sufferings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but on Japan's dependence on the U.S., the country that was responsible for the suffering of its people, on security matters. Japanese governments have so far wept not over the victims, but over the fact that if the current nuclear order is not perpetuated, it could greatly endanger its own security. The CTBT impasse is a crisis of a different kind that has frozen Japan's international nuclear diplomacy.

The Clinton administration believes that it is to the U.S.' advantage to freeze the *status quo* now since the U.S. has a technological and military edge over the rest of the world, including its rivals who need first to conduct tests even to begin to catch up with it. Japan's total support for the CTBT and for other vehicles that thwart horizontal nuclear proliferation, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, stem not from the fact that "Little Boy" and "Fat Boy" were dropped on its cities, but from the overwhelming need to perpetuate the global military balance as it stands now – with its chief and only patron, the U.S., in a dominant position.



KAKU KURITA/ GAMMA

People gather at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the city.

Myth 2 and reality: On October 14, Bill Clinton said at a news conference in Washington: "Japan may be in a unique position to play a role of global importance now... because Japan is by far the wealthiest, strongest country in the world without a nuclear programme." In a statement he made a day after the Senate rejected the CTBT, the U.S. President said: "If the Japanese go to the Chinese and say, 'don't start testing', go to the Indians and say, 'don't start testing again'..."

These did not seem to be the words of a President who had been well-advised on the CTBT. Or, it may have been that the White House was signalling to Japan to adopt a "carrot-and-stick" strategy. Although the Japanese government has indeed announced that it will use monetary aid to promote the CTBT, records show that its ability to wield the stick is a myth.

The reality is that for about a year and a half, the governments headed by Ryutaro Hashimoto, and later by Keizo Obuchi, have been under the illusion that once the U.S. ratifies the CTBT, followed by Russia and China, the two recent entrants into the nuclear club – India and Pakistan – will have to bend before the existing sanctions. The rest, as they say, will be history.

However, India has refused to bow before Japan's inflexible policy of cutting off aid and linking its resumption to more than just signing the CTBT. Even Pakistan, whose dollar account is in poor shape, has thumbed its nose at Tokyo. Japan is now trying to backtrack and save face by asking India to bail it out.

It is possible that the A.B. Vajpayee-led Government will, at some point, sign the CTBT, probably at a time when it will gain maximum diplomatic advantage – for example, on the eve of the U.S President's visit to India. However, that by itself will not mean a return to the pre-May 1998 days (before India conducted nuclear tests) when there was no friction in the political relations of the two countries.

One wonders if there is a coincidence in Japanese officials and business realising belatedly how far they had gone. Officials have begun sending signals to India that since a government is now firmly in the saddle in New Delhi, it is time to do business again. One reasonable inference is that the Japanese government is using business to rebuild bridges. However, it is too early to surmise whether an India injured by Islamabad's international crusade against New Delhi on the nuclear issue or Tokyo's initial stand on Kashmir and then on Kargil, will agree to help extricate Japan out of a self-inflicted trauma.

With Pakistan, the situation is even more complex. Japan has made no secret about its awareness of the oft-reported link between the Pakistani and North Korean missile programmes and the two countries' suspected nuclear relationship. The Obuchi Government has on various occasions told Pakistan that it must sever these ties with North Korea and never allow its missile-related kinship with that country to evolve into a trade-off under which Pyongyang will benefit from Pakistan's nuclear knowhow.

However, despite the fact that the Japanese Ambassador was one of the first to be allowed to call on Gen. Pervez Musharraf after the military coup in Pakistan, there is no denying the fact that the Obuchi Government's influence is greatly diminished in Islamabad. On the one hand, there is little room for manouevre, in that Japan continues to favour International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan tranches to Pakistan. On the other, Pakistan knows that the Obuchi Government can no longer afford to surrender even that limited leverage. Japan has let it be known that there is no link between IMF aid and the CTBT. At the IMF, Japan will continue to support the release of a $280-million tranche as part of a $1.5-billion loan decided on by the Fund about two years ago.

China is an even bigger nightmare for Japan since the U.S. has left room for China to vent its anger if and when it decides. One scenario is of China carrying out a nuclear test if it is provoked by the U.S. – a visit by the Taiwanese leader Lee Teng-hui or his successor to the U.S., for example. Another scenario revolves around the adoption of an exaggerated pro-Taiwan tilt by a Republican-dominated U.S. government, leading to intense pressure on the Chinese civilian leadership by the country's military and conservative lobby to send Washington a

strong message. The second, a very real and high-probability contingency, is what is worrying Japan.

Japan made sharp visible and invisible distinctions in its attitude towards the nuclear tests conducted by China and by India and Pakistan. *Vis-a-vis* China, the visible explanation was that since it was always known that China was one of the nuclear haves, only a cut-off of grants-in-aid (which has long since been restored) would be enough to assuage Japan's hurt feelings. At a cumulative yen 2 trillion-plus so far, China gets far more annual aid from Japan than either India or Pakistan. Thus, logically, Japan ought to enjoy a greater leverage over China's conduct. However, in reality, it is not so.

The real and invisible reason behind cutting off all aid to India and not to China is that Japan cannot afford to cut off aid to Beijing for moral and practical reasons. Nanjing and the occupation of parts of China by Japan are albatrosses that Japan will always have to bear. Besides, aid to China is the only instrument Japan can employ against the U.S. or European Union nations while competing in the world's fastest growing market.

Myth 3, reality unknown: Finally, the question "Is Japan insured?" Right now, the Obuchi Government and the insurance industry in Japan are doing all they can to cough up billions of yen spread over a decade to meet insurance claims at Tokaimura. According to initial calculations, a billion yen will go to the village alone, with its 30,000 people.

It may not, however, be prompted entirely by altruism. The insurance money is linked to the government's and the industry's desperate need to win back public support on the continuation of the nuclear industry. Among other things, the nuclear industry allows the country to stockpile quantities of plutonium far beyond its power generation needs. Many critics and non-governmental organisations have questioned Japan's plutonium consumption *vis-a-vis* the stockpile report. But this report is not intended to investigate a hugely complex subject that might lead to the conclusion that a renewal of confidence gives Japan the option of taking out its own insurance. Rich people, both wise and unwise, do take out insurance policies against the possibility of the night watchman not turning up for duty one evening. Likewise, people expect nations too to make similar provision. Therein lies Japan's double-faced attitude towards India *vis-a-vis* the CTBT and missile development at large. ■

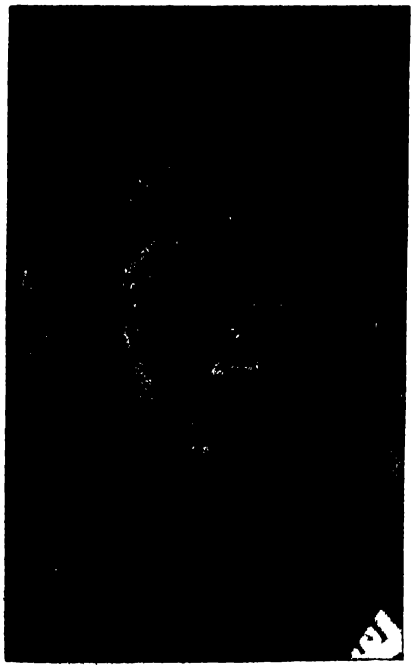
A democratic renaissance

With the election of Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri to the posts of President and Vice-President respectively, Indonesia breaks away from authoritarian rule.

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Jakarta

OCTOBER 21 turned out to be a red-letter day in Indonesia's democratic renaissance when Abdurrahman Wahid, an Islamist scholar with impeccable secular credentials, was elected the Muslim-majority republic's fourth President. The democratic process was strengthened further a day later when Megawati Sukarnoputri, idolised by millions of Indonesians, was elected Vice-President.

The newly constituted People's Consultative Assembly (MPR in local parlance) voted Wahid President, overlooking the claims of Megawati, his political "sister", who remained his only challenger in a contest that was clouded by last-minute withdrawal of candidates.



MUCHTER ZAKARIA/AP

Abdurrahman Wahid, the new President of Indonesia.

Megawati was visibly distraught at losing a determined bid for the highest office. For the world at large, though, the election was proof of democracy at work, after decades of authoritarian rule, in the archipelago-state of many religions, languages and ethnic affinities.

Millions of Indonesians were agitated over Megawati's defeat at the hands of her electoral ally, and several thousands took the issue to the streets. Clashes broke out in Jakarta between pro-Megawati protesters and the security forces, including the Army. The new President, however, acted quickly and ensured Megawati's election as Vice-President without sacrificing democratic principles at the altar of political expediency. His action helped turn a potentially dangerous situation into one of celebration.

Wahid, a frail man who suffers from stroke-induced sight impairment, was widely seen to be in need of a trustworthy and politically energetic Vice-President to assist him. Megawati was the obvious choice, given her growing stature as a leader and her Midas touch in matters related to interaction with the masses, despite her perceived inability or unwillingness to communicate with the elite who are in the vanguard of the democratic revolution. Megawati was elected through a transparent political-constitutional process, leaving no room for doubts about the new President's approach.

An enormous advantage Wahid has gained is the fact that his election was totally free and fair, although a drama of power-brokering was enacted before the vote.

DURING its existence as a free state for over half a century, Indonesia has seen two leaders with extraordinary strength and power of persuasion – Sukarno, Megawati's father, and


ACHMAD IBRAHIM/AP


BULLIT MARQUEZ/AP

Megawati Sukarnoputri, the Vice-President. (Right) Supporters of Megawati Sukarnoputri cheer from the gallery of Parliament after hearing of her victory in the vice-presidential election.

Suharto, whose exit from office in May 1998 at the height of a popular uprising against him led to the current democratic resurgence. However different their styles of functioning may have been, both Sukarno and Suharto were viewed as father-figures by the people.

B.J. Habibie succeeded Suharto in May. A man with no charisma, Habibie was catapulted to the highest office solely by the fact that he was then the elected Vice-President and had the blessings of the military chief, General Wiranto. Not surprisingly, he soon found himself marginalised on the political stage, despite his efforts to ensure Indonesia's transition to democracy.

Habibie's brief period in office left a deep scar on the Indonesian psyche, although he can take credit for having fulfilled his promise to hold democratic elections and ensure the freedom of expression. The recent United Nations-sponsored self-determination exercise in East Timor, a disputed province of Indonesia, only served to make Habibie more unpopular. Indonesians had already begun to despise him for apparently shielding his mentor, Suharto, from being investigated for corruption and the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth. In the event, Habibie's tenure will be best remembered for developments that acquired a momentum of their own – the revival of democracy and the holding of an orderly election to the country's highest office. However, even his direct contribution to the enactment of legislation that led to the holding of transparent elections is seen by critics as actions that were influenced more by popular opinion than by his own judgment.

Habibie, who was from the beginning regarded as a transitional President, did, however, seek a second term in office, contributing to the drama that preceded the presidential contest. Central to his move were several sub-plots that brought into focus Indonesian politicians' remarkable capacity to play power games.

Long before the presidential election, it was obvious to most leaders of Suharto's Golkar Party that the people would be doubly wary of the party in the new reforms era. They were concerned in particular about the meteoric rise of Megawati, who was then only a "heartbeat away" from the presidency, having distinguished herself as an Opposition leader with the spirit for resistance during what turned out to be the twilight years of Suharto's long reign.

Before his fall, Suharto had, as had been widely suspected, engineered Megawati's exit from the leadership of her Indonesian Democratic Party. Unable at that time to rectify the anomaly, Megawati became more circumspect, especially during the weeks of popular protest against Suharto in April-May 1998. In the event, she lost some of the political dynamism that she had begun to display initially. However, when the Habibie administration began to try to prevent her from rising to political prominence, Megawati galvanised herself for a fight. The democratic spirit that was at that time beginning to envelop the nation undoubtedly enabled her to fight back. The result was the creation of a new party – the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), which went on to win the highest number of seats, although not amounting to a clear majority, in the 500-member House of Representatives (DPR) in the parliamentary elections held on June 7.

In an attempt to checkmate Megawati, the Golkar Party sought to establish new alliances, mostly of the informal kind, after it became clear that no party or group would win the presidency on its own parliamentary strength. The Golkar Party almost succeeded in the effort, but was thwarted in the last minute.


FRIDIA LISNAWATI/AP

Former President B.J. Habibie.

Long before the Golkar Party began to look for allies, Wahid and Amien Rais had struck a deal with Megawati, in time for the June 7 DPR polls. From those elections they discovered that their collective votes as reformists would not be enough to entice others into joining them and enable the selection of a consensus candidate for

the presidency. Besides, personality clashes had occurred between Megawati on the one side and Amien Rais and Wahid on the other even before the June elections. This complicated matters further. The consequent reality on the eve of the October 20 presidential poll was that as a campaign issue, the intricacies of a political power game gave way to what many people began to see as an Islamist-secular divide.

The ideological-religious divide was nurtured in part by the fact that Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in any country, despite having a tradition of accepting its Hindu-Buddhist historical legacy. The perceived infirmity of Megawati, a woman, to rule a Muslim-majority state was freely talked about. Meanwhile, Wahid became disillusioned with Megawati's inability or unwillingness to communicate with her political peers, even as he asserted that Habibie's lack of credibility could be his undoing. (Megawati and Habibie were initially the main candidates for the presidency.)

With Habibie's political authority beginning to wane within the Golkar Party on account of his misadventure on East Timor, Wahid soon sensed that he could project himself as an alternative candidate. He eventually did that with stunning success, as Habibie, by now mired in the Bank Bali scandal involving the funding of his presidential campaign, was dropped by his party as its candidate. Habibie lost a virtual confidence vote when the MPR refused to accept the "accountability speech" he made past the midnight hour on October 19, heralding the day of the presidential election.

Meanwhile, adding to the political drama, the Golkar Party nominated its chairman, Akbar Tandjung, as its candidate, barely an hour before the deadline, only to withdraw his name soon thereafter. He had earlier scored a landslide victory in the election to the post of the Speaker of the DPR. The victory was thought to have been the result of a secret deal with Megawati, under which a core group of the Golkar Party, said to be loyal to Akbar, would back her for the presidency if she did not make a real fight of his election as Speaker. Wahid too had proved his skills in political management in the run-up to the presidential poll by ensuring the emergence of Amien Rais as the Chairman of the MPR in the face of a challenge by a candidate backed by Megawati and a section of the Golkar Party.

The presidential poll saw a direct contest between Wahid and Megawati, after a maverick Islamist, Yusril Mahendra, withdrew from the race minutes before the process began. Wahid won by a margin of 60 in a chamber of 700. As violence broke out and Megawati appealed to her supporters to accept the democratic verdict, Wahid took steps to ensure her victory in the vice-presidential election.

During the high drama, General Wiranto distanced himself from the political rivalries of the civilian elite, although attempts were made constantly by one group or the other to drag him to centre stage. His name was even suggested for the post of Vice-President.

Amidst scenes of popular joy following Megawati's election as Vice-President, questions were being asked about whether she will seek to emerge as the real power behind the throne. However, it is too early to get a clear idea of her plans for the future, as also of the future of Indonesia's new democracy. ■

A scholar and a reformist

P.S. SURYANARAYANA

ABDURRAHMAN WAHID, better known to his admirers as "Gus Dur" or "Elder Brother", surprised many observers by contesting for the presidency, and that too against Megawati Sukarnoputri, whom he has often described as his younger sister. Then, they did not know that the game plan had been drawn up over a month earlier in order to ensure that the highest office would be occupied by a political reformist and not a person with intimate connections with the Suharto era. If Wahid defeated Megawati in a stunning display of political acumen, it was because he had conducted an intensive study of the key players and their followers.

In an exclusive interview he gave this correspondent in early September in Jakarta, Wahid said that he would contest the election. After speaking about the merits of the leaders who had by then announced their intention to run for President, Wahid asserted: "I lead the contest now." Wahid said that although Megawati was skilled in the art of interacting with the masses, she was at a disadvantage because she could not or would not communicate with her political peers and rivals. At the other end of the spectrum was Habibie, who did not enjoy the trust of the people, Wahid said. About General Wiranto, Wahid said that the Army chief was doing a "balancing act" by reconciling himself with both those who wanted instant political reforms and those who favoured a gradual transformation. While Wahid was certainly not in favour of an activist role for the Army, he said that he preferred the Army to reduce the extent of its manoeuvring and ensure the country's transition to democracy from a system that gave it ample scope for political intervention.

In certain international circles, much is being made of Wahid's roots as an Islamic cleric and scholar in the world's most populous Muslim-majority state. However, there has been no evidence so far that Wahid will turn into a religious zealot. In fact, his secular credentials have impressed scholars who engaged him in intellectual conversations.

Wahid, who was born in 1940 in a family of Muslim intellectuals in Jombang in eastern Java, grew up on a diet of religious teachings, liberal political ideas and a humanist culture. His grandfather founded the Nahdlatul Ulema (N.U.), which to this day has drawn support from the rural people of Java. According to scholars familiar with the N.U.'s origin and growth, Islam- and Hindu-oriented mystical beliefs blend in the N.U. in some ways while competing with each other in other ways. Wahid now heads the N.U., and in doing so he is at ease while interacting with Western-educated liberals.

Wahid, whose eyesight was impaired as a result of a stroke, relies on his vast experience in public affairs. The Ulema was a political party under Sukarno's "guided democracy". It later merged with the Islamist United Development Party. Despite being reasonably friendly with Suharto at one stage, Wahid opposed him from his position as the leader of the Democracy Forum, whose objectives included opposition to sectarian Islamist politics and exploitation of religion for political goals. ■

A socialist and a visionary

Julius Kambarage Nyerere 1922-1999.

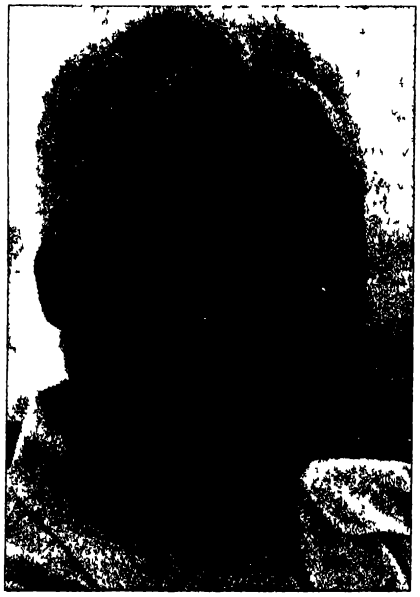
M.S. PRABHAKARA
in Cape Town

THE death of former Tanzanian President Julius Kambarage Nyerere, popularly known as Mwalimu (teacher in Swahili), brings to an end the life of a remarkable revolutionary leader. Nyerere died at St. Thomas' Hospital in London on October 14. He was being treated for leukaemia for nearly a month and was in a coma for about two weeks before he died.

The death was expected. Indeed, a South African radio broadcast announced it about 10 days earlier, with the pre-prepared obituary following, only to issue an embarrassing retraction with wishes for his recovery soon thereafter. It was however clear that his case was terminal. He was pronounced 'brain dead' by doctors two days before his death.

Born on April 13, 1922, to a minor tribal chief and his wife (one of several) in the village of Butiama on the edge of Lake Victoria in what was then the British colony of Tanganyika, he was revered as the Father of the Nation who led Tanzania to independence and freedom. Nyerere was mourned not only in the nation state he crafted and led for over two decades, but also in the whole of Africa and indeed in the rest of the world. The United Nations General Assembly paid a silent tribute with the representatives observing a minute's silence. Other U.N. organisations too paid tributes. Among those paying tribute was James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, an institution whose relations with Nyerere and Tanzania have been best described as complex.

NYERERE, who in various capacities had occupied the highest executive positions in the country since May 1961 (first, as Chief Minister of Tanganyika in its last days as a colony, then as Prime Minister of independent Tanganyika and, when it became a republic in December 1962, as President, and finally, from April 16, 1964, following the union with Zanzibar, to November 5, 1985, as President of the United Republic of Tanzania) did not hold any political



SAYYID AZIM/AP

office in the past 14 years. However, he remained active as the head of the South-South Commission, with the aim of strengthening Third World unity.

Regionally, he was closely involved in facilitating the resolution of conflict in the Great Lakes region, specifically in Burundi. This initiative was viewed with some suspicion by the government in Bujumbura.

Belonging to a generation of leaders who had first-hand experience of life under colonial rule, Nyerere, unlike many others of that ilk, is believed to have never enriched himself personally. He was succeeded by President Ali Hassan Mwinyi in November 1985, and President Mwinyi in turn was succeeded by the present President, Benjamin Mkapa, 10 years later. (A President is allowed only two five-year terms under the Constitution.)

The institutionalisation of such orderly transition in accordance with constitutional provisions is only one of the achievements of Nyerere. Indeed, he was one of the few leaders in post-colonial Africa who quit office when he was neither physically incapacitated nor politically or militarily challenged or overthrown. The only other leader who relinquished office before Nyerere was President Leopold Senghor of Senegal who stepped down in December 1980 after remaining in office for 20 years. More recent additions to such a select company of leaders who voluntarily stepped down are President Ketumile Masire of Botswana and President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, the latter, despite the constitutional provision of two terms for the President, having made clear very early in his days in office that he would not seek another term.

HOW will Julius Nyerere be remembered? What are his achievements and what is his legacy?

As is the case with any revolutionary leader, these are mixed. Perhaps his most important achievement is the forging of Tanzania by uniting Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and, as many analysts have noted, his use of KiSwahili as an instrument to unite the numerous peoples speaking different languages by bonding them under a common language without provoking linguistic or sub-national passions. A tribute by a Tanzanian journalist said: "He allowed Tanzanians to speak with many voices, but in one language. This was his vision of a nation free of tribalism."

Significantly, President Mkapa, in his radio broadcast announcing the death of Nyerere, allayed fears that "the unity of the country will be jeopardised, that our union will disintegrate and our relations with neighbouring countries will be affected."

Nyerere will also be remembered for the readiness with which he ignored the normative prescriptions of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) about 'national sovereignty', 'inviolable borders' and 'non-intervention in the internal affairs of member-countries' when he sent in troops to secure the ouster of President Idi Amin of Uganda (November 1978-April 1979), an intervention that cost the country over $500 million. Tanzania had to bear this financial burden alone. This, according to some analysts, has been one of the key factors that contributed to its economic problems.

Earlier there were other interventions; in Comoros in December 1975 and in Seychelles in June 1977, not to speak of his support to Biafra in the Nigerian civil war which Nigeria has not forgiven.

Almost every comment on Nyerere since his death noted his 'failed' experiment with 'African socialism' to attain self-reliance through a programme of 'villagisation' and community-based farming collectives, implemented following the adoption of what has come to be known as the Arusha Declaration of February 5, 1967. However, according to Nyerere, the programme had not failed "because it had never been really tried". Even the harshest critics of the Ujaama (Swahili for brotherhood, togetherness) concede that the programme produced major benefits in education and health care.

An obituary in *The Financial Times* acknowledges that the "initial gains in literacy, primary school enrolment and life expectancy in the post-Independence era seemed to have validated Nyerere's approach", though it goes on to add that by the mid-1970s, it was clear that "Tanzania was living beyond its means". The fact, as noted above, is that these economic difficulties were due as much to the intervention in Uganda, whose burdens Tanzania had to carry alone.

Over and above all these achievements and failures is the crucial role that Tanzania under Julius Nyerere played in the liberation of the last remaining colonies in southern Africa, a true manifestation of international solidarity. Not a rich country by any means, Tanzania was truly a frontline state, providing at one time or the other office and training facilities to the liberation movements of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, in some cases rival liberation movements.

Julius Nyerere was among the leaders whom Nelson Mandela met during his first journey abroad in 1962. Tanzania was the first safe haven for exiles from South Africa after they crossed the borders into Botswana or other neighbouring countries.

It was in Morogoro and Mazimbu, Tanzania, that the African National Congress (ANC) located its farm and school, home for generations of exiles. Morogoro is now part of the political vocabulary of the ANC, being the place where it held the pathbreaking conference of April 1969. Among the decisions taken at the Morogoro conference was the one to throw open the membership of the ANC to non-Africans. One should however ask whether this legacy, given the direction of the economy and politics of all these countries (including Tanzania) since their liberation, will endure. ■

Pinochet's tribulations

A court rules that General Augusto Pinochet be extradited to Spain to face trial on torture charges, but his lawyers still have options to prolong his stay in the United Kingdom.

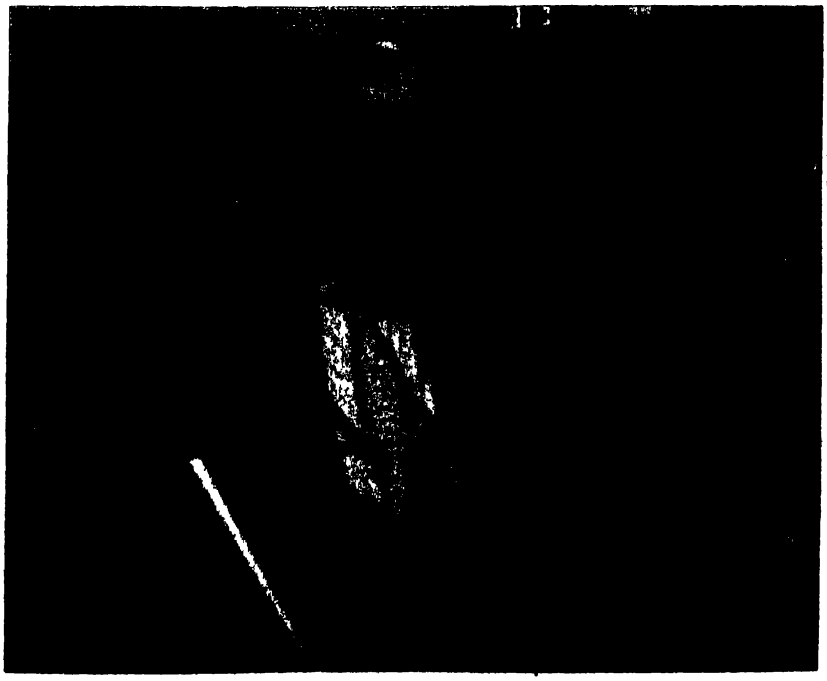
THOMAS ABRAHAM
in London

CHILE'S former dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, lost another round in his battle to avoid extradition to Spain, where he would face trial for torturing political opponents during the 17 years he was in power. Almost a year after he was arrested while he was in a London hospital, a Magistrate ruled that the 83-year-old general could be sent to Spain to face 34 charges of torture and one charge of conspiracy to torture. Pinochet's lawyers have the option to appeal to a higher court, or directly to Home Secretary Jack Straw, and so there is little prospect of his being handed over to Spain immediately.

The proceedings at the Bow Street Magistrate's Court were in a sense a formality. Under the European convention on extradition, the Magistrate had merely to satisfy himself that the charges were extraditable offences and that the paper work was in order. Still, it is that much more probable now that the former dictator will end his days in judicial custody.

The lawyer acting for the Spanish government, Clive Nichols, QC, earlier told the court that Pinochet faced "some of the most serious allegations of crime ever to come before English criminal courts". The charges included torture including beatings and electric shock treatment and the use of hallucinogenic drugs. Pinochet, who reportedly suffered two minor strokes and is in frail health, was excused from attending the proceedings. He was clearly unmoved and unapologetic despite the grave nature of the charges. He protested his innocence.

After the judgment was delivered, Pinochet's lawyers read a statement in which he described the charges as being politically motivated. "As the former President of the Republic of Chile and Senator, I declare that I am not guilty of the crimes of which I am accused. Spain



JUAN EDUARDO LOPEZ/AP

A few months after his arrest, Augusto Pinochet at his rented home near London.

has not produced a single piece of evidence which shows that I am guilty," the statement said. It continued: "It has long been clear that my extradition is politically motivated and being pursued clearly for political reasons."

Whatever the aged general might say, those who suffered during his regime are not allowing him to forget the past. Chilean expatriates who fled the country during his regime, as well as human rights activists, have been keeping up a steady campaign to ensure that the human rights abuses that occurred during his regime are not forgotten.

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The Pinochet regime, which seized power with the support of the United States after overthrowing the elected government of Salvador Allende, became a byword for repression. Almost immediately after he came to power, thousands of left-wing opponents were rounded up and herded into the main sports stadium in the capital, Santiago, and tortured and executed. According to one estimate, up to a quarter of a million Chileans were rounded up and kept in detention centres across the country. Pinochet's secret service, DINA, struck terror in the country and abroad, torturing and killing opponents. Pinochet was reported to have said: "Ever so often, democracy has to be bathed in blood."

After losing a referendum in 1987, Pinochet handed over power but only after ensuring that he remained the head of the Army, and later Senator for life, and constitutionally he would remain immune from prosecution. Few of his opponents thought that Pinochet would ever be brought to justice. It was not only because a group of lawyers in Spain, who documented cases of torture and abuse and took them to a crusading Judge, Balthazar Garzon, that he was arrested in London while on a visit last October.

Pinochet, a great admirer of Britain and former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was on one of his routine visits when Judge Garzon made a request to Britain to extradite him to face charges of torture in Spain. Pinochet, who was in hospital after emergency surgery for a back injury, was arrested while he was convalescing. He and his supporters immediately launched a legal battle to prevent extradition.

The case was unprecedented. Here was a former head of state who faced extradition, not to his own country but to a third country to be tried for acts he had allegedly committed in his own country. It immediately raised questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction. Could British courts take action against a former head of state for acts he committed while in office, or was he covered by the principle of sovereign immunity, under which national courts have no right to try rulers of other nations? Also, could he be extradited to a third country for crimes he had allegedly committed in his own country? The Spanish Judge was attempting to try Pinochet in Spain for crimes committed in Chile, against Chilean citizens, under the provisions of the United Nations International Convention Against Torture.

The British legal system grappled with these challenges and came up with contradictory answers. Pinochet gained an early victory when the British High Court ruled that he enjoyed sovereign immunity for acts committed while he was in power, and so could not be extradited. The Law Lords in the House of Lords, Britain's highest court of appeal, however, overruled this and pointed out that torture could not be considered a normal act of a head of government. Pinochet's lawyers challenged the ruling when they discovered that one of the Law Lords who heard the case, Lord Hoffman, had links with the human rights organisation Amnesty International. They successfully argued that Lord Hoffman should not have heard the case, and asked for a fresh hearing. A new panel of judges heard the case. The conclusion, again, was there was no bar on Pinochet being extradited. The second panel, however, added a twist, saying that Pinochet could be extradited only for crimes committed after December 8, 1988, the date Britain ratified the International Convention on Torture. This ruled out 29 of the original 32 charges that the Spanish Judge had presented. Judge Garzon then presented an additional 32 charges of torture and conspiracy to torture committed in Chile after December 1988. The conspiracy to torture charge encompasses the case of 1,198 people who "disappeared" during Pinochet's period in power.

Pinochet's lawyers have until the third week of October to appeal to the High Court against the Magistrate's ruling. But the High Court, or Divisional Court as it is known, can reject the Magistrate's decision only on three grounds – the trivial nature of the offence, the passage of time since the offence was committed, and the bad faith behind the accusation. The Judge can also examine whether extraditing Pinochet would be "unjust or oppressive". Human rights lawyers believe that these grounds are narrow enough to ensure that Pinochet's appeal is rejected. The process can go up to the House of Lords once again, but again the grounds for appeal will be narrow.

Ultimately, Pinochet's fate will rest with Jack Straw. Once the legal process is exhausted, the Home Secretary is the final authority on extradition. The extradition law gives him fairly wide latitude, and Pinochet is almost certain to take the plea that he is too old and frail to stand the rigours of a trial and that he ought to be allowed to return home. His lawyers and doctors say his health has deteriorated and that he is confined to a wheelchair after the strokes. According to some reports, at one stage he was so ill that a priest was summoned to administer the last rites. In all events, Pinochet will not be sentenced to imprisonment. His age precludes that possibility.

The question is whether he is fit enough to stand trial. Recently, there have been cases in which people in their eighties were made to stand trial, most notably in France, where several people were accused of collaborating with the Nazis during the Second World War. These people include Paul Touvier, who was sentenced to prison in 1994 when he was 81, and Maurice Papon, who was sentenced last year to 10 years in prison for ordering the deportation of Jews from Bordeaux. He was 88 when he was sentenced. Papon has since made himself scarce.

Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, the man who once said that not a leaf in his country moved without his knowledge, may still spend the last years of his life before a Judge, trying to defend his actions as a dictator. ■

Another America

Islands of poverty floating in a sea of abundance represent a less talked about aspect of life in the United States, the haven of capital.

VIJAY PRASHAD

"Poverty is terrorism.
Poverty is a terminal disease.
Poverty paralyses.
Poverty is the ultimate censor.
Poverty, a hell, is war."

Selma Waldman, "A Poor Haiku", *Real Change*, the newspaper of the homeless in Seattle, United States.

"In America you are not required to offer food to the hungry, or shelter to the homeless, or to visit the lonely – in fact, one of the nicest things about living in America is that you really don't have to do anything for anybody."

– Anonymous poet, *Real Change*.

IN 1995, Pete Du Pont, heir to the vast Du Pont family fortune, wrote that "the minimum wage turns out to be one of our leading killers – a killer of economic growth and opportunity among the young, the poor, and the minority community. It's time to stop it before it kills again." This fulmination came just as the U.S. government raised the minimum wage for the first time in over two decades, a rise in pay that was marginal and has not gone near enough to overcome the inequities that tear the nation apart.

From President Bill Clinton (Democrat) to Texas Governor George W. Bush (Republican), there seems to be a consensus that things have never been better in the U.S., and that the brief recession (during the presidency of George Bush) is now over. For almost a third of the population who live under or near the poverty line, this provides little solace. The previously unemployed may now be at work, but few ask them about their conditions at 'work', about the number of part-time jobs they must hold to maintain a household, or else about their lack of medical insurance. "Economic segregation in this country is so rigid that we literally don't know one another anymore," columnist Molly Ivins complained. If we did, perhaps the hoopla about the return to prosperity would not be made so cavalierly.

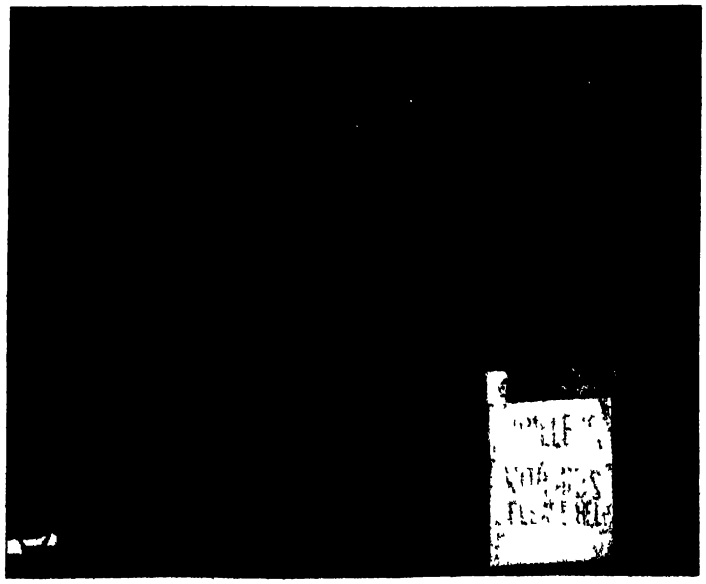
For those who watch the U.S. from afar (or during brief, well-orchestrated holidays), it is hard to imagine the poverty within this haven of capital. Sated by Hollywood movies and by the smooth talk of U.S. politicians, the world imagines that each citizen must bear some title to the wealth of the nation. Within the U.S., however, there are few who have illusions about the nature of the economic miracle, of the Second Gilded Age whose Rockefellers and Carnegies are named Gates and Cosses.

From 1983 to 1998, the U.S. stock market grew a cumulative 1,336 per cent. In the 1990s itself, corporate profits rose by 108 per cent, whilst the Standard and Poor's (stock) Index rose by 224 per cent. Someone seems to be doing quite well, as indeed the pay of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) rose during this period by 481 per cent. Furthermore, the richest 1 per cent of the U.S. now enjoys 40 per cent of the nation's household wealth (1997), more than that held by the entire bottom 95 per cent of the population.

If Du Pont worried about the lack of incentive to the working people, he did not have to worry about the ample incentives provided to the CEOs and the 1 per cent from which they hail. This 1 per cent works hard to lobby with the U.S. government, which passes laws to their tune and not to the democratic sirens that occasionally emanate from the 95 per cent. In 1996, Clinton ended social welfare and let those without work find their own way in the thicket of the market. The Federal Reserve Bank Chairman Alan Greenspan held interest rates down to control inflation (as he argued), but also to keep the dollar strong (a net detriment to the working poor). In addition, the government's tax codes and licence to speculation allowed the 1 per cent to reap more benefits from their wealth, whereas the 95 per cent found themselves at a loss. In the midst of this, the U.S. population seems incensed with the buying up of Washington D.C. by what are called 'special interests'. A lazy population has not squandered democracy (just as poverty is not created by personal laziness). Democracy was assassinated by the plutocracy's assignation with wealth.

The second gilded age

In the three decades before 1900, U.S. 'robber barons' created the Gilded Age in which a few families (Rockefellers, Carnegies, Morgans and Vanderbilts) made massive fortunes and enjoyed an age of 'conspicuous consumption' (as Thorstein Veblen put it). Most of this wealth was built by the rapacious use of resources, and by the withdrawal of the state from the affairs of the wealthy (with the termination of the inheritance tax in 1870, the cession of the income tax in 1872 and the defeat of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890). If Edith Wharton worried about the 'monstrous vulgarity' of the rich, the 1892 Populist Party complained that "the fruits



PORTER GIFFORD/ GAMMA

Begging on the sidewalks of Manhattan.

of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind, and the possessor of these, in turn, despise the Republic and endanger liberty." The close relationship between money and government was tempered by the rise of organised labour and the socialists, and by the creation of a civic consciousness by an activist media (led by Ida Tarbells, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens).

Ronald Reagan inaugurated the Second Gilded Age with his 1981 tax cut, which prompted a rise in unemployment and a polarisation of wealth (when challenged on the figures in 1982, Reagan explained that "the statisticians in Washington have funny ways of counting"). Reagan conducted what Trinity College Professor of Women's Studies Lisa Armstrong calls, "the opening salvo in the U.S. state's structural adjustment policy against itself."

If 35 per cent of U.S. workers in 1954 formed unions, by the end of Reagan's tenure only 14 per cent did. As Reaganism pulled the rug from under the U.S. worker, the strategy of business unionism followed by U.S. unions meant that they offered immense concessions to corporations in the 1980s rather than act in antagonism to them. From Reagan to the present, the bottom 60 per cent of the U.S. population saw their income drop, while only the top 1 per cent (the same 1 per cent), saw their income explode over 80 per cent. In 1965, the wage gap ratio between the highest and the lowest paid workers was 44 to 1, but by this year it stands at over 200 to 1. In 1999, Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett, and ex-Microsoft executive Paul Allen enjoy a combined wealth of $156 billion, an amount more than the GNP of the poorest 43 nations. The wealth of the world's 475 billionaires ($1.7 trillion) is well above the gross wealth of the poorest half of humanity. In the Second Gilded Age, wealth trickles upwards as the rest of humanity takes its chances at the lottery, the casino, or else the stock-exchange.

Wall Street (and its clones across the globe) advertise their power to democratise ownership without revolution and forced redistribution. In this climate, George Soros, Ross Perot and Donald Trump sell themselves as men of the people, simple businessmen who are not so very different from those small merchants who toil under the yoke of interventionist state. However, a close analysis of Wall Street reveals that most stocks (84 per cent) and bonds (90 per cent) are held by not more than 10 per cent of the U.S. population (about 10 million households). Assets of the richest 10 per cent rose by 22 per cent (in the early 1990s) – and it is these people who partly benefited from the meteoric rise in stock prices. The poor gained in one statistic, debt, which rose for the bottom 90 per cent by over 11 per cent while it fell for the richest 1 per cent by 19 per cent. This debt went toward the maintenance of some modicum of the American Dream among households long mortgaged to the will of the banks.

A state of business

The U.S. concocted a welfare state in the 1930s when turbulence in the world of finance left the bulk of the population without waged work and with depleted bank accounts. As a safety net, the U.S. government provided welfare legislation that took care of unemployed single women with children (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and unemployed hungry people (Food Stamps). Welfare expenditure did not exceed 5 per cent of the Federal Budget, and even this amount was grossly exaggerated by escalating medical costs since the 1980s (for the Medicare programme that provides subsidised care). According to the U.S. Congress, Federal assistance in the early 1990s was lower than that provided in 1970. Yet, in 1995, the U.S. government withdrew the safety net with the argument that welfare denudes the culture of work. The "workfare" programme of the U.S. government, however, cannot deliver quality jobs, a colossal failure best represented by the increase in petty crime (and in the prison population). "The real issue," wrote Peter Edelman who resigned from the Clinton administration in 1996, "isn't welfare. It's poverty." Should the state bear any responsibility for its citizens or should it simply act as the caretaker of business interests?

In his new book, *The Global Gamble* (London: Verso, 1999), Peter Gowan shows how the Dollar-Wall Street regime emerged in the 1970s to maintain the power of U.S. wealth as well as to engineer the world economy to the advantage of mainly U.S.-based transnational corporations. The U.S. worker was not to be spared the harshness of structural adjustment. In the 1980s, the top tax rate was 68 per cent, but revised tax law decreased this to 28 per cent in 1988. While corporations in the early 1950s paid 33 cents of every dollar toward tax, today they pay less than 10 cents. Monies that might have been taxed for socially useful work were used in a speculation binge that, in real estate for example, raised rents to render homes unaffordable to much of the population. The speculation fever increased activity in the stock markets and allowed the 1 per cent to gradually claim the saved income of the many into their coffers.

On October 1, *The Wall Street Journal* reported a modest gain in incomes in the U.S., but it was forced to acknowledge the words of Rose Woolery, a working mother: "This country is still for those who have money. For the people who don't have it, you're not going to get it."

Those who 'have it', 'get it' from U.S. State's corporate welfare programme: $85 billion annually to private business, $200 billion to collapsed banks, over $30 billion to agriculture, and $440 billion on tax breaks to the wealthy. Such funds are not forthcoming to alleviate poverty. Furthermore, the U.S. economy enjoys an inflow of capital (a $2 trillion debt, $1.3 trillion since 1992) from its creditors who are pledged to uphold the dollar (in which they preserve their own wealth). In May 1999, Alan Greenspan noted that "the arithmetic of foreign debt accumulation and compounding interest costs does indicate somewhere in the future that, unless reversed, our growing international imbalances are apt to create significant problems for our economy."

From a distance, the paper tiger of the U.S. economy appears ferocious. The U.S., however, is less powerful as a national economy and far more powerful as the chosen vehicle for the maintenance of the economic power of the global wealthy. The structural adjustment of the world, including the U.S., occurs to ensure the hegemony of the Dollar-Wall Street regime. The international image of America, however, is far grander than this mundane view. Fraught with misery, many hope to find some kind of utopia within the U.S. Nevertheless, Father Gene Boyle, a priest who works along with the strawberry workers in California, warns us: "We live in a time when people are working too hard and are still in poverty. And communities and neighbourhoods are crumbling because of it. We have to bring this into the daylight." If John Locke in the late 17th century wrote: "In the beginning, all the world was America", there are many who hope that "in the end, all shall be America." The question we might ask is which America? ■

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With roots in India

A convention in New York of People of Indian Origin discusses issues that matter to the Indian diaspora worldwide.

EUGENE CORREIA
in New York

A CAB-DRIVER in Southall in London, the President of a Caribbean republic, and a computer engineer in Seattle, United States: three persons, who, given their lifestyles and stations in life, might well be from different planets. Yet they are bound by a curious emotional cord to a shared geographical space that they consider their "real home", or *watan*. All three are persons of Indian origin, members of the Indian diaspora, spread worldwide.

A representative group of the People of Indian Origin – though the number of representatives was far too low, considering the size of the PIO community – gathered recently in New York for the Indian Global Convention, organised by the Global Organisation of Indian People (GOPIO), a pan-global organisation that seeks to bring together more than 18 million people of Indian origin worldwide. GOPIO aims, among other things, to address the concerns of the PIO in their countries of settlement and to utilise the expertise of Indian expatriates for the benefit of people in India and the countries where the PIO are settled.

Deliberations at the convention were given over to making follow-up suggestions on the Indian government's programme of issuing identity cards to People of Indian Origin. The PIO cards are intended to give their holders certain privileges – for instance, in the repatriation of income. Persons whose ancestors up to the third generation were persons of Indian origin are eligible to apply for the card by paying a fee of $1,000. The convention adopted resolutions urging the Indian government to consider extending the eligibility for PIO cards to those who are sixth-generation PIOs and lowering the fee to $250.

The presence of Guyanese President Bharrat Jagdeo, 35, a person of Indian origin, in New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly session, gave the convention a high profile. Jagdeo and his political mentor Cheddi Jagan have inspired two generations of Caribbean Indians, and the former is a role model for a generation of PIO who exemplify the theme of the convention, People of Indian Origin: Forging a global alliance. Jagdeo's presence also drew a large contingent of Guyanese Indians from the Queens area in New York.

One of the resolutions passed at the convention called on the Guyanese government to institute an independent inquiry into the alleged atrocities against Indians in that country and to ensure that the ethnic balance was preserved in appointments to the government and the armed services. Indians make up more than half the population but are not adequately represented in the police and the army; this is significant when one considers that the Caribbean country has witnessed many ethnic riots.

SOME of the speakers at the convention seemed keen to impose a Hindi-Hindu worldview on the gathering although the move met with a degree of resistance from a section. The attempts at seeking to emphasise the divisive aspects of a culturally heterogeneous diaspora raised more than a few questions. For instance, one of the resolutions called for the adoption of a "first language" by GOPIO members and delegates. Although it was not explicitly stated, the reference was to Hindi. (The resolution said that given India's linguistic diversity, English had served as an effective link language and served as a door to the world for many Indians.) When a section of the gathering questioned the purpose of this resolution, the chairperson said that its aim was to keep alive in expatriate Indian communities "traditions and religious and spiritual identities".

Similar sentiments found resonance at a session on "Secularism, religion and the national ethos". Speaking on "Focus on Indian culture in the diaspora", Reshmi Ramdhony, senior lecturer and head of Hindi Studies at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute in Mauritius, proposed that GOPIO undertake an "intra-diasporic compilation .. of all the cultural symbols that still thrive." Such an approach, Ramdhony said, "would not only serve to revitalise and syncretise Hindu faith and Indianness in plural societies but would also help PIOs to address the needs posed by their living far, far away from the Indian mainstream."

Another speaker, Parasram S. Thakur of Community College, Rhode Island, said that Hinduism had been grossly "misunderstood and misinterpreted". Thakur said: "The idea of polytheism, paganism and heathenism, attributed to



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

On the opening day of the Indian Global Convention, organised by the Global Organisation of Indian People in New York. The convention made several follow-up suggestions on the Indian Government's programme of issuing identity cards to People of Indian Origin.

Hinduism..., is derived from the ignorance of Western Euro-centric scholars, and the exclusivity of Christian dogmatic intolerance for external ideas."

GOPIO-India president Harish Mahajan used the platform he was provided to make undisguised communal statements. In his paper, "Wisdom of religious conversions", Mahajan criticised "Christian pundits" for not responding to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's call for a national debate on religious conversions, following the attack on Christian places of worship in Gujarat last year. Conversions, he said, were proceeding "unabated" without any concern for the "likely implications", including the possibility that "serious reactions" might recur. Mahajan's case was that Christian missionaries were "on the prowl" and were proselytising people "in the garb of service to and upliftment of the deprived ignorants of India." Conversions, he added, were causing "serious emotional hurt" to the majority community in India – which numerically exceeded the combined populations of the United States, Canada and Europe.

GOPIO aims to address the concerns of the people of Indian origin and to utilise the expertise of expatriates for the benefit of people in India and the countries where the PIO are settled.

GOPIO may not have acquired the saffron hue of the Overseas Friends of BJP, a powerful pressure group that is active in the U.S., but the dangers of its providing a platform for hate campaigns are self-evident. It was left to secular-minded scholars such as Sebastian Devasia, Rajiv Gandhi Professor for World Order Studies, New Delhi, to challenge Mahajan's chauvinistic ramblings. GOPIO secretary-general Dr. Jagat Motwani, who chaired the session, put the issue to rest by stating that the subject was too controversial to be discussed.

THE most telling remarks on the problems and issues affecting the Indian diasporic communities came from noted West Indian historian Dr. Brinsley Samaroo, who called for solidarity among Indians the world over in order to prevent any further abuse or discrimination in their adopted lands.

Samaroo wanted Indians to come together to "offer that continuing spiritual guidance to the wider world which so desperately needs the sustaining spiritual force, such as that which Mahatmaji unleashed in his epic struggle against the British empire with its enormous technological power."

Speaking on "Sharing the inheritance", Samaroo said: "Indians, wherever they are and in whatever circumstances they find themselves, must cease to be apologetic and defensive about their culture and their civilisation." He wanted the Indian diasporic communities to follow the "African diaspora" in facilitating cultural fusion in each "diasporic settlement", instead of being "too preoccupied with small disputes and internecine warfare whilst the large picture eludes our focus."

Dr. Chandrasekhar Bhat of the Study for the Indian Diaspora, Hyderabad, echoed the same sentiments in his paper on "Contexts of intra and inter ethnic conflict among the Indian diaspora communities", and offered examples of identity clashes between what he calls the Older Diaspora and the New Diaspora. He feels that "a major domain of intra-ethnic conflict today among the Indian diaspora is religion". He notes that Operation Bluestar "left its scars" on the Hindu and Sikh communities in Britain.

Bhat said that caste too played a role in the power structure of particular communities. In this context, he pointed out that there were two associations representing Telugu people in the U.S. – the Telugu Association of North America (TANA), made up largely of people belonging to the Kamma caste, and the American Telugu Association (ATA), comprising Reddys.

ON the eve of the convention, Prof. Jagdish Bhagwati, Professor of Economics and Political Science at Columbia University, told a local newspaper that immigration from India was no longer considered brain drain but rather a phenomenon "serving almost an overseas arm of Indian culture and prosperity."

He said: "In that sense, an institution like GOPIO is useful. Indians are playing a major role here but I think we need to cast our net wide and see what is happening around the world to our community and people who are descended from India."

Dr. Thomas Abraham, GOPIO president, recalled that since it was founded in 1989 in New York, the organisation had come some way but its operations were hampered by a financial crunch. Going by the number of participants at the convention, it appears that GOPIO has not reached out to many persons of Indian origin even in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Abraham had earlier served as president of the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA) and the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA).

The first Global Convention of People of Indian Origin was held in New York in 1989 and was attended by an estimated 3,000 delegates. Four years later, a second convention was held in New Delhi; it was inaugurated by then Guyanese President Cheddi Jagan and presided over by Dr. Karan Singh. Dr. Najma Heptullah and Atal Behari Vajpayee delivered the keynote speeches. A constitution was formally adopted and office-bearers were elected. Abraham was elected president. An international secretariat was set up in New York in 1994. (It operates from the residence of a PIO and is run on a voluntary basis.)

In the ten years of its existence, GOPIO has taken up with the U.N. the issue of human rights violations in Fiji and Sri Lanka. In 1994, it came up with the idea of the PIO card, sensing that the Indian government was reluctant to consider dual-citizenship.

Like many other associations in the U.S. that claim to represent the Indian diaspora, GOPIO has grand visions of bringing PIOs under one global banner. However, given its current pattern of membership, its plans appear to be overly ambitious. It has no more than 150 life members, and its ordinary members number about 100. Much of the organisational work is carried on with personal contributions from office-bearers.

The constitution of GOPIO envisages a three-tier body with a global convention, an executive council, and an executive committee. There is to be a human rights commission, an international advisory council and a credentials committee.

The international secretariat is operational, but this is not the case with the regional structures. There are no organised structures even in countries such as Canada. Given GOPIO's current plight, it may be a long while before it sets out to achieve its stated objectives. ■

Northern magic

Samiland has no borders or boundaries, wars or armies, and it does not appear on the map – it is a place for those who love nature untouched and clean.



A glacier above Finse. Samiland has many lakes, rivers, streams, mountains and boundless hills.

Text and pictures:
HARISH KOHLI

FROZEN deep in the Arctic Circle and along the same latitude as Alaska and Siberia lies Samiland – an imaginary country that has no borders or boundaries, no wars or armies. It is imaginary because it appears on no map, and yet the Lapps – or the Sami people, as they prefer to call themselves – have lived here from time immemorial and traces of their presence here go back more than 8,000 years. Even today, they jet across parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and northern Russia on their shiny skidoos, largely oblivious to the outside world.

Samiland is a mighty land, rich in lakes, rivers, small streams and, not the least, grandiose mountains and boundless hills, which in some places reach as far as the Atlantic coast. In winter the wind occasionally blows across the wide Finnmarkvidda (plateau) in northern Norway and Finland, and the temperature plummets to minus 50 degrees Celsius It affords the sort of adventure you might expect to experience in the vast plateaux of Tibet or in Antarctica.

Harish Kohli travelled to the north of Norway to practise ski-sailing as part of his training for a projected crossing of Antarctica. There, in the wilderness, he discovered a whole new world – that of the Sami people, with their fascinating, age-old culture, and the magnificent, almost unreal, landscape in which

Finnmarkvidda lies in Samiland and visitors to Norway now come here to see its scenery, which is spectacular. It is the vastness of the inhabited areas that make the greatest impression here: ranges of mountains and fjells stretch away to the horizon, seemingly without end, silent and awe-inspiring – a place for those who love nature untouched and clean.

As night descends, the snowy mountains and the frozen lake are still coruscating bright white, the sky a deep Tibetan turquoise blue, the air crisp and pure like a swig of fine dry champagne I



At Finnmarkvidda. The scenery is spectacular here.

strap myself to a harness, attached to my pulk carrying one month's supplies complete with food and fuel. My skis – a new set of Norwegian backcountry 'Madshus' – are lighter than those I used while traversing the Himalayas in 1995. My body is acclimatised and tuned after a month's initial training in Hardangervidda, Europe's largest mountain plateau south-east of Bergen.

Agnar Berg, a veteran explorer who, with four others, achieved the first crossing of Greenland, wearing clothing and equipment as used by the Norwegian hero Fridtjof Nansen, skis alongside me. He is there to encourage me, to express his happiness at witnessing the beginning of an adventure or to wish me luck, or all three. It is a Norwegian send-off by one explorer of another.

At Jotka, Agnar turns back. Ahead, there is silent white: bushes laden with frosted snow look stunted in the distance; the sky beyond is now deep violet. The surface is all scarred and fractured ice. This is Lake Jotka on Finnmarkvidda. It seems so unreal, it is easy to believe it could be home to extraterrestrial life. For me it is a training ground.

It is to this idyllic setting that I have come to practise for my long-held ambition to traverse Antarctica. The route – starting from the Chilean end of the continent and climbing steadily over treacherous crevasses to the South Pole, rising up to 3,350 metres in the Trans-Antarctic mountains and across to McMurdo Sound – is almost 3,000 km long. It is a hundred-day journey with a payload of 200 kg and if one is going to attempt it alone, then one needs to practise, practise and practise.

Two months earlier, I reached London, courtesy Air-India, and then Oslo where I trained at Hardangervidda for one month. I then flew from Oslo to Alta, the second biggest town in the north and possibly the oldest in Norway with a population of 14,000. Remains of a stone-age settlement – 10,000-14,000 years old – are said to have been discovered here in the Komsa Mountains.

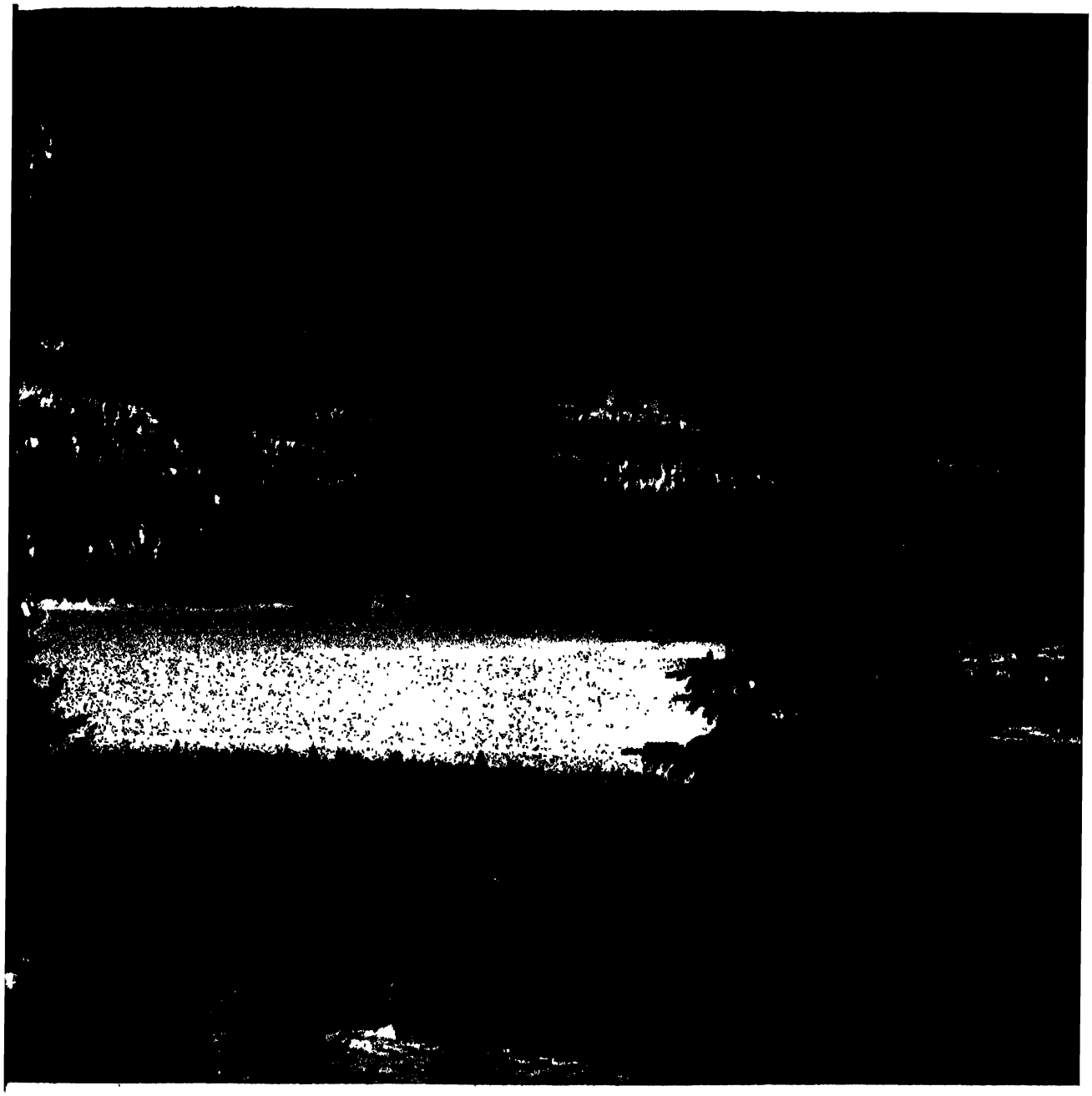
Agnar drove me to his home, where I was able to see a different aspect of the people of the north. Fifteen or so howling hounds met us on our arrival, and Agnar took a few minutes to frolic around their enclosure with them. Four years ago he led a journey through the Northwest Passage with dog sleds, while his wife, Irena, followed him along a safer route with their two-year old son in her lap. He has been across Greenland and the Northwest Passage, but he is basically a dog-man, one of a tribe of old adventurers.

Earlier in the day, he drove me to the Finnmarkvidda, from where I am now beginning my journey. At the edge of Jotka Lake, half a dozen skidoos stand and



I can hear conversation inside the single hut. I enter and find six people gathered around three empty wine bottles and plates with well-polished reindeer bones. It is warm inside, they smile, we make conversation and I move out into the cold again. It is almost midnight. Two Samis cross on their skidoos. The wind begins to gain strength and my GPS (global positioning system) equipment begins to malfunction. I move away from the skidoo track and dig in. As I begin to camp, the world's biggest light show, the Aurora Borealis, begins.

The Northern Lights can resemble a psychedelic experience. The sky is filled with pink swirls, which, in a split second, change to sharp green zigzags, then fold



Oslomarka, a forested area near Oslo. Oslo is one of the world's biggest cities, but much of the area is surrounded by forests. These forests are well-preserved by the residents, who use them for trekking and cross-country skiing.

in on themselves to become high-speed silver rain. The oddest thing is that all this happens in the dense Arctic silence – Ravi Shankar's sitar or Zakir Hussain's tabla would suit this celestial disco.

I wake to find myself on an awesomely flat ground, across which I can see almost 40 km, maybe more. A Sami man and two women pass me on their skis. Some distance ahead I catch up with them while they rest and soon I realise that they represent three generations. The eldest of the three, the man's grandmother, is nearing 70 and still fit. The wind is strong, but from the northeast, the direction in which I am travelling, it is a head wind and I cannot use my ski-sail, the very reason I have come here from so far away. If the wind were right, I could zip along at breathtaking speed, like the skidoos.

Jiesjavrre (lake), which runs north to south and is about 50 km long, is the biggest of the 177,000 lakes in Finnmark. Molisjok, at the southeastern end of this lake, is a strange oasis in this wilderness. A generator, making a "tuk-tuk" noise, powers the single house and the long aerial that helps locals and travelling executives from Stockholm, Tokyo and London to keep in contact with the outside world through their mobiles.

'Mobile' could be a Sami's middle name. They are on the move all the time, usually tugging around behind them some kind of temporary home. Apart from the deafening noise of their skidoos, the only sound in Finnmark is what you can make yourself.

Yet it is the kind of place where every Norwegian would like to be. For Scandinavians, sunshine is synonymous with life – something to be cherished, pursued and exploited. In winter they seek their sun god (Baldur, as he was known to their pagan ancestors) on the shores of the Mediterranean, the Canaries and the Azores. And in summer, as soon as the sun gathers strength, they take





'Mobile' could be a Sami's middle name. The Sami people are on the move much of the time, usually tugging around behind them some kind of a temporary home.

every conceivable opportunity to get out of doors and luxuriate in its warmth.

"Look, he is almost brown," say Kristine and Kirsten, awed at what they take to be my tan. They have themselves driven here from Hammerfest, the northernmost city in the world, in the hope of becoming as brown as I am Now, after a week's skiing on the plateau and drinking in large doses of sunlight, they only feel invigorated. "I am ready to join the world again now," says Kirsten. "I am beginning to unfurl, in my thoughts, like a fern when its leaves unfurl I feel like a new human being."

And so they look They have come straight out of the sauna at Ravnastua, my day's destination. I catch a whiff of their perfume as they wish me luck As they pass by, I notice their light blue eyes twinkle and their blonde hair framing their tanned, glowing skin.

I continue my journey past Ravnastua, where a courting couple sit, having driven there on their skidoos. Not far beyond, I sit in the wide wilderness, take out my steel thermos from the pulk and drink coffee. I drop my chocolate bar in the mug for it to melt rather than risk my teeth. The cold is intense.

A convoy of about two dozen skidoos passes by, some of the drivers casting amazed looks, while others give a customary navy salute. I smile and raise my thumb. Later, I ski past elk and reindeer, marvelling at the thousands of stunted silver birches (more hardy than pine and fir) and lolloping arctic hares. The reindeer is the most important animal here and the basis of the Sami household. It is the Sami's staple and his future.

There are very few truly nomadic Sami people left. Most now have a permanent home, even though the herders from the interior still move with their herds to the high grounds in the summer. During late summer and in autumn the reindeer are driven down to the woods near the foot of the mountains where the lichen pasture is rich. There they stay during winter, roaming freely until the spring, when it is time once more to move up the mountains to the high slopes where the vegetation is now juicy, succulent and nourishing.

Remarkably enough, though they constitute a minority, the Sami people have been very successful in conserving their rich cultural heritage and many unique traditions. They have fought for political control over their own affairs and now have their own Sometinget (Parliament) in Karasjok.

As the plateau drops down in the Karasjok valley, the gradient becomes steep. The pulk pushes from behind, threatening to cause an awful accident. The route comes out at Assebakte on the Kautokeino-Karasjok road. I find an emergency shelter in which to camp. The scene from the window is beautiful, and I watch it for a long time as the full moon rises in the sky. It is never really dark these days. There is always a glow, like an unending evening.

The next day, the route along the Jies Jokka (river) is sprinkled with Wild West-style villages until I reach Karasjok. Karasjok is the Sami centre, where the ancient and modern houses blend into each other. A new Sometinget is under construction, its design reflecting modern architectural influences. So does the new church in the new part of town while the old still stands in the ancient centre.

What is interesting about the com-



Ski-sailing. On a summer night in May, the author has this to say of his ski-sailing experience: "... I am in a trance, where only my sail and I exist. The only sound is of the wind and my skis zipping on the snow. This is ecstasy..."

munity is how the Sami, the townspeople and the newer arrivals all get on so well, drawn together by a frontier mentality and fierce independence. Local Finns and Swedes herd elk and reindeer alongside the Sami. Women dressed in beautiful braided clothes visit the Rimi and Mega shopping plazas. We stop and admire each other.

In the uptown handicrafts emporium, you can buy reindeer leatherwork and traditional silver jewellery, exquisitely handcrafted into chains and elegant pendants. Silver was discovered in the frozen mountains by the Europeans, who arrived here in the 16th century. In the 1880s an iron-ore mine was excavated at Kiruna in Sweden, and a coalmine at Gullivare, and Lapland became a northern frontier with bars and boxcars, gambling parlours and moonshine brews.

I continue my journey along the Tana River, known for its salmon. Across the river is Finland but these borders are meaningless for a Sami, who moves at will across the northern territories. This is a Mecca not only for skiers but also for anglers: in one recent year, 28,000 day passes were issued and about 50,000 kg of salmon was caught with fishing poles.

"The Finns have two distinct passions," a Finnish priest said. "These are angling and sauna." Every village has a forest, a lake and a little group of huts that can be hired to provide the authentic sauna experience. In fact, "sauna" is a Finnish word. Everyone is equal in the sauna culture. The Finnish Cabinet used to meet in the sauna every evening in what came to be known as the "evening school". "It was there that the major decisions were taken, but not any more," said the priest, shaking his head. "Not since they decided to appoint a woman as Minister."



Outside a hotel in Finse, at an elevation of 1,222 metres.

Birch fires have been burning all day to heat the gargantuan sauna room. I undress, tip a couple of barrels of water over myself, then hang out in the cosily dark sauna and pass out. I awake to a light beating on my back with bunches of birch twigs from (don't ask), who, like me, were travelling to Lavajok.

Rasti-gaissa, at 1,067 m, is the highest mountain in the eastern part of the plateau. "So high, it may be closer to heaven," reads a signboard at the beginning of the track at Lavajok. My progress, although late in the day, is obstructed by Ole, who emerges, as if magically, from behind the clouds. We walk to his hytte, inside which two women are playing dice. They don't speak English, but they have beautiful smiles.

I sleep in the outhouse and slip out, as pre-arranged, at 3 o'clock in the morning. By 8 o'clock I am still struggling with my pulk and half way up when Ole overtakes me on his skidoo. His two women are safely tucked behind on a sled under layers of reindeer skins. At noon, when I reach Levva javrre (lake), Ole has already set up a tent, with oil burner, light and a VHF (very high frequency) telephone.

We spend the day fishing in the lake through a hole about 15-20 cm in diameter made by a drill. As dusk falls, the peaks throw shadows across the ice; a bonfire is lit on the frozen lake to ward off the chill and we cook fresh arctic char, a tasty deep-water fish. It is their kind of a weekend

The next day the wind is strong, but I travel anyway, copiously using my GPS and compass. I cross over the mountain range between Suodine and Ucca gaissa to Suodine javrre, from where I pick up another skidoo trail that runs northwest. From lake to lake and mountain to mountain, I travel alone on the frozen Martian landscape with no one to talk to or see. I cannot even remember if this is the world I live in. The Seven Wonders of the World don't even come close to this. This is far more beautiful, far more exotic, far more seemingly unreal.

At day's end I notice a hytte, the only one since my start from Lavajok and the only one I may find till I reach Skoganvarre. Its location in the wide wilderness impresses me and I begin to wonder how people will react on seeing a stranger. And what if the stranger is profusely tanned, with a shaggy white beard, and smells less like a human and more like a reindeer?

Knock, knock! I can hear voices but no footsteps. I peep through the glass in the door and catch sight of a woman. She stares, drops her jaw and turns. Another woman opens the door, drops her jaw and retreats. I look on. A man strides up from behind, winks and motions me to come in.

Randi, the tall woman, laughs at herself for mistaking me for someone else, as she pours wine into my glass and fills hers. Yes, wine! Mari, the other woman, sits alongside and we make conversation. She uses a mix of Sami and English, at the end of which she nods and says, "Oh, you understand." I nod back, saying, "Yes, I do." Actually, I have understood nothing. Bjarne, the man, looks on, rising occasionally to pour wine or kiss one of his ladies. The wine-women-and-wilderness cocktail is heady.

For supper we have a Sami staple – reindeer meat. I am served chops and reindeer tongue with clear soup, a delicacy. My stomach growls as I look at the tongue unappetisingly stretched out on my plate. In the end I realise I have finished three helpings and many cups of soup. It was delicious.

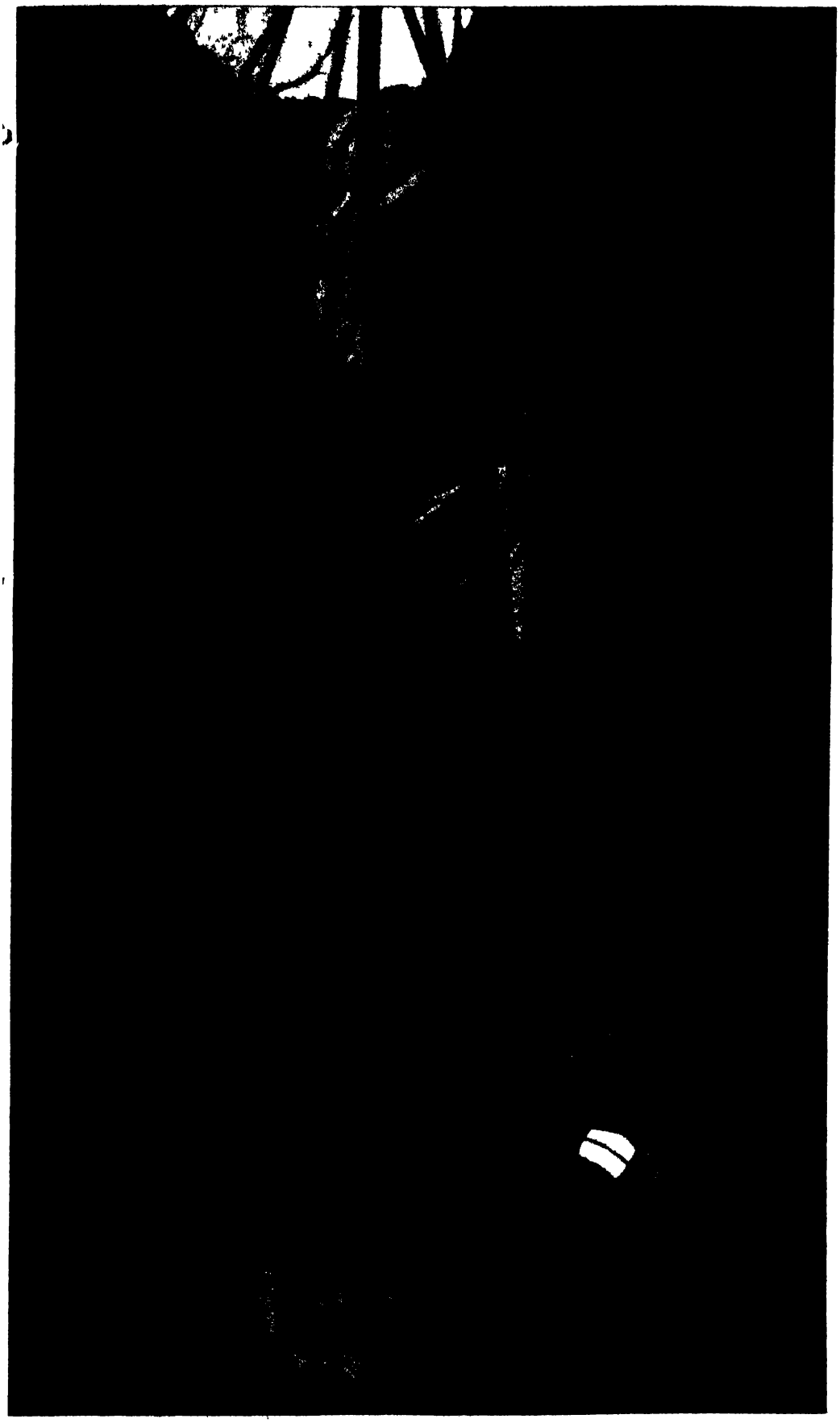
The three are half-Sami and reflect the strong Sami culture for protecting animal species. A discussion ensues on the effects of technology on nature. From the window, as far as I can see, it is pristine nature. This is the route I take the next day.

All day I have nothing but wild beauty in front of me. Wilderness is irresistible but after a time you develop a hunger to share it with another person. Mari called it "Magi, magi" last night. Now I understand what she meant. It is magic, magic!

As I begin to descend, I notice the mosses and lichens giving a gentle splash of colour to the rocky hillsides and the edges of the bog. Perhaps these colours have been a source of inspiration for the Sami costume that is now worn only on special occasions. During Easter, particularly in Kautokeino, there are no bounds to this richness and colour, which make a magnificent sight.

At Skoganvarre I am in the lowlands where pine, blue fir and spruce grow and the reindeer dutifully troop south to their winter pasture. The road between Karasjok and Lakselv cuts through the plateau and runs further to North Cape. I look for skidoo tracks crossing the road that I can follow to climb up the western plateau again. Soon I come to a farmstead. A dog barks, a window opens, a sun-baked head pops out and I am asked who I am. I answer and am told that I don't have permission to go any further before I have had a cup of coffee with him. I have two.

I am now on my fourth and final lap. The journey from Skoganvarre will bring me back to Jotka, a circuit of almost 400 km on the Finnsmark plateau. The day's journey is dominated by Vuorje, which at 1,024m looms large, majestically overlooking the wide, flat terrain and shelter-



Inside a lavvu, a Sami tent. There are very few truly nomadic Sami people left, and most of them now have a permanent home.

ing Laevnjas javrre at its foot – one of the prime fishing locations. As I approach, I see a couple zip past on their skidoo. The wind starts blowing; I draw out my ski-sail but realise it is again a head wind as it has been throughout my journey. I camp as soon as I reach the end of the lake. The scene from my tent is exotic and I find it hard to relate it to anything I know. Imagine the red planet Mars with water, emerging out of the Ice Age. It is the closest I can get.

The next day I meet three young men who are travelling from Norway's southern tip to North Cape – an adventure that many young Norwegians like to undertake after they graduate. I wish that many young Indians would show a similar spirit and go Trans-Himalaya.

Adventure, I suppose, cannot be taught in schools. It is caught from one generation by another. Fridtjof Nansen, Roald Amundsen, the Arctic explorers, and Thor Heyerdahl of the Kon Tiki and Ra expeditions, still are a great inspiration for Norwegian youth. And the number of modern explorers such as Borge Ousland, Sjur Modre and Agnar Berg is on the rise.

Despite the inhospitable nature of the region and the ferocity of the winter, the people of Finnmark are greatly attached to their part of Norway. Outside an old unused telephone hut at Dollajuolgge, two boys sit on their skidoos and watch the wind blow the snow. I ask if they are coming or going. The







(Left) A Norwegian woman in traditional dress. The embroidery on her dress is similar to the one on the ceremonial dress of the Queen of Norway.
(Left centre) Thousands of Norwegians come together in Hemsedal Valley to celebrate Easter. For Scandinavians, sunshine is synonymous with life – something to be cherished, pursued and exploited.
(Left below) On the waterfront at Oslo. Norwegians like to live near the sea and do what their ancestors have enjoyed doing for generations – sailing.

answer is, neither. They are there just to be outdoors.

It is May, and the night is light. It is this pale, translucent light of what the Norwegians call a *sommernetter* (summer night) that is so much more remarkable than normal light. Instead of dipping, the sun begins to rise, rise and rise again. In this magical, diffused golden light, all normal rules of life seem suspended and anything at all is possible.

Just then, the wind tugs me from behind. I am thrilled. It is a back wind and could be perfect for sailing. Although it is late at night, I clip on my ski sail and I am ski-borne. The plateau ahead is wide, open and flat. On it are my sail, my pulk and myself travelling at great speed, without fear, moving as wildly as a skidoo. Travelling at this speed, I am more exhausted with excitement than by the pull of the sail in front and the pulk behind. I am in a trance, where only my sail and I exist. The only sound is of the wind and my skis zipping on the snow. This is ecstasy. I feel heady, drunk on life. I begin to understand why the Norwegians call their summer night the "time of life".

This day comes as a present from nature and I cherish it as the most beautiful in my life. It is a day I will live for again. It is a place I will come to again and again. And when I retire, I want to live here, die here. Is nature giving me a portent of success, by showing me that the wind can be harnessed and that I have been tried and tested? The wind took me south but will it take me to the South Pole? ■

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Looking back on the Net

The story of the evolution of the Internet, thrity years on.

GEORGE JOHNSON

THIRTY years ago, on October 29, the inaugural message was sent over the first thin reed of what was to become the Internet. It was nothing so portentous as "What hath God wrought," the words christening the telegraph in 1844. It was just the simple word "login"

There were only two nodes on what was then known as the Arpanet, the precursor to the Internet built by the U.S. Defence Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). As the story has become enshrined in folklore, a student of University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) named Charley Kline tapped out the letters "l" and "o", which were dutifully echoed back by a computer at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), a centre about 768 km northwest in what was not yet Silicon Valley. When he typed the third letter, "g", the SRI computer was supposed to recognise and complete the full command.

Instead, the letters caused a memory buffer to overflow, bringing down the system. But it was an exceedingly minor crash, said Bill Duvall, who was tweaking the connection on the Stanford end. The buffer size was increased and the first connection was flawlessly made.

"I guess that I really don't care to be known as 'The First Guy to Crash the Internet'," Duvall wrote in an e-mail message. What sticks in his mind is the satisfying feeling of getting the pieces of the complex system to mesh. The SRI computer had to be fooled into thinking it was talking to a regular old teletype machine, a "virtual user" which might as well have been in the same room. Stanford had practised for the occasion by running simulations of the network connection. But there is no substitute for the real thing.

"Quite a bit of thought went into debugging the initial network connection," Duvall recalled. "When the SRI end came up, I was pretty happy. I guess that it is a bit like a symphony – it's the last note that is remembered, not all of the stuff in between." No one apparently thought of taking a picture. And no one recalls what messages followed. "It seems like it should have been 'Watson, come here! I need you!'" Duvall said, referring to Alexander Graham Bell's first, urgent telephonic command (he had just spilled battery acid). "That would not have been out of character. But, alas, I really don't remember."

And so the revolution quietly began. With one scarcely noticed milestone after another, the planetary nervous system envisioned in the early 1960s – cyber rhetoric is as old as a Beatles tune – unceremoniously began insinuating itself into society. A strange amalgam of U.S. Defence Department money, engineering expertise, and even a dab of countercultural idealism, slowly brought on the Net we know today.

There was no big ribbon-cutting a month later when a third node was installed at the UCLA at Santa Barbara, or the following month, when the reach extended outside California to the University of Utah. No golden spike was hammered into the ground to commemorate the joining of the coasts with a link to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where a small consulting company called Bolt Beranek & Newman had won the contract to build and run the Arpanet.

What was emerging would be barely recognisable today. There were no dot coms, no World Wide Web, nothing called e-mail. The main purpose was to let university-based researchers for the Defence Department agency share computer resources, allowing someone in, say, California to run a program on a machine in Massachusetts. Many system administrators were reluctant. Computer power was scarce. Why should they share it with strangers?

But from very early on, a handful of visionaries realised the synergistic power that would come from someday putting a computer on everybody's desk, then gradually weaving them into one great matrix. In an age when computers were still identified in the public mind with punch cards and spinning reels of tape, some of the early fomenters of the information age showed stunning prescience.

AS long ago as 1945, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Dr. Vannevar Bush, the engineer, educator and government research adviser, came up with the basic idea of the personal computer, a device he called the memex – a mechanical extension of human memory. Never mind that it was as big as a desk and that it stored all your documents, including encyclopaedias and reference libraries, on super-fine-grained microfilm shuffled by nimble mechanical fingers and projected onto translucent screens.

Though embodied in the clunky technologies of the time, the memex would work something like an associative memory – or, less grandiosely, a relational database. A user researching the history of the bow and arrow might start by calling up an encyclopaedia article. When he found another relevant passage in a book, he would link the documents with a few keystrokes, encoding them with crude hyperlinks, and even add his own annotations. "Thus he builds a trail of his interest through the maze of materials available to him," Bush wrote.

To his credit, Bush also speculated that going beyond "dry photography", the data might be stored as magnetised dots on metallic sheets using the technology that already existed for recording voices on spools of wire. And for entering data, he even envisioned the scanner, an outgrowth of the radio facsimile machines that already existed in his day.

The big thing Bush missed was electronic networking. As he saw the chain of events, the researcher would meet someone a few years later who wanted to incorporate the bow-and-arrow material into his own study on technology. "He sets a reproducer in action, photographs the whole trail out and passes it to his friend for insertion in his own memex," he wrote, "there to be linked into the more general trail." He had invented the World Wide Web with messengers on bicycles in place of high-speed digital T-3 lines.

A decade and a half later, Dr. J.C.R. Licklider, one of the most visionary computer scientists of his day, took another

leap with his predictions of a "Galactic Network" linking everyone to a universe of information. In a later paper titled "The Computer as a Communication Device," he and Robert Taylor, who would go on to direct the Arpanet project, imagined nothing less than "a labile network of networks, ever-changing in both content and configuration".

"What will go on inside?" they asked. "Eventually, every informational transaction of sufficient consequence to warrant the cost. Each secretary's typewriter, each data-gathering instrument, each dictation machine, will feed into the network."

There would be no need for letters, telegrams, telephone calls or even business trips. People would simply link their computers to other people's computers. Dictionaries, encyclopaedias, investment advice, tax counselling, advanced scientific modelling programmes – all would be available within the Net.

Online communities would form with people selected "more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity." And, more ominously, the two researchers speculated, those denied the benefits of this "intelligence amplification" might be relegated to an information-deprived underclass. Both the bright and dark sides of today's Internet were anticipated years before the first message was sent.

For all the grandiosity of the vision, the Internet developed haltingly. To make Licklider's Galactic Net a reality, scientists and engineers had to design a communications system that operated like none that had come before. The obvious example to emulate might have been the telephone network, in which long-distance calls from one small town to another were routed like airline flights through one or more central hubs.

BUT in the early 1960s, researchers began to realise that a computer network would be made much less vulnerable to failure if it was more widely spread out – less like the air travel system than like the network of back roads weaving together every municipality in the country. Each point is connected to its nearest neighbours by several redundant paths. If a connecting node between A and B fails, it is easy to find an alternative route.

But there was an even more radical difference between the networks of old and the one that was about to take root. In an ordinary telephone system, two phones were linked by forming a temporary circuit, a dedicated physical channel through which the electrified voices flowed. The telegraph used a different technology called message switching: each telegram was given an electronic address, then sent into the Net, where it would be relayed, node by node, to its destination.

Paul Baran at RAND Corp. and Donald Watts Davies at the British National Physical Laboratory independently saw the advantages of taking this "store and forward" model a step further. A message from one computer to another would be chopped up into many little packets, which would be sent swarming through the network to find their way. Some would take this route, some would take that. Each would carry a destination label along with instructions for where the packet fit inside the overall message. No matter in what sequence the pieces arrived, they could be reassembled.

In this system, called packet switching, there would be no need to tie up a circuit for a single transmission. And since the messages were broken into smaller fragments, the flow would be smoother. Finally, if a packet got corrupted, one could just resend it and not the whole transmission.

Around the same time, Dr. Leonard Kleinrock, who would preside over the establishment of the first node at UCLA, was using a mathematical tool called queuing theory to understand how data would flow in a packet-switched network. By 1966, with these and other basic ideas in place, Lawrence Roberts, recruited by ARPA from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, mapped out the plan.

Two years after the first transmission, the number of host computers grew to 23. The "@" symbol was invented in 1972, and a year later 75 per cent of the Arpanet traffic was e-mail. It was starting to look like the Net.

Before long, other organisations, like the National Science Foundation, wanted their own networks. By the late 1970s, Dr. Robert Kahn and Dr. Vinton Cerf of ARPA were putting the finishing touches on the lingua franca, inelegantly called TCP/IP, that would weave the patches into the electronic quilt called the Internet.

And that is just a fraction of the contributions. No one stands in relation to the Internet as Bell to the telephone or Morse to the telegraph. There was no single moment when it all came together. From the beginning, it was a continuous collaboration of many minds. And any attempt to recite the history in less than a book must be notable for its omissions.

IT was not until 1984, when the Net had grown to include 1,000 host computers, that the domain name system was established that lets Amazon.com be Amazon.com and not 208.216.182.15. And in 1991 came the World Wide Web followed by Mosaic, the first graphical interface, or browser, that inspired Netscape and Explorer. The number of Internet hosts quickly exceeded a million, and this year that number multiplied fifty-fold.

Before long the barbarians were at the gates. Scientists on the Net were suddenly getting e-mail from journalists, then from their own parents, and then from schoolchildren asking for help with their homework. The Pentagon was sharing the Web with pacifist groups, cyberspace mirroring the conflicts of the physical world.

And what a powerful tool it has become. Simply by typing "Watson, come here" into a search engine, one can now find a scanned image of Bell's original notebook pages at the Library of Congress. There on the yellowed paper, in his own handwriting, is what he really said (slightly different from what is often quoted): "Watson – come here – I want to see you."

Sitting up in the futurist's perch, where Licklider put himself almost half a century ago, today's visionaries talk about the arrival in the first decades of the coming millennium of "ubiquitous computing". Hand-held computers will merge with cellphones, talking to computers hidden in the office walls and the trunks of cars, all linked into a pervasive net. With a spoken command, a person would have instant access to the invisible ether of information.

Writing in 1960, Licklider called this kind of technobiological mind meld "man-computer symbiosis" and ventured that bringing it together might take 15 years. "The 15 may be 10 or 500," he added more realistically, "but those years should be intellectually the most creative and exciting in the history of mankind."

As the Internet inevitably recedes into the background, it can almost be taken for granted – the ultimate compliment. It has become the platform on which its successor will rise. When the 40th anniversary or the 50th rolls around, it will be even harder to untangle the individual contributions to something so much bigger than its inventors. ■

New York Times Service

Surging ahead

A recent Internet show in Delhi showed that the throwing open of the telecom sector has given a boost to information technology in the country.

ANAND PARTHASARATHY

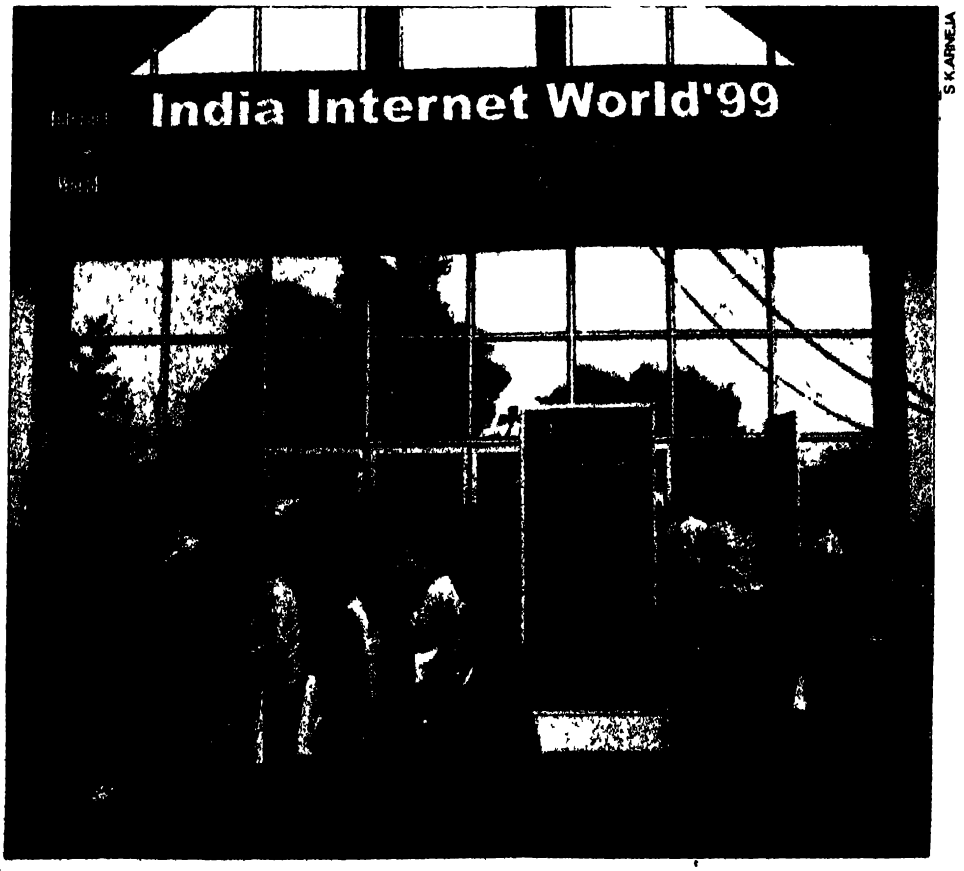
THERE could be nothing as rosy as government-inspired statistics. They invariably err on the side of breezy optimism. But on rare occasions, unexpected and positive developments make even the bureaucracy's optimistic projections under-estimates. The Indian government's estimates about the growth of information technology in the country constitute a good example of such under-estimation. For years, one was told that the penetration of the personal computer (PC) was one per 500 persons. This figure was sanctified in the government's Information Technology Task Plan for a decade, which was published in mid-1998. The plan document stated that efforts would be made to increase this figure to one per 50 persons by the year 2008. The planners were obviously unaware that the Indian government's long-delayed telecom liberalisation policy and the arrival of the Internet would prove these estimates too modest.

On November 6, 1998, the government announced a new policy for Internet Service Providers (ISPs). This policy removed the monopoly enjoyed by state-run agencies such as the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and its external arm, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL). This allowed private ISPs to provide value addition and sell Internet services to Indian customers. Early players such as Satyam Online were initially content to stick to the VSNL price structure, which many Indian users found prohibitive. However, when more ISPs stepped in – 10 nationally, 15 regionally and at least 100 based in single cities – competition reduced nearly by half the cost of accessing the Internet. Today, 70 Indian towns have access to the Internet through a local telephone call.

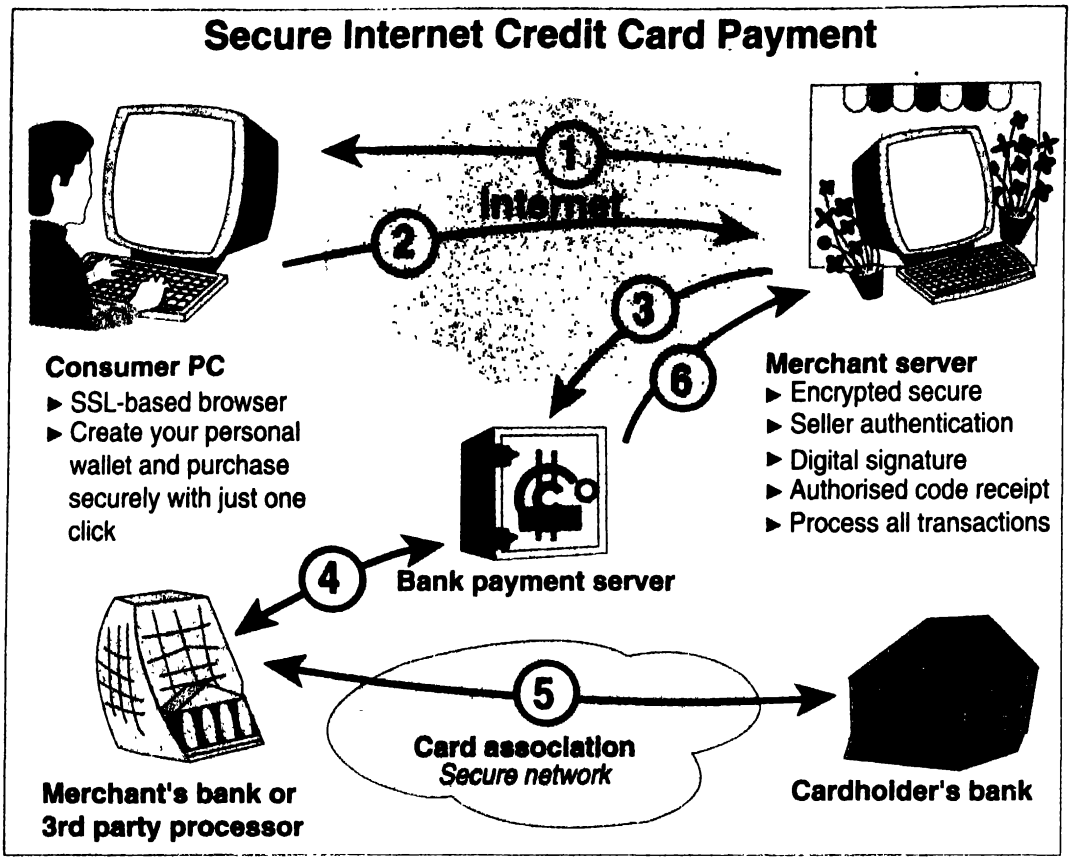
Along with this expansion of services came a sharp drop in the price of personal computer products: multimedia 'Internet-ready' PCs, with 25 hours of free Net access thrown in, were available for Rs. 35,000 in mid-1999. (The price of Internet-optimised colour inkjet printers crashed below the Rs.5,000 mark.) As a result, thousands of Indian middle class families could afford to buy a PC and have an Internet connection.

In mid-1999, the Manufacturers' Association for Information Technology (MAIT) announced that the sale of PCs in India had for the first time crossed the one-million-a-year mark and that the installed base by the end of this fiscal year would be at least four million. Take the fact that India's population would be above the one billion mark around that time, and you know why the IT industry is the country's "sunrise" industry. People bought twice as many PCs as the most optimistic statistics had projected. By September 1999 there were 1.5 million Internet users in the country. Although this is still way behind the figures for the United States – 70 million out of 379 million Internet users worldwide – IT watchers were more interested in the 100 per cent growth rate that contributed to this number, making the Internet the fastest-growing media sector.

It was this upbeat mood that was evident at India Internet World, which was organised in Delhi in end-September.



At India Internet World '99 in New Delhi.



Internet service providers used the event, the largest such in Asia, to show the different ways in which they were providing value addition even while doing the same thing – buying telecom bandwith and Internet gateway access from the government and reselling it to customers. Satyam, which pioneered the use of CD-ROMs to sell hassle-free Net access, announced a new Web site for business-to-business products and services called www.seekandsource.com, where even organisations that do not have their own Internet presence can do business on the Net. Wipro, one of the first major Indian IT manufacturers to enter the ISP business, announced a Web-based distance learning service called Virtual Education Network, which would enable companies to link their far-flung offices for training sessions (www.wipro.net). It also placed on tap the learning resources of Lotus Corporation. Mantra Online, a joint venture between Bharti Enterprises and British Telecom, offered Fleximantra – reduced connection charges during off-peak hours.

inevitable that sooner or later meone would realise the potential of tapping India's large non-English-speak- pulation. The Delhi event saw the guration of what was termed "India's first Hindi Internet portal" – a Web site that served as an entry point to dozens of other resources in the same language. Created by Suvi Information Systems Ltd, an IT company that pioneered the Web site for the Indore-based Hindi newspaper *Nai Dunia*, the new portal (www.webdunia.com) is a canny mix of news, cultural round-ups, recipes, religious features and "infotainment" based on the Mubai film industry. It was obvious that the creators of the site thought beyond the Hindi heartland. Both E-patra, the free e-mail service (www.epatra.com), and E-varta, the chat site, are multilingual – one can enter it in Marathi, Gujarati, Malayalam or Punjabi. Suvi has promised to include every Indian language in the near future. For those who need both English and Hindi services, DSF Internet Services offers the first Indian bilingual portal at http://in.orientation.com. In order to show that international portals with a *desi* accent can be steered rapidly towards commercial success, pioneers in the field such as the Mumbai-based Rediff on the Net (www.rediff.com) and the Calcutta-based 123 India (www.123india.com) were on hand to display their range of customers and e-services.

Indeed, e-commerce and e-services seem to be the buzzwords of the day, and "Move your business on the Internet, or move out", the *mantra* that motivates hundreds of Indians. Helping in this process are international IT majors such as Sun, IBM, Hewlett-Packard and Microsoft, who are aggressively marketing their e-biz initiatives in India. The only stumbling block appears to be India's antiquated laws – some, like the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Telegraph Act, the Indian Evidence Act and the RBI Act, date back to the 19th century. These laws need to be sharply revised if the new regime of "digital signatures" and "electronic payments" is to become a reality.

Buoyed by this vision, multinationals such as CyberCash, which specialise in secure Net-based payment systems, as well as Indian telecom providers such as Global Tele-Systems (which offers the "secur-e-pay" system) are now promoting their services in the country. "If I make a payment on the Net, will it reach the seller, and more important, is information about my account safe from Net-pirates?" is a question that inhibits even the most enthusiastic of Internet users from shopping online. Payment system companies thus play a crucial role in instilling customer confidence.

Even in the relatively less critical area of online banking, most banks in the nationalised sector continue to dither over providing even simple Net services such as giving information on cheque status and account status. Meanwhile, almost all foreign-owned and many of the enterprising private sector Indian banks have launched such services to complement their network of Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). An event like India Internet World served to separate the "talkers" from the "doers".

N. Muralidharan, head of technology and e-solutions, SchoolNet India Ltd, the technology arm of Infrastructure Leasing and Finance Services (IL&FS),

said that the apparatus of Web-based trading is in place and can generate a million deals a day as soon as the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) permits Internet-based trading. The company is geared to launching Internet-based trading by April 2000 and expects to double the number of daily transactions at Indian stock exchanges.

Meeting the large communication overheads of such ambitious projects is in itself big business. Global telecom giants such as Ericsson, Hughes, Gilat, Teleglobe and Comsat, which have arrived in India either through marketing agents or in partnership with Indian companies, have begun to bid for many large public contracts. Particularly relevant in a country where the telephone network is thinly spread is the communication option of using Indian satellites in conjunction with Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs). Unrealistic monopoly pricing by the government for this option had hitherto hampered potential user agencies. A competitive market environment is, however, poised to open the satellite-based Net route in a big way for Indian corporates.

For the rest of the people, new and affordable alternatives are in the offing. The Delhi Finance Corporation has announced plans to provide loans up to Rs.2.40 lakhs for setting up 'Cybercafes' in Delhi. At the Internet World exhibition, prospective investors could view products such as the WebRamp, a Rs.20,000 gizmo that allows a person to share a single Internet connection among dozens of user terminals. Cybercafe software is also available off the shelf.

A trial run organised by the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) to provide cheap video e-mail services between Mumbai and Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh has proved to be so popular that the facility will soon be available between telecom centres in the metros. The sender sits in front of a video camera and a microphone and records a message for three minutes. This is then compressed and sent via e-mail to the recipient centre. The receiver sits in front of an identical set-up at the recipient centre and sees the recorded video message. The entire process takes only a few minutes and costs only Rs.15. On October 2, eight towns in Bihar and U.P. introduced this service.

The transformation of STD/ISD booths into cyber information kiosks is already taking place – the first 100 booths that were so converted were commissioned in the National Capital Region on September 25. The State governments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Gujarat and West Bengal have tied up with WorldTel, a company promoted by Sam Pitroda, former Chairman of the Telecom Commission, to set up their own State-level fibre optic networks. They will ultimately form part of a National Information Backbone (NIB).

Meanwhile, it has become clear that various people are working overtime, trying to ensure that India, a late starter in the Internet business, catches up and probably even overtakes the early starters since it has a vast reserve of software talent. Interestingly, while the heads moved to the Silicon Valley and other destinations in the West, the hearts continue to root for Malleswaram in Bangalore, Mambalam in Chennai, and Chowringhee in Calcutta. The former group comprises entrepreneurs of Indian origin, who today control almost half the foreign-owned Internet start-up companies in the U.S. Names such as Sabeer Bhatia, founder of Hotmail, and K.B. Chandrasekhar, co-founder of the leading server hosting company, Exodus Communications, are already part of legend. At India Internet World, others such as Ram Shriram and Rakesh Mathur were on hand to provide motivation to young aspirants. Ram Shriram first served with Netscape and then joined Junglee.com, a product finder service that was acquired by Amazon.com, the pioneer bookseller on the Net. He moved to Amazon.com as vice-president and his current interest is google.com, a service that filters out garbage and retains critical information from the Internet. He recommends an aggressive – even predatory – attitude for surviving in the Internet business. Rakesh Mathur, co-founder of Junglee, who quit Amazon a few weeks ago along with Shriram, has decided to come back to India in five years to help strengthen the infrastructure here. Rohit Chandra set up the Internet's first user identity company, eCode.com – you get a free, single, permanent identity which you retain even though your e-mail address or Web site may change. It was a simple idea, and it succeeded because it is useful. Prof. V. Rao Vemuri of the University of California at Davis, is one of the gurus of neural computing. In recent months he has turned his attention to his home State, Andhra Pradesh, where he has set up an Indo-U.S. company, Smartifacts.com, dedicated to "mining" nodules of useful information from the Internet and delivering it in processed form to the receiver.

After being highly successful in the U.S., these people are now looking homeward since for the first time in many years the technological prospects have increased. They think that India can launch itself into the big league. In the fading days of this century, it looks like India has found in them its secret weapon – a cyber-driven *'agni asthra* that will power its surge into the next century. ■



S. ARNUJA

Visitors at an Internet access facility.



At the India International Maritime Expo '99 in Panaji.

RAVI SHARMA
in Panaji

THE India International Maritime Expo '99 or Inmex 99, held in Panaji, Goa, from October 6 to 10 was the first exhibition in India to be dedicated to maritime products and services Held at a time when the global maritime industry is facing a sea of troubles, the event provided a platform for the industry to advertise its wares It also underscored India's achievements in this field and focussed on the challenges ahead as India develops its maritime infrastructure

During 1998-99, the overall global gross registered tonnage (GRT) was 8 33 million, about 1 68 per cent less than that in the previous year Commander J Sinke, a retired Dutch naval officer and sales manager of MarineSafety, a Dutch company, said "The maritime industry experiences ebbs and flows Right now, the prospects for the offshore industry are not good "

Inmex '99 focussed on maritime development and utilisation across the world Although the prime targets were Central and State government organisations, commercial operators were also in it out. As one exhibitor said: "Almost everyone knows what everyone else has to offer, but being here and showcasing our products is important "

Prominent manufacturers from 22 countries, including India, were represented at Inmex '99 The exhibition covered the entire gamut of maritime products and services Among the manufacturers were Schottel, MarineSafety, Kamewa Finland, France Telecom, the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), the Chennai Port Trust, the Mumbai Port Trust, the Mormugao Port Trust, Simpsons, Adani Port, IHC Holland, Skanti, Penang Port, Port Klang, STN Atlas, CounterFire, Cummins India, Heinen & Hopman Engineering, Anderson Marine, the National Institute of Oceanography and Stone Marine The Indian Navy, the Indian Coast Guard, the Ministry of Surface Transport, the Port Trusts and Defence Laboratories such as the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory and the National Ship Design Research Centre were also represented.

Inmex '99 was organised by Pradeep Deviah and Associates, a Bangalore-based group which specialises in exhibitions, with support from the Ministry of Surface Transport. Over 150 stalls were put up in three prefabricated hangars; among the products on offer were large ships, bulk carriers, fishing trawlers, tug boats, dredgers, work boats, navigational equipment, marine engines and barges Among the services were port development, ship-building, fire-fighting, communications, ship repair, marine air-conditioning, vessel traffic management systems and oil spill crisis management systems

A two-day conference, Maritime 2000, held concurrently with Inmex '99, generated debates on trade, shipping, ocean resources, ports, oil spills crisis management, harbours and ship-building. Only Indian vessels participated in the static display at Inmex '99.

WATERWAYS – global, inland and coastal – are a cost-effective alternative to rail and road routes, which are overly congested worldwide. Dr. Jose Paul, Chairman of the Mormugao Port Trust, said, "More than 80 per cent of all international trade by weight or volume moves by sea; in the case of developing countries, the percentage is even higher. (In India's case, it is 95 per cent.) In order to facilitate the extension and diversification of international trade, sea ports and their facilities must be constantly expanded, modernised and run efficiently."

A range of products and services to cater to these demands were on offer at Inmex '99. Dutch maritime officials promoted vessel traffic systems that are in place at Rotterdam, the world's busiest port. These included virtual reality systems that allow marine pilots, tug masters and vessel traffic service operators to simulate escort, towing and shore-based pilotage exercises. Sinke said that MarineSafety's Full Mission Bridge Simulators took in over 200 ship models and different geographic areas, including the Mumbai port.

IHC Holland showcased its newly developed rotor tugs. Tug boats have no rudder; they have only three propellers. The "rudderpropellers", as they are called, make the 75-tonne bollard pull tugs highly manoeuvrable and cost-effective.

Poland's maritime industry was represented by its Consul in Mumbai, Ireneusz Makles. According to Makles, Poland's shipyards have overcome the bleak years. "Today we are the world's sixth largest shipbuilder. Many of our yards have been merged and privatised and are working to full capacity." Polish ships are cheaper than those manufactured in other European countries and have a ready market in Norway and Germany. Their shipyards also offer repair facilities (for which most Indian ships go to South Korea) and are looking for joint ventures with Indian shipyards. A memorandum of understanding was signed recently between Naval Shipyard Gdynia and the Mazagon Docks for the production of four medium-class warships for the Indian Navy. The project will cost $160 million, and production will start in 2000; one warship will be manufactured in Poland and the rest in India.

Polish shipyards also hope that the Indian government will call for a re-tender for the 105,000 DWT (Dead Weight Ton) aframax oil carrier that the SCI wants to acquire. The South Korean company Hyundai won the contract but is yet to make the delivery.

China, which is competing with South Korea in the Asian maritime market, had a small presence through its agents. Shandong Machinery from Qingdao province offered propulsion systems, cargo-handling equipment, navigational aids and even patrol and life boats. Mohan Chitre of Bohra Industries, which will supply the Chinese firm's equipment in India, said: "Chinese products are cheaper and we hope to make articles like propellers a consumer item which can be bought off the shelf."

Most of the Indian companies at the show were representative firms or selling agents for foreign companies. The Chennai-based Simpson and Co. Ltd, for example, presented its Volvo Penta marine engines (150 to 600 horsepower). The engines have their outdrive mounted on the stern, which makes it easy to use the rudder. Simpsons also put its indigenously built Simpson Marine Engine (54 hp) on show.

Cummins India showcased its indigenously developed 6B 5.9 Marine (94 hp) engine. According to Cummins zonal manager V. Nageshwaran, the light-weight engine, fuel-efficient and environment-friendly, will be ready for the market by January.

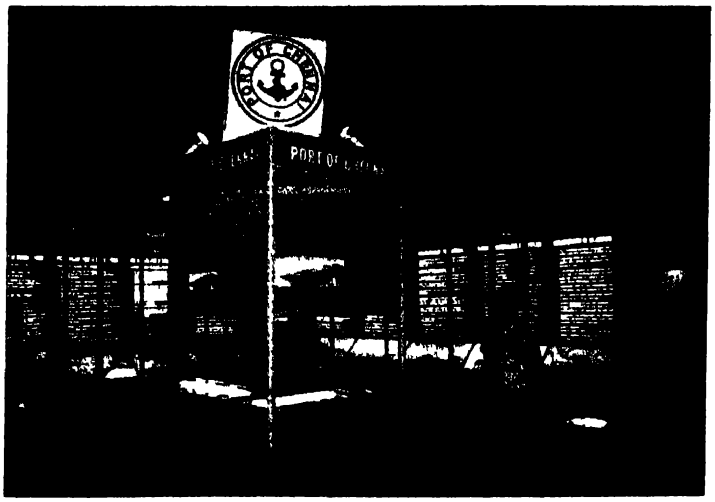
Wadia Boat Builders from Bilimora (Gujarat), Anderson Marine from Goa and Tebma Shipyards from Chennai, whose products range from dredgers, small craft, boat and launch builders to pontoons and barges, were three of the Indian enterprises which part-manufactured the equipment that they sold.

Tebma Shipyards builds dredgers, and its Tusker series of standard cutter suction dredgers, with amphibian capabilities, are built with the technical collaboration of Degroot Nijkerk Machinefabriek, Holland. Its Turtle 100 dredger, being used at the Vijayawada Thermal Power Station, can also be used on small canals and lakes and cooling water canals of power stations; it can be used even to clean city sewers. According to E. Chacko, managing director of Tebma Shipyard, the municipal administrations of Surat and Delhi are interested in using Turtle 100 to clear sewage lines.

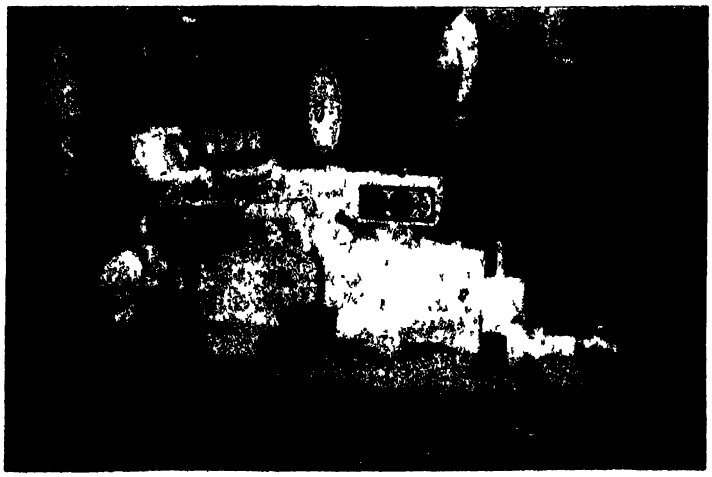
Most Indian shipbuilders build the hull, which could be made of steel, wood or fibreglass, depending on the size of the vessel and the requirement; the engine and the propulsion systems are imported.

The Naval Science and Technological Laboratory, which is part of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), showcased its High Speed Towing Tank.

THE Indian maritime industry is going through difficult times.



The Port of Chennai stall at Inmex '99. The lack of adequate infrastructure and management systems at Indian ports came up for discussion at the Maritime 2000 conference.



Cummins India's indigenously developed 94-hp engine, which will be in the market by January 2000.

Economic liberalisation has facilitated private participation in infrastructure development, including ports, but simultaneously many concessions have been withdrawn or diluted. The quantum of cargo that the government controls has fallen, resulting in a reduction of cargo support for Indian shippers.

Indian ships carry only around 32 per cent of all Indian cargo and just 10 per cent of Indian breakbulk cargo; foreign vessels carry the rest.

According to Rohet Tolani, chairman and managing director, Tolani Ltd, an Indian shipping company, "Indian shipping has become less competitive in the global context and therefore less profitable." Tolani added: "The industry is therefore unable to compete for capital for the long term. Owing to discriminatory taxation of Indian seafarers serving on Indian ships, the industry is unable to attract the best manpower. These factors, and antiquated labour laws, have together meant that the industry is incapable of managing operating costs."

LACK of adequate infrastructure and management systems at Indian ports came up for discussion at Inmex '99. Although the 11 major Indian ports handle (and will continue to handle) cargo in excess of their capacity, the volumes are far lower than those of ports in other Asian countries. Captain Rajan Vir, president of the Indian Maritime Foundation, said: "No Indian port qualifies as a hub port (a port where the world's mainline traffic comes). Even the major ports are used only as feeder ports. Only the smaller lines come to India, while the mainlines move from hub to hub. In the Asian region, mainlines move from Aden to Colombo to Singapore to Hong Kong and Japan."

Cargo congestion, customs delays, protest action by dock workers or delayed paperwork often means that the turnaround time (the time taken for unloading/loading of a ship) at Indian ports is unduly long. As a result, ships waiting to unload have to pay demurrage to the ports. According to SCI Director Sudhir S. Rangnekar, around $0.5 billion is paid to Indian ports as demurrage every year.

Commodore Ranjit B. Rai added: "Most Indian ports do not have heavy lift capacity, which has therefore to be hired from outside – a costly proposition, which pushes up costs of projects for which heavy machinery is required."

Rear Admiral (retd) Mohan Raman said: "The world over, shipbuilding is a catalyst for industrial growth. It was the case in Germany, Britain, Japan and even South Korea. Unfortunately, this is not being given importance in India. There has to be a dramatic increase in the volume of water-borne trade, both domestic and international."

According to a statistical report on world fleets (1998-99), India ranks 17th among maritime nations in terms of GRT. It has a fleet strength of 425 vessels with a combined GRT of 6.41 million.

The Planning Commission has set a target of 9 million GRT during the Ninth Plan, but that is unlikely to be met. However, Rangnekar argues that GRT is not the only criterion to judge a fleet "It is not necessary to keep adding tonnage; we can charter tonnage." The answer, he says, is "a profitable, robust-growing shipping industry". He adds: "Privatisation is not the panacea. What we need is an attitudinal change. For example, most Indian ports are departments of the government. Instead, let them operate as corporations. Make them responsible for their profits or losses."

There is also an opinion that if Indian ships are to increase the amount of cargo they carry, they will have to go in for cross-trading – hop from port to port with cargo that is not Indian. According to Rangnekar, this is the litmus test of a fleet's standing in the international market. Indian ships, he said, tended to travel empty to their ports of loading, using ballast instead of cargo. Cross-trading would bring down the ballast component (which is now 40 per cent).

Many speakers at Maritime 2000 were of the opinion that the choice before major and minor ports as they planned infrastructure development was to add new facilities or convert existing facilities into more efficient propositions. Mukesh G. Parikh, vice-president, Adani Port Ltd, one of Gujarat's fledgling semi-private sector ports (in which the Gujarat Government has a 26 per cent stake), said that during 2001-06 India would need $18.3 billion for infrastructure development.

Although successive governments at the Centre have revised various sections of the Indian Ports Act in order to encourage private participation, the feeling was that much more needed to be done. Parikh said: "The paperwork and clearances that have to be obtained are time-consuming and laborious. There should be a single window for securing clearances, within a time-frame."

India's major ports keenly encourage private sector participation in keeping with the Vision 2020 plan prepared by the Ministry of Surface Transport. A study undertaken by the Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES) in association with High Point Rendel (U.K.) and Prof. E.G. Frankel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology states that if the terminals or services within an existing port are privatised, they will stand a much better chance of taking off than a totally new port at a greenfield location.

The report notes that under the Indian Ports Act, a major port cannot be privatised; therefore it recommends that terminals and services be offered to private entrepreneurs to run.

The Mumbai Port Trust, the first Indian port to offer designated cargo-specific berths to the private sector to operate, is in the process of handing over a general cargo berth. The entrepreneur will have to equip the berth, pay a royalty, undertake to deliver an assured quantum throughput and manage all operations.

Saroj Tahiliani, company secretary of the Mumbai Port Trust, said: "Private initiative has been a good experience. They have been able to deliver a better throughput than we." The port also plans a joint venture with the private sector to upgrade its existing dry docks at a cost of Rs.25 crores.

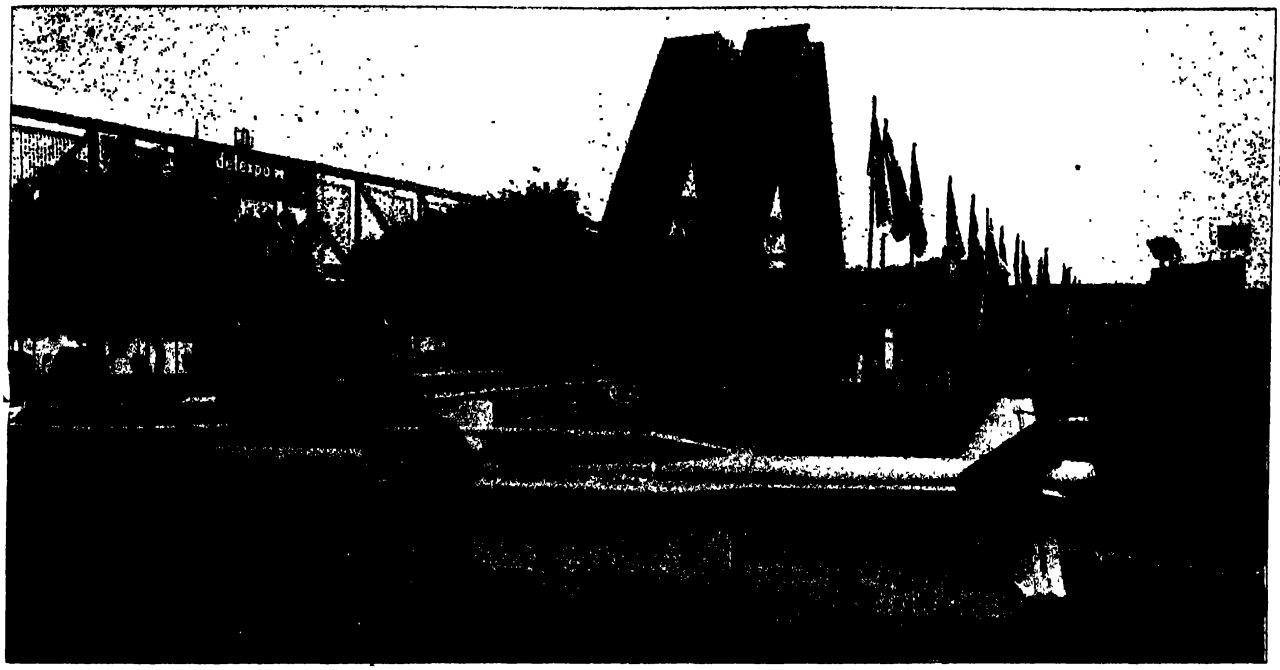
Other major ports have followed the Mumbai example. The Ennore port has gone a step further: it is to be run as a corporation. Other such exercises hinge on its success.

While it is unrealistic for India even to think of competing with 'flags of convenience' or open registry countries such as Panama, Liberia and the Bahamas (where rules and regulations are not as rigorous and costs are 30 per cent less), some exhibitors at Inmex '99 felt that if India invested more in infrastructure development, it could hope to benefit from having an efficient and cost-effective growth in maritime transport.

As was evident at Inmex '99, the world wants to do business with India, provided an enabling environment is provided. India plans to modernise and increase the handling capacity of its 11 major and over 150 minor ports from the present 250 to 420 million tonnes by 2002. India also plans to develop coastal shipping and inland waterways and modernise its fleet. The development of port infrastructure alone is expected to cost $4 billion. But all this is almost certain to translate into tonnes and tonnes of business. ■

The defence bazaar

As many as 193 companies from 17 countries participated in Defexpo '99, an exhibition of defence equipment held recently in Delhi.



PICTURES R V MOORTHY

Akash, one of the four missiles manufactured by Bharat Dynamics Limited, among other exhibits at Defexpo '99 in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

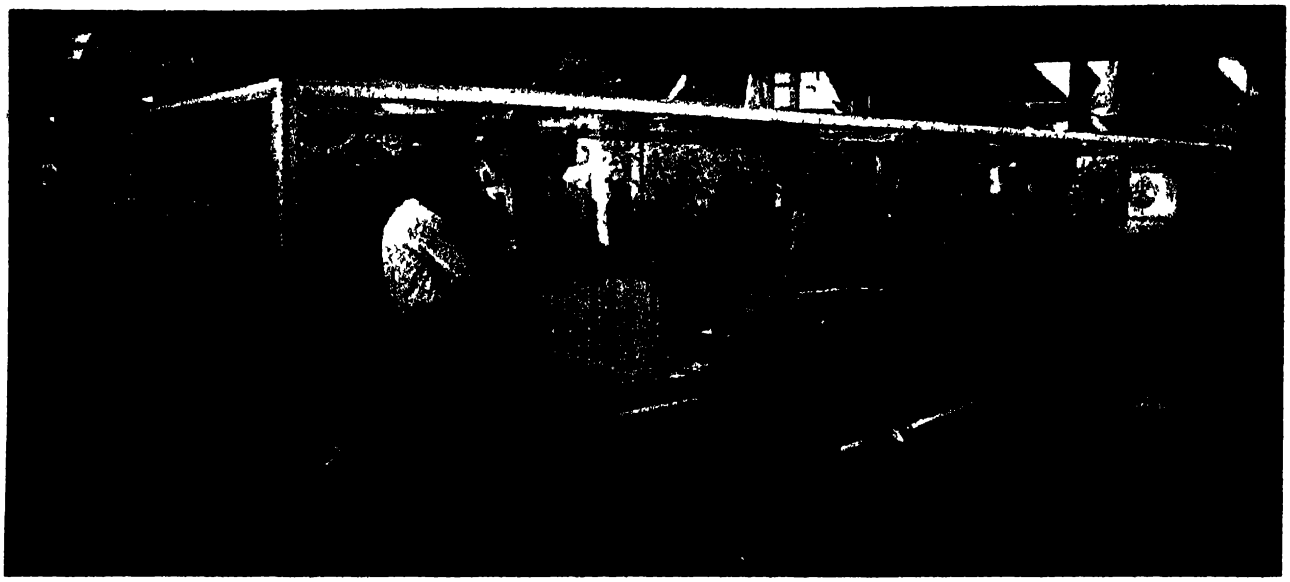
JOHN CHERIAN
in New Delhi

INDIA'S first land and naval systems exhibition, Defexpo '99, was held in Delhi from October 12 to 16. It was organised by the Department of Defence Production and Supplies (DDPS), Ministry of Defence (MOD), in association with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). According to Prabir Sengupta, Secretary, DDPS, it was meant to showcase the capabilities of India's defence industry and provide a forum for the government and the private sector to interact with each other and strengthen the country's military capabilities in order to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

The Indian defence industry was represented by 39 ordnance factories, which are under the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB); eight public sector undertakings; and 68 private sector industries, including small-scale industries. The highlight was the presence of 193 companies from 17 countries. South Africa, Israel, the United Kingdom and Russia had a significant presence. The South African Defence Minister, Mosiuoa Lekota, led a delegation of senior Ministry and South African National Defence Force (SANDF) officials to India specially for the Defexpo. Lekota's visit is viewed as one more "concrete" step towards the implementation of the "strategic partnership" between the two countries. In the South African pavilion, that country's arms industry displayed its prowess in niche defence capabilities. On display for the first time there was an Indian-built Arjun tank fitted with a South African T6 turret (155 mm artillery howitzer). This collaborative effort was the result of an earlier agreement on defence cooperation between the two countries. Despite some misunderstandings at the political level, defence cooperation between the two countries has reached an advanced level. For instance, South African 155 mm artillery shells, which are used in the Bofors guns of the Indian Army, played an important role in the Kargil conflict.

Talking to mediapersons, Lekota said that he expected a defence and security agreement with India to take shape in the near future. South Africa has one of the largest defence production industries in the world and is keen to sell weapons to or start joint production with friendly countries. India has purchased 90 South African-made Casspir armoured vehicles, which have proved themselves in the tough African terrain. Also under active consideration is the purchase of the G-5 towed artillery gun. South Africa recently signed multi-billion dollar defence deals with Germany, Italy and Britain.

The South African Government's "guns and butter" policy has involved the signing of multi-billion dollar contracts with a view to extracting promises from foreign arms makers of investment in South Africa's defence or civilian industries. German, British, Swedish and Italian suppliers have promised to invest a total of nearly $17 billion in develop-



The Indian defence industry displayed a wide range of products, services and communications systems available for export.

ment projects. These include a steel mill, a crankshaft factory and a tannery unit. According to South African officials, the total represents a return of more than 3 to 1 on South Africa's investment in military equipment. The defence deal was worth $5 billion.

OTHER countries that had big pavilions at the exhibition and that were eager to showcase their military hardware were Russia, Israel and Britain: only these three had separate national pavilions. Leading arms manufacturering countries such as the United States and China did not participate in Defexpo. The government had wanted all leading arms manufacturers to be present and had extended invitations to all countries save Pakistan. The organisers were not forthcoming about the reasons for the absence of the U.S. and China, but the suspicion was that it had something to do with the post-Pokhran sanctions imposed on India. France was not too keen to participate but the Indian government apparently insisted on a French presence. The French are more interested in clinching aviation deals. The Israelis, on the other hand, were eager participants. Ahead of the exhibition, there were unconfirmed reports that India had committed itself, in the wake of the Kargil conflict, to buying hi h-tech Israeli weaponry worth $200 [illegible].

[illegible]he British pavilion had two of the [illegible]'s top 10 defence companies par-[illegible]ing – British Aerospace, the [illegible] largest, and Marconi Electric [illegible]s, the fifth. The strong British presence had partly to do with India's imminent deal to purchase 66 Hawk training aircraft from Britain. According to reports, the Indian government has earmarked $1.38 billion to procure advanced jet trainers. With the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government now safely ensconced in New Delhi, the British armaments industry feels that India will be a seller's market. Immediately after taking office, Defence Minister George Fernandes hinted that the country's defence budget will be raised further.



The 5.56 mm INSAS Rifle on display.

The Indian military and political establishment seems to be impressed by the quality of the Israeli weapons that have already been purchased and the equipment that are being tested. In fact, the Secretary, Defence Production, said in response to a question that India has identified Israel, the U.K., France and South Africa as potential long-term collaborators for the development of military hardware. Diplomats from Arab countries are of the opinion that Israeli weaponry is too expensive and most of it is manufactured under licence from U.S. companies. Many Arab governments and the Arab League have expressed their misgivings about growing Indo-Israeli military links. Indian officials, however, point out that countries like China also deal with Israel in the international arms bazaar. China and Israel have had strong defence links since the late 1980s, despite periodic protests from U.S.

A glossy brochure brought out by the Israeli Defence Ministry claimed that every military item made in Israel, from a bullet to an early warning system or a missile, was always operationally tested in the field, and bore the tag of "battle proven". The Israeli focus at the exhibition was on advanced products such as unmanned air vehicles, early warning systems, defence electronics, smart weapons systems and other state-of-the-art intelligence systems. The upgrading of aircraft and helicopters and the supply of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are priority areas for the Israeli arms industry.



British industry had a strong presence at the exhibition.



The Israeli focus at the exhibition was on advanced products such as unmanned air vehicles, early warning systems and other state-of-the-art intelligence systems.

The Russian presence was comparatively low-profile, but the fact remains that defence links between India and Russia continue to remain strong. Both countries have a "strategic partnership", as the representative of Rosvoorouzhenie, the Russian foreign trade organisation representing the Russian defence industry, said in Delhi. According to the official, this means that Russia is the only country that is willing to supply "special weapons" exclusively to India. No other country or manufacturer has yet given a similar assurance to the Indian government. The official said that India actively considered buying the Russian S-300 air defence system. The Rosvoorouzhenie official also emphasised that the Russian arms industry attached great importance to the upgradation and modernisation of Russian military hardware already in use. The official also underlined a major selling point of Russian armaments – that of reliability at reasonable prices.

The Indian defence industry displayed a wide range of products, services and communications systems available for export. Officials of the Ministry of Defence stated that the exhibition demonstrated the capabilities of the Indian defence industry and assisted potential collaboration in defence electronics and avionics. They expressed the hope that such interaction would serve to raise the level of defence exports in the coming years.

Prabir Sengupta pointed out that the direct supply of private sector goods to the defence services had more than doubled in the last few years. Tarun Das, Director-General, CII, said that Defexpo '99 represented a "unique partnership" between the private and public sectors and was "the most visible symbol" of an increasingly intensive interaction between the two in the past few years.

George Fernandes said that Defexpo reflected the increasing interaction between public and private sector industries in the area of defence production. Inaugurating the exhibition, he said that India was keen to establish joint ventures to produce world-class defence hardware for the domestic and export markets. He admitted that Indian exports were "modest" but expressed the hope that India would be able to "access a large share of the export market". Fernandes even mentioned that India exported missiles to some countries. People involved in India's defence production feel that West Asian and South Asian countries are potential markets for Indian military hardware. But the Managing Director of Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Commodore S. Rao, is of the opinion that India has entered the export market too late. BDL, which makes four missiles – Prithvi, Trishul, Akash and Nag –, executed an export order worth Rs.5 crores during 1998-99.

Lessons for India

A. G. NOORANI

Contemporary British Politics by Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins; Macmillan; pages 538, £14.50
British Politics since the War by Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins; Macmillan; pages 322, £13.99
Choosing a Leader: Party leadership contests in Britain from Macmillan to Blair by Leonard P. Stark; Macmillan; pages 246, £15.99.
Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive by edited by R.A.W. Rhodes and Patrick Dunleavy; Macmillan; pages 364, £13.99.
Constitutional Reform: Reshaping the British Political System by Rodney Brazier; Oxford; pages 197, Rs 795.

JUST as the Constitution-making process began in India, Sardar Patel said in the Constituent Assembly on July 15, 1947 that the country had decided to opt for "the parliamentary system of Constitution, the British type of Constitution with which we are familiar". It was a natural and wise choice. But, while the model continued to develop, the emulator stagnated. For instance, parliamentary privileges in India remain frozen as of January 26, 1950, when the Constitution came into force. A Supreme Court ruling in 1958 threw the law centuries back and endowed Speakers of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies with the power to order the press not to report expunged proceedings. No Speaker of the House of Commons claimed this power. The Commons would not dream of exercising the power of commitment for breach of privilege in the manner it is done in India. For that matter, no English judge would get worked up over comments made by Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar as Chief Justice A. S. Anand and Justice S. P. Bharucha did.

There is sharp contrast on a whole range of constitutional and political issues between reform and renewal in Britain and stagnation and even regression in India. Federal India refuses to rid itself of distortions in constitutional practice which make a mockery of the States' autonomy as recognised by the Constitution. The tepid Sarkaria Report has been ignored for over a decade. Unitary Britain has made impressive strides in the devolution of power to the regions in what, to use its correct name, is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; a union of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Referendums were held in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on how they should be governed. Legislation was briskly set afoot. The Scotland Act, 1998 provides for a Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Executive. Scotland's first Parliament in nearly 300 years met last May.

The Government of Wales Act, 1998 establishes a National Assembly of Wales. Elections were held to these bodies and their executives are in place. The Belfast ("Good Friday") Agreement of 1998 was approved in a referendum by an overwhelming majority followed by elections to a new Northern Ireland Assembly. Decommissioning of arms by paramilitary groups is holding up progress. The statutes enacted provide good models for devolution of power to regions within the States.

There is sharp contrast on constitutional and political issues between reform and renewal in Britain and stagnation and even regression in India. Federal India refuses to rid itself of distortions in constitutional practice.

Both India and the U.K. are pledged to fight privilege and hate groups, racial in the one case, communal in the other. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's censure of the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons did not touch the groups behind it. Prime Minister Tony Blair's condemnation of the forces behind Stephen Lawrence's murder did. The Macpherson report found "institutionalised racism" in the police force. Justice D. P. Wadhwa of the Supreme Court exonerated the Bajrang Dal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party despite overwhelming evidence of the culprit Dara Singh's affiliation with these bodies.

Lok Pal Bills have been hanging fire since 1972. The House of Commons' Select Committee on Standards in Public Life is not the best instrument for eradicating corruption; but it works. The first thing our Parliament's Committee on Ethics did was to travel to Europe, with the U.S. next on its busy agenda. A gaping void in the British constitutional system has at last been filled by a very British compromise. Parliament is sovereign, unfettered by any Bill of Rights Act. However, the Human Rights Act, 1998 incorporates as part of U.K. law the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) by an elaborate and cumbrous procedure.

ALL this, bar the Committee on Standards in Public Life, has been achieved by the Labour Government since it was voted to power in April 1997, with promise of more reforms to come. In his speech at the Labour Party Conference at Bournemouth on September 28, Blair pledged the party to fight "the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices, old ways of working and of doing things... The old prejudices, where foreign means bad. Where multi-culturalism is not something to celebrate, but a left-wing conspiracy to destory their way of life... The old elites, establishments that have run our professions and our country too long. Who have kept women and Black and Asian talent out of our top jobs and senior parts of Government and the services, who keep our bright inner city kids from our best universities. And who still think the House of Lords should be run by hereditary peers in the interests of the Tory Party."

He also said: "The forces of conservatism allied to racism are why one of the heroes of the 20th century, Martin

Luther King, is dead. It's why another, Nelson Mandela, spent the best years of his life in a cell the size of a bed. And though the fact that Mandela is alive, free and became President, is a sign of the progress we have made; the fact that Stephen Lawrence is dead, for no other reason than he was born black, is a sign of how far we still have to go. And they still keep opposing progress and justice. What did they say about the minimum wage?..."

There is little awareness in India of the incongruity of working a democratic Constitution through undemocratically governed political parties.

He, thus, related the fight against racism to the fight for equality and social progress. There is a lesson for the Muslim communal bodies here.

There is yet little awareness in India of the incongruity of working a democratic Constitution through undemocratically governed political parties. In the U.K. the candidate for Parliament is *elected* by his constituency party, not selected by the party headquarters in London, though it has a voice in the process if things go wrong; more so in the Labour Party. A party high command as such does not exist. The MP is not beholden to anyone for a favour. Both Labour and Conservative parties have undertaken extensive reforms of their party structures. Two of India's leading parties are run with scant respect for democratic norms. The BJP, in the final analysis, obeys the RSS' diktat. The Congress(I) is based on the personality cult with a clique that constitutes the "High Command".

The cluster of books under review records the impressive strides towards reform in the U.K.

Except for the book, *Constitutional Reform*, which is by a distinguished constitutional lawyer, the rest are by political scientists. All the books are well documented and contain useful material for reference. The historical resume in *British Politics since the War* provides the setting in which a society, innately conservative, bestirred itself for radical change. Two recent incidents reflect the political culture there. On May 21, 1999, the Labour Government found that its majority of 178 in the House of Commons had dwindled precariously to just 40 when many of its MPs either abstained or voted against the leadership on its plans to cut welfare payments to the disabled who were unable to work. This was a personal rebuke for Prime Minister Tony Blair. It could be delivered only because the MPs were not indebted to him for their seats in the House.

Consider another, on July 9. The Prime Minister tried to dampen talk of a leadership rift with his deputy, John Prescott, while acknowledging that he and Prescott were from "different parts of the Labour Party". He added: "Although he comes from the traditional wing of the Labour Party and I come from the modern wing, we both believe in the same things." They had fought over the public sector in what was seen as symbolic of the gap between Labour modernisers and its traditional working class supporters. Prescott swiped at the "faceless wonders" in Downing Street, whom he blamed persistently for sniping at his bid to reform the chaotic, privatised railway system.

No one suspects Prescott of ambition to oust Blair. Their differences are over ideology and policy; openly aired and with no fear of a sack. Prescott enjoys respect in the Labour Party and while the party is behind the Prime Minister, it is not his fiefdom. This is what gives life and meaning to parliamentary democracy. A Constitution erects the skeleton of the polity; politics gives it flesh and blood.

These incidents could have happened in India only in a few rare cases; L. K. Advani, for instance, enjoys power in his own right. But we do need furiously to think of the pathetic state of our parliamentary democracy in the following vital topics: inner-party democracy generally, the absence of which in very many of them has invited censures from Chief Election Commissioners for the last two decades; selection of party candidates; election of the leader of the parliamentary party; the state of the Cabinet; and reforms to ensure effective accountability in the government.

Coxall and Robins' book, *Contemporary British Politics*, has been comprehensively revised in its third edition to cover "New Labour's First Year". Both Tony Blair and William Hague, leader of the Conservative Party in Parliament, known as "the 1922 Committee", have made extensive changes in the set-up of their respective parties which are succinctly described. Both have tightened their grip over their parties, ironically, amidst democratic reform. Blair has sought to bypass the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the Annual Party Conference by appealing directly to the members.

Hague has worked to build a unified national party, ending the division between the parliamentary party and the central office. The National Union of Conservatives and Constitutional Associations is to be wound up. The party will now comprise its two other elements: the parliamentary wing and the Constituency Associations, "the party in the country". Hague plans to build a mass-membership party.

The authors' description of the procedure for the selection of parliamentary candidates is of particular relevance to India and bears quotation *in extenso*. "Selection of Labour parliamentary candidates is done by the constituency parties (CLPs). CLPs consist of delegates from a wide variety of labour organisations and societies and are run by General Management Committees (GMCs). Selection of parliamentary candidates cannot begin without permission from the NEC, which automatically forwards its approved list of candidates to the constituency party concerned. Nominations are made and usually include many names not on the approved list. Next, the CLP General Committees shortlist candidates. Shortlists must include the sitting labour MP; any candidate receiving 25 per cent of the nominations or any candidates with 50 per cent of the nominations from affiliated organisations; at least four candidates where no Labour MP is in contention; and at least one woman. If the sitting MP is nominated by two-thirds of nominating bodies, he or she is automatically re-selected; and if he or she has at least one nomination the CLP may vote for automatic re-selection anyway. Since 1993, the final selection of Labour parliamentary candidates has been in a full meeting of the CLP by the 'one member one vote' principle. Successful candidates must then seek endorsement by the NEC.

"CLPs have been subject to considerable NEC intervention in their selection processes in recent years. The main example of this centralisation was the imposition of all-women shortlists in half of 'winnable' seats between 1993 and 1996. But there have been many instances of tough action by the NEC where it has

found local party choices of processes unacceptable; for example, Denis McShane was imposed on the local party in Rotherham (1994). Phil. Woolas on the new Oldham and Saddle-worth CLP (1995) and, most controversially, the candidature of Liz Davies, the choice of the Leeds NE CLP, was overruled (1995) on the grounds of her political 'disloyalty'. The NEC has also suspended CLPs it suspects of dubious practices.

In contrast, "local Conservative Associations possess considerable freedom from outside interference in choosing a parliamentary candidate. Candidates must either be on the party's approved list of candidates or, if not, gain acceptance by the party's Standing Advisory Committee on candidates. A Vice-Chairman at Central Office is in charge of the 800-strong candidates' list. As soon as they are on the list, candidates can apply for advertised vacancies. Applications are considered by a sub-committee of the local Association's Executive Council; it draws up a shortlist of about 20 candidates, whom it interviews and reduces to a final shortlist of about three, who then go before a final selection meeting of the full Executive Council. The Council then must recommend at least two candidates for final choice by a special general meeting of the Association. Local associations have largely resisted Central Office pressure to select more working-class and women candidates."

There are, thus, checks on power at every tier – the constituency party, the party headquarters, the parliamentary party comprising MPs elected in the manner they were, the Cabinet, and the leader of the party elected by a free vote. Forget the idolatrous Congress, the Janata Party in 1977 and the Janata Dal in 1989, 1996 and 1998, picked the leader who became Prime Minister by dubious procedures, shunning a free vote.

Leonard Stark's work *Choosing a Leader* demonstrates after a thorough survey of elections since 1963, that far from imparting unity, free elections to the post of leader *helps* to bind it together. It ensures fairplay and the defeated candidates take the result in their stride. An Appendix sets out the texts of the Rules for the Selection of leaders of all three parties, Labour, Conservative and the Social and Liberal Democrats.

Hague's proposals envisage "a new democratic system for the election of the party leader in which MPs choose the candidates in a Westminster primary and then the leader is chosen by the party membership by a simple majority on a one member/one vote principle."

In India, the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing should be made more accountable... The Interception of Communication Act, 1985, however inadequate, imposes some checks on the grosser abuses of phone-tapping.

RHODES and Dunleavy's collection of essays demolishes the myth of "prime ministerial government", fostered by Richard Crossman. Their assessment of the present state of the Prime Minister – Cabinet relationship is far more accurate than is drawn from admiring accounts of Margaret Thatcher's tenancy of 10 Downing Street.

Rhodes points out: "If the Thatcher era apparently highlighted the strengths of the monocratic approach to prime ministerial power, it also rather graphically demonstrated its dangers and limitations. The resignations of Michael Heseltine over the Westland affair, Nigel Lawson over the role of Sir Alan Walters as the Prime Minister's economic adviser, and Sir Geoffrey Howe over European Community policy all illustrate that a domineering style can impose heavy costs on a Prime Minister."

Asquith bequeathed to the world his one memorable saying: "The office of Prime Minister is what its holder chooses and is able to make of it." It is important to remember that the Prime Minister is expected to lead, not only by the country at large but by backbenchers and by ministerial colleagues. "They want him to give a sense of purpose, to inspire the party at the (party) conference, to mince the opposition in Parliament and to win the next election. As far as policy goes, they want purpose, cohesion and no nasty parliamentary rebellions. When ministers disagree, they want the matter sorted out swiftly and without public embarrassment. Two or three senior members of Cabinet might not be too upset if the Prime Minister bungles it because they might gain promotion, possibly even the succession, if he goes – although Prime Ministers are seldom, if ever, overthrown in office; Mrs. Thatcher was the first peacetime Prime Minister to be overthrown for 70 years."

Michael Heseltine's resignation from the Cabinet undermined Thatcher's leadership. Another contributor, Simon James, remarks that "this held-on approach seems also to have heightened the likelihood of her being overruled by her Cabinet, which happened to her with a frequency unknown to her more cautious predecessors. On at least three issues – public spending cuts in 1981, a radical review of public expenditure in 1982 and membership of the ERM – she was overruled on issues so crucial to the Government's policies that they could easily have broken her administration (and indirectly, the ERM conflict did precisely that)."

Lastly, there has been significant reform in a wide range of institutions and agencies. In India, the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing still function without a statutory charter. They should be made more accountable with statutes like the Security Services Act, 1989 on the MI5 and the Intelligence Services Act, 1994, concerning MI6 and the GCHQ. The Interception of Communication Act, 1985, however inadequate, imposes some checks on the grosser abuses of phone-tapping. The Official Secrets Act, 1989, is an improvement on the archaic law; not much though.

The cumulative impact of reforms on the system and the inadequacies that still remain are analysed incisively in Rodney Brazier's book, aptly sub-titled "Reshaping the British Political System". He makes detailed suggestions on the reform of the House of Lords and the judiciary.

But, by far his best contribution is his critique of "Ministerial Powers". Despite the checks, executive power has increased and calls for yet more effective curbs.

Is it too much to ask for a national consensus on similar reforms in India? It would be far more worthwhile than the escapist and dangerous advocacy of the presidential system. India's Constitution has stood the test of time. The fault lies with constitutional practice which has warped the supreme law and the political set-up which is essentially undemocratic.■

The new masters of the universe

SUSAN RAM

The Media Monopoly by Ben H. Bagdikian, fifth edition, paperback, Beacon Press, 1997; pages 289, $16.

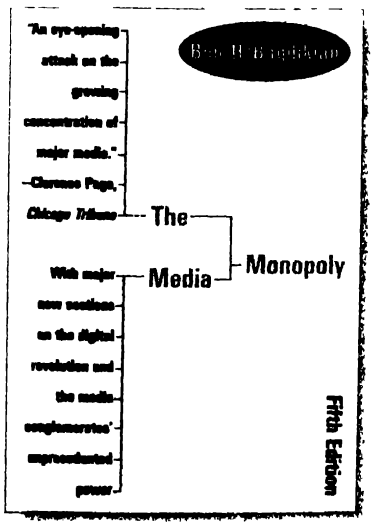
IN 1983, Ben Bagdikian, a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, documented and exposed what he saw as the central paradox in the development of the United States' media during the twentieth century. The very period that had wit nessed exponential growth in the scope and reach of the media, diversification of media forms and modes of delivery and technological advances beyond the imaginings of our ancestors a hundred years ago had also seen an accelerating, seemingly immutable process of narrowing: the step-by-step shrinkage of the media's ownership base. In 1983, argued Bagdikian, the U.S. media, commanding awesome power to influence events and perceptions at home and across the planet, were dominated by as few as 50 private corporations. In his study, he set out to explore the implications – for journalism, for society, for democratic politics, for people's perceptions of the reality unfolding about them – of the inexorable trend towards monopoly ownership and control.

Back in 1983, there were critics who dismissed Bagdikian's analysis as 'alarmist'. Their caveats and ostrich-style complacency doubtless continue to surface, and to win the plaudits of corporate America. But for a reader with a modicum of objectivity, what is striking about Bagdikian's book is not only the brilliance and persuasiveness of the case it argues but also its ability to read the future. For by 1997, when the book was republished in its fifth edition, the number of corporations controlling most of America's daily newspapers, magazines, television, radio, books and films had dropped from 50 to just 10. Today, the U.S. media is in the grip of a new communications cartel with a power to penetrate and shape the social and political landscape that is unmatched in human history.

For this latest edition, Bagdikian prefaces the research which proved such a landmark back in 1983 with a 25-page update on developments since the appearance of the fourth edition in 1992. The scale of the change over that five-year period is such that even this gifted and resourceful writer is left groping for words; there is a schematic quality to this update which points to the need for a qualitatively fresh research engagement. But the case which Bagdikian put forward 16 years ago emerges as unassailable and uncontested in its essence by intervening developments.

Bagdikian's contribution in part derives from his dual identity: on the one hand, a working journalist who knows his profession from within, and on the other, a scholar capable of sustained research under conditions of academic rigour. His teaching and research at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley (where he is currently Dean Emeritus) have helped shape his perspective on the nature, goals and responsibilities of journalism, irrespective of the medium by which it is articulated and disseminated.

Journalists, argues the author, carry out for society a number of crucial functions. Through their work, they establish and enforce the principle of accountability, vital to the working and integrity of democratic societies. They sound alarm bells, signalling system weaknesses or failures that would otherwise go undetected. And they also help people contextualise events in such a way that their understanding of what is happening about them is enriched and endowed with meaning. Bagdikian endorses the view of James Britton in his 1970 study, *Learning and Language*, that, given the kaleidoscopic character of experience, humans need to group events on the basis of similarity; without this, nothing can be made of the present moment nor can expectations or predictions be entertained.



Concentration of media ownership, in tandem with the growing clout of mass advertising and the prioritising of commercial values, argues Bagdikian, undermines each of these journalistic functions and responsibilities. Journalists whose newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations are part of vast, interlocking corporate empires are tremendously weakened in their ability to call to account those in positions of power and authority. Moreover, with their editorial independence now fatally compromised, they may no longer see it as part of their remit to exercise their accountability function. Alarm bells that should be sounded remain silent. And consumers of the media, far from being helped to gain a rounded, well-informed perspective on reality, are fed a diet of pap: news presented in discrete morsels; the heavily loaded messages of mass advertising; generous helpings of tittle-tattle, trivia, sex and violence.

Bagdikian documents his argument with a series of case stories which buttress his position and enhance the accessibility of his study. For readers inclined to doubt the baneful impact of corporate ownership on editorial freedom, he tells how, back in the 1970s, a book by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman was effectively killed by Warner Communications, an awesome conglomerate that had begun life as a firm 'specialising in funeral parlours and parking lots'. He pursues the dismal story of mainstream American journalism's repeated failure to question the powers-that-be, from the McCarthy years in the early 1950s to the Vietnam War and beyond.

In a section that carries particular resonance today, as the U.S. tobacco giants stand indicted before the world for their culpable hawking of their deadly products, Bagdikian tracks what he calls 'a strictly media disease, a strange paralysis'. This, he shows, so afflicted the U.S. media that it could not alert readers and viewers to a basic truth, established beyond doubt as long ago as 1954: that smoking causes can-

cer. Tobacco, it should be noted, was until recently the most heavily advertised product in America.

The U.S. media's interaction with the tobacco industry also serves to illustrate the limitations of the 'doctrine of objectivity', an article of faith within mainstream American journalism. This holds that, in the interests of 'balance', one point of view articulated in the course of reporting should be matched by an opposing one. In practice, as Bagdikian documents, adherence to this doctrine has prioritised the views of the authorities and the officialdom, resulting in bland reportage from which all elements deemed dissenting or 'extremist' have been purged. Notions of balance have been taken to absurd degrees: Bagdikian shows how, in the case of the tobacco industry, scientific testimony and the views of doctors were routinely required to be countered by industry spokespersons in the interests of 'objectivity'. Small wonder that large sections of the American public remained confused and misinformed about tobacco over so many decades – and to such deadly effect.

Whereas it was once possible to identify specific corporations dominant in one communications medium, with only a few of them similarly dominant in a second medium, the new conglomerates pursue a far more comprehensive agenda.

Such notions of 'objectivity', Bagdikian argues, originate in the world of mass advertising. Here, blandness is favoured, confrontation is eschewed, and energy is focussed on creating and sustaining a 'buying mood'. In the case of American television, which has evolved as a commercial activity supported almost entirely by advertising, corporate interests can be seen to promote a 'buying mood' via a range of strategies, among which the doctrine of objectivity emerges as one of the more subtle and subliminal. Bagdikian cites numerous examples of corporations intervening directly to restrain, censor or otherwise influence the content of programming.

As Bagdikian's book has passed through a succession of editions, the basic processes at work within the U.S. media have strengthened and accelerated, perhaps beyond his own worst case scenario. Concentration of media ownership has grown inexorably, with all that that implies for journalistic freedom and integrity, while mass advertising has tightened its grip on media content and the purposes to which the media are directed. But from the early 1990s, Bagdikian suggests in the preface to this fifth edition, the name of the game has changed – in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. Not only has the ownership base of the U.S. media shrunk still further; there is something qualitatively new in the character of the corporations that constitute the cartel in command.

HE ten corporations that now dominate the U.S. media are identified as: Time Warner; Disney; Viacom; News Corporation Limited (Rupert Murdoch's empire); Sony; Tele-Communications, Inc.; Seagram; Westinghouse; Gannett; and General Electric. The resources they command inspire, in equal measure, awe and fear; the $340-million media merger between Gannett and Combined Communications Corporation – the biggest media merger in history at the time Bagdikian's book first appeared – shrinks in significance beside the $19-billion deal that, in 1996, brought together Disney with ABC/Cap Cities. This latter union, Bagdikian points out, created a conglomerate commanding great power over every mass medium: newspapers, magazines, books, radio, broadcast television, cable systems and programming, movies, recordings, video cassettes – and, through alliances and joint ventures, telephone and cable.

The name of the new game is 'synergy'. Whereas it was once possible to identify specific corporations dominant in one communications medium, with only a few of those corporations similarly dominant in a second medium, the new media conglomerates aggressively pursue a far more comprehensive agenda. As Bagdikian notes, they aim to acquire "dominant positions across every medium of any current or expected future consequence." The process by which one company subsidiary is used to complement and promote another has helped produce what the author identifies as a "quantum leap" in the power exercised by the media cartel over news, information and popular culture.

In the 25 pages of his new preface, Bagdikian provides fascinating glimpses into the world of the new media masters of the universe. There is some active demythologising here. For media consumers in America and around the world, the Disney empire is shown to extend far beyond its benign film-and-theme-park packaging:

> The Disney empire includes - in addition to non-media interests in oil and insurance – interests in interactive TV and the America Online computer network, Buena Vista home video, Hyperion and Chilton book publishing, four movie and TV production studios and a national distribution system for them, four magazine publishing groups...., 429 retail stores selling Disney products, television and cable networks, a major league baseball team and a National Hockey League team, three record companies, eleven newspapers..., and nine theme parks in the United States and other countries. (p. xxv)

Bagdikian also draws attention to the growing involvement in the media of industrial conglomerates, including such major defence industry players as General Electric and Westinghouse. One wishes for a more extended engagement with the implications of this trend.

Indeed, the one substantive criticism that can be levelled at this new edition of what is rightly ranked a classic among studies of the U.S. media is the brevity and schematic quality of its preface. The 25 pages establish the character of change during the first half of the 1990s, but offer little more than tantalising hints as to the implications and results. A case in point is Bagdikian's engagement with the digital revolution, the Internet and the World Wide Web; while casting doubt on casual assumptions that these will stand as guarantors of individual freedom against the predations of the mass media cartel, he offers only a sketchy outline of why this should be so.

What seems beyond dispute is that Bagdikian's classic study will continue to illuminate and excite general readers and students of journalism for years to come. As the global reach of the U.S. mass media strengthens and the impact of American news presentation and popular culture is felt in every corner of our planet, his analysis – and his warnings – deserve the widest possible dissemination. And one looks forward to what he doubtless has in mind: not a sixth edition, but a new book for a new, even more challenging media age. ■

For Waugh 'completists'

RICHARD EDER

The Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh; Little, Brown & Company, Boston; pages 536, $29.95.

Evelyn Waugh, A Literary Life by David Wykes; St. Martin's Press, New York; pages 224, price $39.95

DAVID WYKES' lively study of Evelyn Waugh comes up with a word all too pertinent to this collection of every single one of the short stories that could be unearthed, including childhood scribbles. "Completists", Wykes calls enthusiasts who cherish even those things that no one else could cherish – their author least of all.

Putting aside Conrad and Woolf, Waugh may be the greatest English novelist of the century. He was also, quite consciously and for reasons almost inseparable from his rebarbative genius, a great hack. *The Complete Short Stories*, 39 of them, include a half dozen that are notable, if not up to the novels; and another eight or so that are interesting failures, or interesting because they so closely prefigure or replay the novels.

A dozen stories are tinny potboilers of very small pots: for instance, a contraption commissioned by a magazine series entitled "The Seven Deadly Sins of Today". (Waugh chose Tolerance, but the joke gets no farther.) Another dozen he wrote as a schoolboy or at Oxford. Juvenilia sometimes display the roots of a writer's growth: Waugh, though, did not write from his roots but – reinventing – against them. He broke backward into his cool and tragicomic voice out of a process of elaborate contrivance that periodically relapses into just that.

If the pen is not to be censored, neither is the wastebasket. Waugh did not literally throw away his hackwork, but he plainly treated it as something produced only for the money, and to be ignored. The money was for symbolic as well as material need: it supported the painfully expensive self-image of a testy country squire. Wykes – he is supposed to come later in this review but keeps intruding – writes: "Waugh lived like a gentleman whose income was inherited and came from his estates. But there were no estates, and the income came from the family trade, his writings." The irony takes a moment to register: Waugh as the middle-class tradesman he affected to despise in life and in his books.





In any event, there is a whole category of Waugh that retains about as much survivor interest as one of his poke-out-your-eye check suits. There would be little reason to resurrect such travel books as *Robbery Under Law*, an excoriation of the Mexican revolution subsidised by an expropriated oil company; or *A Tourist in Africa*, paid for by the Union Castle shipping line.

Similarly, a good two-thirds of *The Complete Stories* is matter for the completists. These stories have the familiar brittleness, along with Waugh's impersonation of a God who keeps his eye on the sparrow the better in order to shoot it. Even in his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, Waugh used these traits to far better purpose. He exploded the brittle wit into clattering shards of icy hilarity. When the clatter subsided, a silence ensued. Like the dog that didn't bark, it suggested presence by absence. The religious note became more audible, later on, in the squashy *Brideshead Revisited*. Only in the *Sword of Honour* trilogy, his late triumph, did he discover how to sound it.

There is no point describing the hack items (try to think third-rate Saki, P.G. Wodehouse, Ring Lardner, Roald Dahl) or the school and Oxford efforts. A Selected rather than *Collected Short Stories* might include interesting failures like "The Balance" (1926), a semi-modernist mess with a suggestion of the chiselled gouge of Waugh's dialogues; and "My Father's House" and "Lucy Simmonds", chapters from the unfinished novel *Work Suspended*, hybrids with some dreadful romantic writing and a little that is very good.

It might also include the prefigurings: "The Man Who Liked Dickens", a study for the grisly ending of "A Handful of Dust"; and "Compassion", a rending, exquisite story of Jews interned in war-time Yugoslavia. This was virtually reproduced in the final volume of *Sword of Honour* a full 12 years later. It took that long for Waugh to fuse successfully faith and art, malice and compassion, comedy and anger in a structure that could accommodate prose of such direct, laconic sorrow.

S for the stories that best survive on their own, "A House of Gentlefolks" is a gem of upper-class comedy and cruelty. Its doddering Duke of Vanburgh is P. G. Wodehouse's Lord Emsworth as pig-starver. "An Englishman's Home" taps a pure Waugh vein in its duel of vanities among three different species of sub-gentry (one genuine, two not so) who attempt a common stand against the threat of a real estate development. "Love in the Slump" strings a wonderfully absurd farce of errors around two young things who marry and drop – bump! – out of Oxford languor and London revelry onto the stony ground of meagre funds and intimate betrayal.

There is "On Guard", told from the point of view of a young woman's dog, a present from her fiance, who instructs it to guard her while he is off for an indefinite stay in Africa. What it guards her from, all too well, is suitors. A trifle, and silly, but the silliness wafts giddily up and finds sudden legs in a sere last line.

The volume's best retrieval is "Charles Ryder's Schooldays". Written shortly after "Brideshead" but published only posthumously, it is immeasurably stronger: a fierce, subtle, layered portrait of a boy, both vulnerable and armed, in mid-joust through an English boarding school. By comparison, Orwell's acid Eton memoir, "Such, Such Were the Joys", is virtually sentimental. Curiously, in its intensity of fury and longing, "Schooldays" is closer to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Yet Wykes has it: "They are the most tedious pages of fiction he ever wrote." Clearly, this is blind – though should the author read this, he might well think I am. There are all kinds of critical blindness, though, and the most useful is love. Wykes' study is acute, perceptive, stylishly written

and passionately appreciative of Waugh at his best.

Wykes' best does not always coincide with mine, but he is so intelligently right so much of the time that it is exhilarating once or twice to think him wrong.

Wykes' passion is for the first six novels, loosely categorised as comic satire (though he recognises more in them than that), beginning with *Decline and Fall* and ending with *Scoop and Put Out More Flags*. No quarrel with this. Furthermore, Wykes writes of each of them with a mix of what all of us see and what he sees a little beyond.

He accomplishes gracefully the link between life and writing, a particularly close one. Waugh was his own material; the genius was in the transformation. Wykes notes, for instance, a happiness and lyrical virtuosity in *Decline* that its successor, *Vile Bodies*, lacks. Not, I think, because the former is less barbed but because the arrows Waugh shot were also the ones that hit him; and the sheer youthful exuberance of the archer wore into the stiffer, crabbier demeanour of the target.

Then came the conversion to Roman Catholicism, right at the time *Vile Bodies* was published. Religion did not, for a while, change Waugh's literary temper directly or make the world's disorder less painful; but it provided him a way to deal with it. Wykes has found two lines that in nicely improbable conjunction fix the essential Waugh from then on.

One was by his society friend, Ann Fleming: "He liked things to go wrong." The second, from St. Augustine, deepens the first: "The reason why humans behave as they do is because they are not living in their true home."

This religious sense, always implicit, underpins *A Handful of Dust*. Wykes, who analyses *Handful* brilliantly, asserts a sharp decline once religion turned explicit. He is right about the sentimentally redemptive *Brideshead*, its *Deus* popping out of its *machina*. What he does not quite recognise in the War-time and post-War *Sword of Honour* trilogy is *Deus* popping back. Not all the way; Waugh allows grace, in the person of old Gervase Crouchback, to take a place in the chaotic circus without quietening it one bit. At most it pokes an air hole in the tent flap.

Bumpy as it is, the trilogy remains Waugh's masterpiece; a crotchety introduction of the worm of faith into the world's mealy apple. Sword is a great, shattered work: a partway Don Quixote, if Cervantes had believed the windmills were entirely windmills and also giants, somewhat. ■

New York Times Service

■ THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Self makes a comeback

WILLIAM SAFIRE

"SELF" used to be a dirty word. "The wretch, concentered all in *self*," wrote Sir Walter Scott in 1805, might get "power and pelf" but would wind up "unwept, unhonoured and unsung." Not so, said Walt Whitman a half-century later. "I celebrate myself," he sang in his "Song of Myself."

Since then, however, the notion of *self* as something to be celebrated has been taking a beating; Scott's sneer at *self* reverberates through the language. It is bad to be *selfish*, good to be *selfless*. People who are smug are *self-satisfied*, narcissists are *self-absorbed* and often *self-indulgent* and braggarts are *self-serving*. You can find a few uses that reflect well on *self*–like *self-reliant* and *self-possessed* – but most praise is lavished on the rejection of self, as in *self-sacrifice*. And *selflessness* is next to godliness.

Then *self* made a comeback. Showing some self-confidence, it became the name of a Conde Nast magazine aimed at women interested in their own bodies and minds. Its 20th-anniversary issue, out this month, faces some of the bad *self*s ("self-love, self-pity, self-delusion, self-aggrandisement") but dwells more on the good *self*s ("self-help, self-governing, self-made, self-respect, self-denial" and, for ovens, "self-cleaning").

Though a bit self-conscious about a decline in their publication's circulation, *Self*'s editors gutsily reprint a Mike Twohy cartoon showing a timid fellow writing in his diary, "Dear Diary, Sorry to bother you again," captioned "Low Self-Esteem." In that regard, what to do about *myself*?

This reflexive pronoun requires reflection. *Reflexive* means "turned back on itself," and a reflexive pronoun turns the action back on its subject: "I (pronoun as subject) perjured (verb) *myself* (reflexive pronoun pointing back to the subject 'I')."

The correct use of *self* or *selves* attached to *my, your, him, her, them* or *our* is to turn the action back on the other pronoun in the sentence. The subject and the object are the same thing. But too many writers are using *myself* in an orgy of false modesty, fearing to make the squeakily assertive sound of the first-person singular accusative and dative *me*.

President Jimmy Carter did it in his farewell address (a speech he concluded with the word *farewell*, which is the proper way to end a farewell address). He said, "I will work hard to make sure that the transition from *myself* to the next president is a good one."

When I popped him on this, E. Ward Gilman, editor of Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage – "Dr. Roundheels" himself – cited the use of *myself* instead of *me* by grammar-conscious authors from Dr. Samuel Johnson to E.B. White. He even found the abomination in a sentence – "No longer were Price, Buchanan and *myself* part of the innermost circle" – written in 1974 by me, and in no way "written by myself." Even Homer noodled.

Myself is being used incorrectly in place of the first-person singular nominative. (I'm too shy to write *I*.) The new Uriah Heeps, wallowing in phony humility, eschew the use of *I*. Sometimes, blushing shyly and digging a toe in the dirt, they substitute *yours truly*.

A generation ago, I was astounded when my predecessor as a conservative *New York Times* columnist, Arthur Krock, titled his memoirs about growing up in the 1890s *Myself When Young*. Not until I plunged into the philological scholarship required for this article did I discover that he bottomed the title on Edward FitzGerald's translation of a quatrain in the "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (*ruba'i* means "quatrain"; *rubaiyat* is the plural): "Myself when young did eagerly frequent..."

If you hate to begin a sentence with *myself*, as in "*Myself*, I could not care less," try *as for me* or *for my part*. A reflexive pronoun is fine, however, as an emphasiser. I used one a moment ago, as "Dr. Roundheels *himself*," above.

Americans use *myself* to underscore a pronoun as often as the British use the superfluous *indeed*, which means "you bet; hear, hear," and the emphatically reflexive "If I do say so *myself*." Let us not become the *Myself* Generation. If you want to show submission, sew a large sign on the seat of your pants that reads, "Kick me." Avoid "Kick *myself*." The latter lacks *self-esteem*. ■

New York Times Service

Auschwitz, Pokhran and beyond

The claim of the amorality of science is a clever way of escaping responsibility for the horrors that have sprung or can spring from science.

AMULYA K.N. REDDY

A WORLD energy assessment meeting in Cracow, Poland, in September 1999 brought me to within 50 km and an hour's bus ride from Auschwitz and Birkenau, where the concentration camps are now preserved as museums. I decided to go with my energy analysis co-authors on a half-day visit to the camps. Brought from all over Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War, about 1.5 million innocent victims, overwhelmingly Jews, went either directly to the gas chambers and the crematoria at Auschwitz and Birkenau, or indirectly via the camps where they were held prisoners until they were too weak to labour.

The tour of the camps left me with a completely unexpected feeling. The scale of human extermination was so enormous that I had to remind myself – particularly because the camps have been unpopulated since 1944 – that there used to be human beings there. Human belongings – toothbrushes, shoes and suitcases – were piled from floor to ceiling in huge rooms, a separate room for each item, but the aggregate was more reminiscent of factory inputs. Even the human hair that filled a room looked like raw material for an industry – in the case of Auschwitz, the manufacture of tailor's lining cloth.

If Auschwitz was unbelievable, Birkenau, 3 km away, beggared the imagination. Birkenau was spread over 175 hectares with 300 buildings, each capable of housing 1,000 inmates. As my friend Bob Williams pointed out, it was a scale-up from the pilot plant demo at Auschwitz with a peak of 20,000 prisoners to full-scale commercialisation of mass-murder technology at Birkenau with 100,000 prisoners in August 1944. The powerful impression that persisted was of detailed engineering resulting in "... the immense technological complex created... for the purpose of killing human beings" (*Auschwitz – How many perished*, page 11, Ved Vashem Studies, volume xxi, Jerusalem, 1991). The meticulous organisation and rigorous management were characteristic of mega-industries, "gigantic and horrific factories of death". The main gate of Auschwitz displayed the inscription *Arbeit macht frei* ("Work brings freedom"). Perhaps a more apt announcement would have been "Technology completely decoupled from values". Also, one could not help reflecting on the frailty of the social institutions that sanctioned these horrors and the failure of legal safeguards to prevent them.

As the scale of killing increases, the technology often (but not always) becomes more and more sophisticated – from knives to guns to machine guns to bombs to gas chambers and crematoria to atomic bombs. Also, with the scale increasing, not only does the distance from victims become greater but also the complexion becomes more and more technical. Burial is sufficient for one body, but for hundreds or thousands of bodies, one thinks in terms of "throughput", "air/fuel ratios" and "burning capacity".

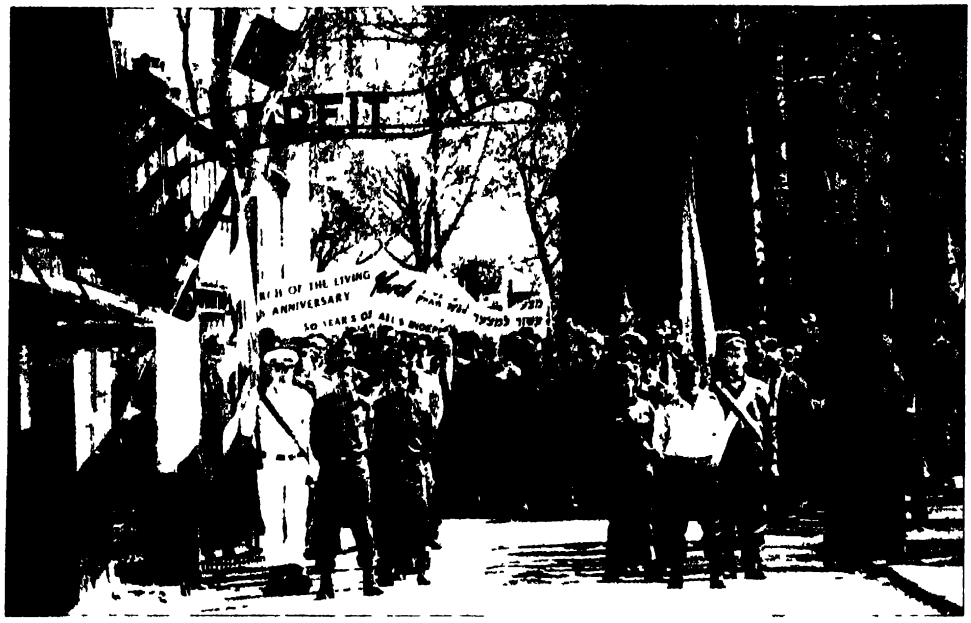
In Auschwitz, it is obvious that nothing happened spontaneously. Everything was designed and planned. One of Germany's top chemical industries, IG Farben, produced the poison Cyclon B for exterminating people in the gas chambers. Careful experiments were done to determine the time it would take for a person to be poisoned. An engineering firm designed the crematoria furnaces to process 350 bodies a day in Auschwitz I. So, there must have been engineers preoccupied with the technical problems. Perhaps, like Oppenheimer talking about the atomic bomb, some even thought that the problem was "technically sweet". Or, like the Department of Atomic Energy scientist at the Bangalore Kaiga debate in 1989 who said: "Hiroshima provided us with a fortunate opportunity to study radiation effects"!)

Once the problem was defined as eliminating hundreds and thousands of people a day, the Auschwitz solution was inevitable. But, who defined the problem and promulgated the order? By and large, it is political decision-makers who define the problem. There was a conference at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, on January 20, 1942, at which the Nazi leadership decided in less than two hours before lunch on the "final solution" – to exterminate the Jews. Ethnic superiority, racial/religious hatreds and fundamentalist views are well-known bases for decisions with far-reaching destructive impact on human beings.

WHY was this definition of the problem so widely accepted? There could be several reasons. There was the silencing of the informed and articulate dissidents who became the first inputs to the camps. The media were not allowed to reveal the truth. As a result, many citizens genuinely claimed ignorance as an excuse. The most serious problem is the plea of duty and the obligation to carry out orders. Recall the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* with Spencer Tracy as the judge trying the Nazi judges for having furthered the extermination of Jews. These judges defended themselves by submitting that they were just carrying out orders. The judgment at Nuremberg was that a human being has to take full responsibility for the consequences of his/her actions and that the excuse of obeying orders is inadmissible.

Apart from the above factors that operate in the case of officials and technical personnel, there is the additional device of taking a top-down macro view (for instance, national security, geopolitical compulsions and so on). In such a macro view, numbers and statistics displace human beings. New proxy words dominate the discussions – "burning capacity" replaces "the number of corpses burnt", "kilotonnes yield" replaces "kilodeaths", and so on.

Functionaries, however, cannot avoid contact with the prisoners and victims in order to keep the system going. What is overwhelming in Auschwitz and Birkenau (as my friend Thomas



LASKI DIFFUSION / GAMMA

At the main gate of the Auschwitz museum, participants of a march in April 1998 in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The inscription on the arch reads: "Work brings freedom".

Johansson also noted) is the unbelievable cold-bloodedness of the operation. It appears that the guards treated the inmates inhumanly because they believed that the victims were sub-human and "things" rather than people. Once this belief is propagated and accepted, anything goes – as in the growing number of examples of ethnic cleansing and genocide (native Americans, Partition, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor).

The tour of Auschwitz ends at the gas chamber and the crematorium. But just before that, near the main gate, is the gallows where Rudolf Hess, the bestial camp commander, was hanged after a trial.

Just when I felt that this was fair retribution, a doubt arose: are only the vanquished tried as war criminals, while the victors go scot-free?

Reeling under the impact of what we had seen, I began to wonder how the development of the atomic bombs at Los Alamos, the test at Alamogordo and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki differed from the Nazi concentration camps. Of course the Allies in the Second World War were not driven by the racism of the Nazis, and they were not pursuing a final solution of extermination of any particular religious group. But with regard to the scale of killing, the recruitment of capable minds, the harnessing of science and technology (some people perhaps hoping that the weapons would never be used and others even opposing the use of the weapons after they were developed), the extent of organisation, the resort to effective management, and the choice of targets to maximise the annihilation of Japanese civilians, the Manhattan project was like the concentration camps, in fact, even more horrendous in its impact.

BUT, for me it was not merely the standard school question "Compare and contrast X and Y". I was leaving the same evening for India and I was agonising over what all this meant for India. Over the past year and a half, the country had witnessed the scientist-politician nexus underlying the nuclear tests at Pokhran, the use of security arguments to advance party agendas, the jingoism of the scientists, the virtual absence of dissent, the silence of its media with a few notable exceptions and the obfuscation of reality. After an initial silence on the subject (as if it never happened), the journal *Current Science* publicised the official/government version of the "kilotonnes yield" of the test bombs but rejected/suppressed M.V. Ramana's estimates of the hundreds of thousands of innocent non-combatants who would be killed if even a primitive atomic bomb were exploded on Mumbai or Karachi.

Other questions bothered me. Are the institutions on the Indian sub-continent necessarily more robust and moral than those in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s? Are Indian politicians and parties less prone to exploiting religious animosities? Are Indian scientists and engineers less eager to get political support for their next ego trip or power play (for instance, neutron bombs because they kill but do not destroy). Once the nuclear-tipped missiles are deployed, are there guarantees against "some crazy guy doing some crazy thing"? Are we sure that Pokhran will not lead as inevitably to Lahore and/or Chagai to Mumbai as Alamogordo led to Hiroshima?

The claim of the amorality of science is a clever way of escaping responsibility for the horrors that have sprung or can spring from science. For example, the well-known statement of a missile developer that he is "only an engineer" and that his "missile can also be used for delivering flowers". The relationship between the scientist (the subject) and the object of scientific study must be such that initial separation (and distance) ends in subsequent unification (and embrace). The suppression of emotion *during* analysis must give way to emotion *after* analysis. The functioning of scientists as individuals, groups and institutions must be constrained and limited by moral strictures and taboos. Otherwise, the isolation of the subject from the object, the removal or absence of emotions and feelings, and the perception of people as "things", all lead inevitably to science becoming the instrument of violence, oppression and evil. Science, therefore, is not neutral, but it can be – and must be – encoded with life-affirming values, as Shiv Viswanathan demands. The link between science and morality must be re-established.

A crucial safeguard is to insist that, quite apart from the top-down macro view of security, yields, kill-ratios and so on, there must be a bottom-up micro view based on human beings. We must see beyond the numbers and the statistics, we must see children and parents and grandparents, lovers and married couples, siblings, friends and comrades. We must never forget the Gandhi talisman: "Recall the face of the poorest and most helpless person... and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything from it? Will it restore to him control over his life and destiny?" ■

Amulya K.N. Reddy retired as a Professor of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He is currently president of the International Energy Initiative.

Foeticide unlimited

The campaign against sex-selective abortions based on pre-natal sex determination procedures gains momentum in Tamil Nadu with the State Government making concrete moves to enforce the law.

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

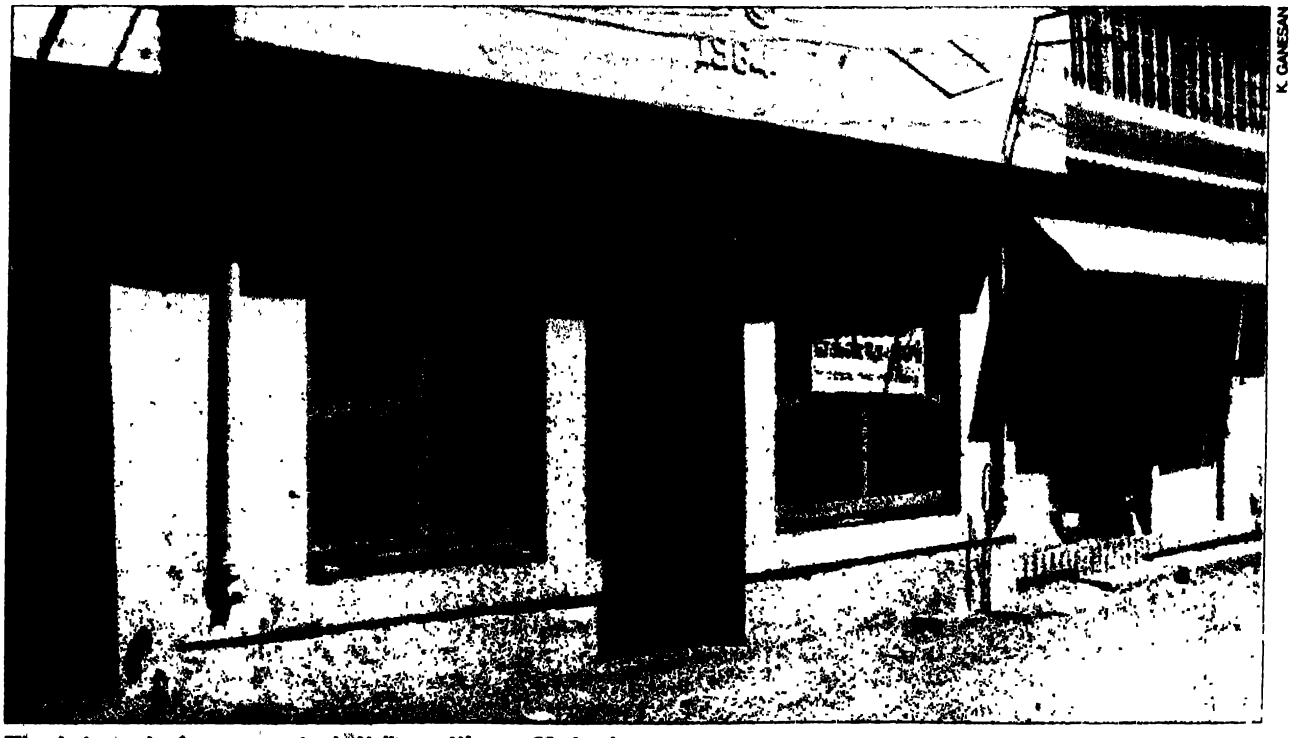
EFFORTS to end the practice of sex-selective abortions and to check the decline in the sex ratio in Tamil Nadu got a shot in the arm with the State Government taking steps in recent months to implement seriously the Pre-Natal Diagnostics (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act. The Government, which had gazetted the Act and framed the rules in 1996, has decided to act in the face of pressure from certain non-governmental organisations and media coverage of the issue.

Though female foeticide is apparently practised throughout Tamil Nadu, there is reason to believe that it is concentrated in Madurai, Salem and Dharmapuri districts, as indicated by the low and rapidly declining juvenile (0-6 age group) sex ratio in these districts. In Tamil Nadu as a whole the ratio declined from 995 (girls per 1,000 boys) in 1961 to 948 in 1991. In Madurai district alone it fell from 988 to 918, in Dharmapuri from 993 (in 1971) to 905, and in Salem from 990 to 849. The figure for Salem is one of the lowest in the country.

Amniocentesis, the sampling of the amniotic fluid during pregnancy by the insertion of a hollow needle into the uterus, which can also serve as a sex-determination test, began to be performed in the 1970s in Delhi essentially in order to determine the sex of a foetus before opting for abortion on the basis of the determination. Later it spread to other parts of the country. With public outrage mounting against sex-selective abortions, the Centre in 1994 legislated the Pre-Natal Diagnostics (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act.

Under the Act, pre-natal diagnostic centres set up for the express purpose of detecting any foetal abnormalities need to register themselves with the Appropriate Authority. The Act also forbids sex-determination *per se*. Chapter II, Section 3 of the Act states: "No medical practitioner... shall conduct... any pre-natal diagnostic techniques at a place other than a place registered under this Act." Further, Chapter III, Section 6(b) states: "No person shall conduct... any pre-natal diagnostic techniques... for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus." And, Section 5(2) of the same chapter states: "No person conducting pre-natal diagnostic procedures shall communicate... the sex of the foetus by words, signs or in any other manner." Non-compliance with or breach of these provisions is punishable by imprisonment up to three years and a fine of up to Rs.10,000.

But the Government's failure to implement the Act effectively has by all accounts led to sex-selective abortions on a fairly large scale. For instance, in some villages in Madurai district sex-determination tests continue to be performed with impunity, with the aid of ultrasound scanning (which costs Rs.150), followed by sex-specific abortions, assisted in many



K. GANESAN

File photograph of a scan centre in Usilampatti, near Madurai.

instances by doctors and paramedics, sometimes at great risk to the woman's life (*Frontline*, December 18, 1998). This situation also raises serious questions of medical ethics.

The Campaign Against Sex-Selective Abortions (CASSA) – a movement of non governmental and women's organisations, human rights groups, lawyers, educationists, academicians, mediapersons and activists, led by the Madurai-based Society for Integrated Rural Development – has been, since December 1998, seeking to prevail upon the Appropriate Authority to regulate the setting up and functioning of scan centres. Until recently none of them was registered as mandated by the Act.

With the pressure mounting, the Tamil Nadu Assembly debated in April 1999 the issue of female foeticide and the need to enforce the legal provisions that require scan centres to register themselves and forbid them from revealing the sex of the foetus. The State Government then advertised in some newspapers asking all scan centres to register themselves with the Appropriate Authority.

By September 1999, the Appropriate Authority had issued 545 applications, of which 250 were submitted for registration. While this is a good start, the response from the very districts with a concentration of such centres has been poor – only two centres from Dharmapuri and 18 from Madurai district had sought registration until October 1.

At a meeting in Chennai in September, CASSA got representatives from the Indian Medical Association, the law enforcement machinery, government officials and the Appropriate Authority to discuss the implementation of the 1996 Act. Dr. Captain N. Ramasubbu, Director of Medical and Rural Health Services, who is the Appropriate Authority to implement the Act in Tamil Nadu, announced that the district authorities would be asked to prepare a list of scan centres. Notices would be issued to those which are not registered.

While moving to get the scan centres to register themselves with the Appropriate Authority is a step in the right direction and the least the government should do, it would not ensure by itself that the centres do not reveal the sex of a foetus, aiding the continuation of the pernicious practice. According to Joint Director (Medical Termination of Pregnancy) Dr. N. Bakthi Devi, who was put in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Act after the Campaign Committee met in September, "surprise checks will be conducted at the scan centres to find out if they are violating the Act". But, as pointed out by Dr. Vasanti Devi, former Vice-Chancellor of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, medical ethics lies at the root of the implementation of the Act. The Indian Medical Association acknowledges that some doctors are indeed committing foeticide and has condemned the practice. It has written to all its branches asking them to appeal to doctors to comply with the law.

Clearly, government schemes have not made much headway in protecting the girl child. Worse, there is now evidence that with the introduction of the new diagnostic technique the problem of female infanticide is giving way to that of female foeticide. According to media and academic reports, female foeticide is on the rise in Tamil Nadu.

ACCORDING to Dr. Ramasubbu, Tamil Nadu is relatively better off in terms of the declining sex ratio when compared to States such as Bihar. This is largely because of the various State Government schemes to protect girl children from families that are below the poverty line. One of the important programmes, according to him, is the 'Girl Child Protection Scheme'. But this scheme is ill-conceived as is clear from the eligibility criteria, which stipulate, among other things, that one of the parents of the child concerned should have undergone sterilisation; that the family should have only one or two daughters and no sons; and that the beneficiary child should be less than three at the time of enrolment in the scheme.

Under the scheme, Rs.2,500 was to be invested in a fixed deposit in the name of the girl child, who would be given some money periodically for studies and at the end of 20 years Rs.10,000. Between November 1992 and March 1997, 2,503 children were enrolled under the scheme in Madurai district. But the scheme was not implemented and was finally revised in April 1997. Under the revised scheme, if a family has one girl child, Rs.3,000 would be invested in her name, and if there are two girl children, Rs.1,500 each would be invested. Under this scheme, 1,226 children were enrolled in Madurai district between April 1, 1997 and March 31, 1998 to receive Rs.1,500 each and 11 girls to receive Rs.3,000 each. In all 39,218 girls were registered in the State before April 1997 and 14,161 thereafter.

These numbers are too meagre to make any significant change in the situation. Even according to the 1991 Census, there were 20 lakh female children in the 0-4 age group in rural Tamil Nadu. Assuming that 40 per cent of them are below the poverty line (this is according to 1983 figures and is unlikely to be different today), the number of poor female children in rural households in Tamil Nadu would be around eight lakhs. To this every year 1.5 lakh female infants get added in poor rural households. The government would have to set aside Rs.22.5 crores every year just to cover the new additions, and some Rs.120 crores for the backlog of eight lakh poor female children.

However, the government set aside only Rs.4.05 crores for this scheme in 1996-97, and added another Rs.4 crores later. For 1998-99, Rs.2.25 crores was allocated.

Clearly, government schemes have not made much headway in protecting the girl child. Worse, there is now evidence that with the introduction of the new diagnostic technique the problem of female infanticide is giving way to that of female foeticide. According to media and academic reports, female foeticide is on the rise in Tamil Nadu.

CASSA sees an urgent need to pressure the Appropriate Authority to implement the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Act focussing on the aspect of medical ethics that lies at the core of compliance with the Act. But in the long run, as Vasanti Devi says, unless the larger issues which perpetuate the discrimination against women are addressed, attempts to arrest the declining sex ratio would be futile as it would amount to dealing with the symptoms rather than the disease. ■

For excellence in science

On the men from the sciences who have won this year's Nobel prizes and their work.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

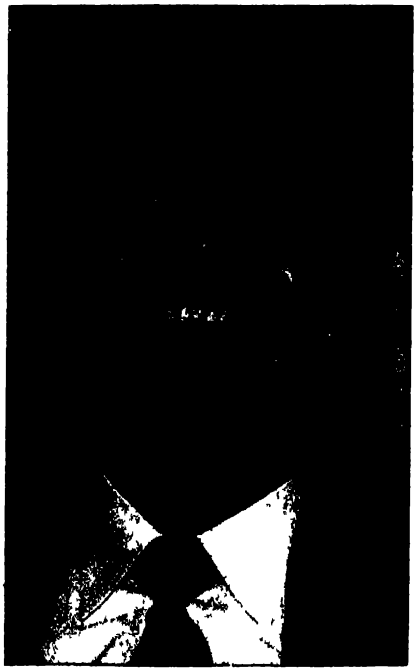
CHEMISTRY

CHEMICAL reactions, say between molecules A and B to form C, roughly proceed like this. When A and B come sufficiently close together, they begin to interact. As they move even closer, other molecular species, which are neither A nor B, are formed. One of these transitory species represents the stage at which the reaction can proceed irreversibly to result in the creation of a new, stable molecule, C. This stage is technically called the transition state. The converse process takes place when C gets sufficiently energised. It passes through the transition state to form molecules A and B. If one can determine how molecular motions change during the critical transition phase, one can understand how new chemical bonds form and how old ones break. This, in turn, can help one understand why some chemical reactions occur and not others, and help design new drugs or molecular-electronic devices, optimise industrial processes and even understand the delicate mechanisms of life processes.

In practice, however, observation of the transition state in real time and witnessing the "birth of the molecules" had proved very difficult for the simple reason that reactions occur extremely fast, over time scales of less than a millionth millionth of a second (10^{-12}s), or one picosecond (ps). Heavy molecules or atoms typically emerge from chemical reactions at velocities of about one km/s. If molecules A and B are close enough to be in a transition state, the distance between them must be of the order of a chemical bond, about 0.1 nanometre (10^{-10}m). The ratio of the distance to the velocity gives the time spent in a transition state — 10^{-13}s, or 100 femtosecond (fs), one fs being 10^{-15}s, which is to a second what a second is to 32 million years. For the simplest of all chemical reactions, involving the hydrogen molecule, the transition state is very short-lived, about 10 fs. Thus the time scales for transition states are in the 10^{-100} fs range.

THIS year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry has been awarded to Professor Ahmed H. Zewail, a Linus Pauling Chair Professor of Chemistry at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), United States, "for his studies of transition states of chemical reactions by femtosecond spectroscopy", as the Nobel citation noted. Using molecular beams and ultra-fast laser flashes, Zewail developed the techniques and the methodology for observing atoms and molecules in "slow motion" during a chemical reaction. His pioneering investigations on some key chemical reactions and their time scales have led to a revolution in chemistry with consequences in other fields such as biology and molecular electronics. Interestingly, Zewail is also a Professor of Physics at Caltech.

"The existence of short-lived transition state in any chemical reaction is an axiom in the teaching of chemistry. The structure, shape or lifetime of this state were always in the realm of speculation. Zewail's work has virtually put an end to the need for speculation about these short-lived species. Now they can be directly observed and distinguished from the reactants and products. In short, by filling the gap, he has put an end to the story of how and why chemical reactions occur," said Prof. N. Periasamy of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai.



CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP

Ahmed H. Zewail, winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. He demonstrated that a rapid laser technique can observe the motion of atoms in a molecule as they occur during a chemical reaction.

The new field that this has opened up is called femtochemistry, a term coined by Prof. Richard Bernstein, a colleague of Zewail. "Femtochemistry," observes Prof. Brengt Norden of the Nobel Committee, "has fundamentally changed our view of chemical reactions. From a phenomenon described in vague metaphors such as 'activation' and 'transition state' we can see the actual movement of individual atoms; we can speak of their motion in time just as we imagine them; they are no longer invisible."

Chemical reactions ranging from the rusting of iron to the explosion of dynamite proceed with varying velocities. However, what is common to all is that the reactivity increases with temperature, when molecular motions become more rapid. That is, molecules need to be activated or kicked over a barrier if they are to react faster. This barrier is determined by the forces that hold atoms together in the molecule (chemical bonds) and if the "temperature kick" is not enough for the molecule to overcome the barrier, they simply collide and scatter off. The temperature dependence of reactivity was quantified by Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius in 1889. While Arrhenius' formula does give a handle on chemical dynamics at the macroscopic level, a detailed quantum-theoretic picture at the microscopic level – the path of the molecule over the barrier and what the molecule actually looks like at the top of the barrier (the transition state) – was absent.

In the 1960s, the development of new techniques involving molecular beams – which allowed the isolation of reactions in vacuum – enabled the obser-

vation of processes at time scales, or time resolution, of about a thousandth of a second. This was good enough to study chemical intermediates but was too long for transition states of a few femtoseconds. In the late 1970s, Zewail and his associates used a combination of laser techniques and molecular beams to achieve time resolution of tens of picoseconds, which by 1984 was improved to three picoseconds Although this allowed a direct measurement of the rate of reaction of a molecule as it changed from one quantum mechanical state to another, this was still far away from the femtosecond time scale of transition state dynamics.

In any kind of photography to study continuous motion, one needs snapshots of sufficient resolution to capture distinct events so that a fast motion can be slowed down to the desired extent for the eyes to see. In femtosecond photography, the definition of the frame should be less than 10^{-10} m, distances over which chemical reactions occur and, because the speed of molecular motion is typically 1 km/s, the "shutter"' resolution must be better than 100 fs. Therefore, to record, for example, the characteristic spectra of transition states, the signatures of the underlying quantum mechanical processes, a "molecular camera" with such a time resolution, or "shutter speed", was necessary.

A shutter speed of a few femtoseconds is impossible if one uses mechanical or electrical devices. To build a femtosecond camera, Zewail and his colleagues combined the technique of molecular beams with the technology of tunable ultrashort laser pulses with femtosecond resolution. Since no chemical reaction occurs faster than this scale, Zewail's techniques are sufficient to understand fully the detailed dynamics of chemical reactions.

THE conceptual idea behind the femtosecond experiments of Zewail is rather simple but ingenious. First, a laser flash, called the pump pulse, hits a molecule in isolation and in vacuum (in the molecular beam apparatus). This initiates the reaction and at the same time sets the experimental clock at zero. A second (weaker) pulse at a chosen wavelength, called the probe pulse, arrives several femtoseconds later and records the snapshot of the reaction. When the probe pulse hits the molecule, it does not produce an image, unlike in a conventional camera. Instead, the molecule interacts with the probe and then emits a spectrum of light. With the given wavelength of the probe pulse, the free molecules A, B and C and the transition state produce different characteristic spectra. Using information from the spectral signals combined with the time elapsed between the pump pulse and the probe pulse, reactions and their "images" can be reconstructed in real time.

Zewail's studies on light-induced coherent conversion of a molecule from one structure to another have given insights into the high efficiency of eye vision. Another crucial application of femtochemistry is in biology where it proves the efficient energy conversion in chlorophyll molecules.

Femtosecond studies based on Zewail's concept are now performed in various related fields, not only by using molecular beams but by studying processes involving catalysts, in liquids and solvents (to understand the mechanism of dissolving, for example) and in polymers (to develop new materials for electronic applications, for example).

In the early 1980s, when Zewail had just begun his investigations using molecular beams, TIFR scientists also began research in the area. But the advances in laser technology, according to Prof. Periasamy, left them behind.

Interestingly, in 1986, the TIFR had invited Egyptian born Zewail to participate in a workshop on Fast Chemical Processes organised by the institute. Zewail declined the invitation saying that he was busy with his experiments. Those were the very experiments that have brought him the coveted prize now.

PHYSIOLOGY/MEDICINE

ABOUT 100,000 billion cells make up the body of an adult human being. Each cell is made up of several compartments, called organelles, which carry out specific specialised tasks. Each organelle is surrounded by a membrane. The cell nucleus contains the genetic material DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) in the form of chromosomes and thus governs all the functions of a cell. The mitochondria occur in the cytoplasm (which surrounds the nucleus), and they are the site of the reactions that produce the key enzymes required for cell function. In that sense, they are the respiratory centres producing the energy required by the cell. Within the cytoplasm is a system of membranes that constitutes the endoplasmic reticulum, which, together with ribosomes that exist on its outside, is responsible for the synthesis of proteins.

Every cell contains about one billion protein molecules, which are the building blocks of living systems. Cartilage, skin, hair, nails and eyeballs are all made of the same basic substance. In addition, the molecular machines that perform, or catalyse, the building, tearing down and maintenance work that keeps organisms functioning are made of protein. The proteins within the cell are constantly degraded and re-synthesised. Proteins are made up of amino acids and these range from 50 to several thousands in number, forming long, folded chains.

However, it remained a puzzle for long how large proteins could traverse the tightly sealed lipid-containing membranes that surround the organelles. It was also unknown how newly made proteins were directed to their specific locations in the cell. For solving both these puzzles in the 1970s, through the discovery that "proteins have intrinsic signals that govern their transport and localisation in the cell", Prof. Gunter Blobel of the Rockefeller Institute, New York, has been awarded this year's Nobel Prize in physiology/medicine.

Blobel began investigations into these problems soon after he joined the well-known cell biology laboratory of Prof. George Palade at the Rockefeller Institute in 1967. Blobel's work was built on the work of Palade and his team, which had studied the structure of a cell and the principles of the transportation of newly synthesised proteins out of a cell. This work had earned Palade the Nobel Prize in 1974.

In 1971, Blobel postulated that synthesised proteins have an intrinsic signal that is essential to direct them to and across the membranes of the endoplasmic reticulum. In 1975, through elegant biochemical experiments, he established the various steps involved. The signal, Blobel showed, is essentially a peptide – a specific sequence of amino acids that forms an integral part of the protein. He recognised the importance of this signal in enabling the protein to be correctly processed for transportation to its destination. He also suggested that transport across the membrane of the endoplasmic reticulum occurs through a channel. Over the next two decades, Blobel and his co-workers characterised the step-by-step molecular mechanisms underlying these processes. The most significant outcome of the work is that the "signal hypothesis" is universal and these processes are the same in yeast, plant and animal cells.

In collaboration with other research

groups, Blobel soon showed that similar intrinsic signals directed proteins to other intracellular organelles. On the basis of this he was able to formulate in 1980 general principles for the sorting and targeting of proteins to particular cell compartments. The protein structure contains the information needed to specify its localisation in the cell in the form of specific amino acid sequences.

These 'topogenic signals', as they are termed, are present either as a "short tail" at one end or are located sometimes within the protein. They determine whether a protein is meant to pass through the membrane into a particular organelle or become integrated into the membrane or be exported out of the cell. A range of signals that direct proteins to different parts of the cell have now been identified, proving Blobel's "signal hypothesis".



STAURT RAMSON/AP

Dr. Gunter Blobel of the Rockefeller Institute in his laboratory in New York City.

"In effect the cellular machinery is like an enormously complex airline baggage handling system. The baggage tags are little sequences of amino acids within the protein sequence," Prof. P. Balaram of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, said. "The idea that amino acid sequences encode not only the information necessary for folding and function but also for determining the spatial location of a protein in cells and organelles is indeed a major conceptual advance," according to him.

"Blobel's work has had a major influence on modern cell biology. Protein trafficking is an area that is directly derived from Blobel's early work. His work has also allowed definition of the details of the biochemical mechanisms involved in the precisely controlled processes of protein transport in biology in general," Balaram pointed out.

THE knowledge of topogenic signals has greatly increased the scientific community's understanding of many medically important mechanisms such as the production of antibodies in the human immune system. If the sorting signal in a protein is altered, the protein will obviously reach the wrong destination. This could be the underlying mechanism in several genetic disorders. One example is primary hyperoxaluria, which causes the formation of kidney stones at an early age. In some forms of familial hypercholesterolemia, it is known that deficient protein transport signals lead to high cholesterol levels in blood. Other genetic diseases, such as cystic fibrosis, are also caused by similar factors.

With the imminent mapping of the human genome, deduction of the structure and topogenic signals of various proteins will become possible. The knowledge will increase scientists' understanding of processes that lead to diseases and can be used to develop new treatments.

Increased knowledge about protein transport mechanisms will also be useful in designing new drugs that are targeted at a specific defect in the cell. The finding is important from the perspective of future cell and gene therapy.

PHYSICS

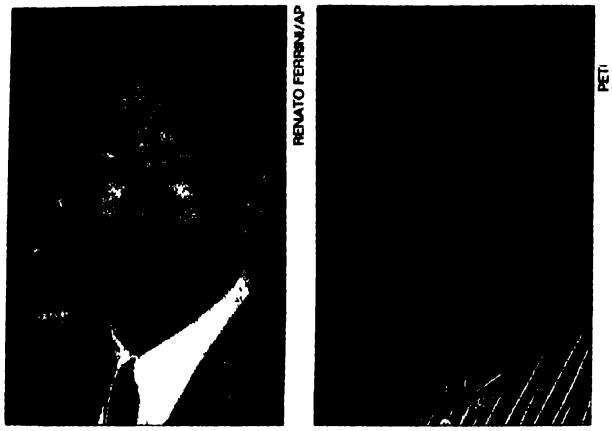
PHYSICS at the sub-nuclear level, particle physics as it is called, is described in terms of the basic constituents of matter and forces of interaction among them. The forces that are at work are electromagnetism (which causes an electric bulb to shine), the weak nuclear force (which causes radioactivity and is the source of the sun's energy), the strong nuclear force (which binds neutrons and protons in atomic nuclei) and gravitation. In the current understanding, the fundamental constituents of matter are of two kinds: *leptons* which are not affected by the strong nuclear force and *quarks* which experience the strong force. Leptons include the familiar electron and quarks make up sub-nuclear particles such as the proton, the neutron and the meson.

In a quantum description, the forces – barring gravitation which has so far defied a quantum description – through which these constituents interact, display a basic similarity. They are described by certain mediating particles: electromagnetism is transmitted by the massless photon, the weak nuclear force by a triplet of massive particles (W^+, W and Z^0) called vector bosons, and the strong force by an octet of massless particles called gluons. The quantum description of electromagnetism, called quantum electrodynamics (QED), was completed in the 1940s and has been verified by experiments to great accuracy. The currently accepted mathematical framework which governs particle physics beyond electromagnetism, and appears to be well borne out by experimental measurements so far, is what has come to be called the Standard Model. The mathematical foundations for this theory were laid by the works of Sheldon Glashow, Abdus Salam, B. W. Lee and Steven Weinberg in the late 1960s. Subsequent works of Glashow, J. Iliopoulos and L. Maiani ensured that the theory reproduced correctly the known basic features of weak interactions.

But it was the work of Martinus J. G. Veltman and Gerardus 't Hooft of the University of Utrecht in the late 1960s and early 1970s that enabled physically meaningful quantum theoretic calculations to be performed using the Standard Model, which could be verified by experiments. The discovery of the top quark in 1995 with the correct mass as predicted by the Standard Model several years earlier (which was possible only by using 't Hooft-Veltman techniques) has proved the validity of the Standard Model. This year's Nobel Prize has been awarded to this teacher-student duo for this breakthrough work which placed the Standard Model on a firm mathematical footing.

The most important feature of the Standard Model is that it provides a unified description of electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force. That is, the two apparently disparate forces of nature can

be described in a single mathematical framework. This "electroweak" unification is possible because of the following principle: Despite their manifest disparities in strength and range, the different forces of nature seem to have a deep unifying mathematical connection, an underlying symmetry, which remains hidden in the real world. The unifying principle in the mathematical description of all these forces is called the gauge symmetry. Physicists believe that gauge symmetry is a fundamental feature of physics and theories based on the properties of gauge symmetry are called gauge theories. It is hoped that this underlying gauge symmetry will eventually lead to a single unifying theory of all forces, and the electroweak unification marks the first step in that direction.



Prof. Gerardus 't Hooft and Dr. Martinus J.G. Veltman who shared the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Gauge symmetry arises from the fact that force fields – magnetic and electric fields, for example – can be expressed in terms of certain mathematical functions (the gauge fields) which allow certain mathematical operations (the gauge transformations) to be performed on them without changing the physical values of the force fields. That is, force fields remain invariant with respect to gauge transformations and the theory is said to be gauge invariant. In the case of electromagnetism, the allowed transformations are such that the order in which they are performed is irrelevant. Electromagnetism is referred to as an abelian gauge theory. But one can have more complex mathematical structures where the order of gauge transformations becomes important. Such a theory is referred to as a non-abelian gauge theory.

Since the 1950s, there were attempts to describe the weak nuclear force in terms of a non-abelian gauge theory (also known as Yang-Mills theory). This culminated in the work of Glashow, Salam, Lee and Weinberg which not only provided a mathematical framework for the weak force but also unified it with electromagnetism. An important concept that enabled this unification was that of *spontaneous symmetry breaking*. The basic principle here is that while the underlying theory and the equations of motion are gauge invariant, the specific real world solutions do not respect this gauge symmetry resulting in the observed difference in electromagnetism and the weak interaction. Crucial to the development of a self-consistent quantum theory that would implement the idea of spontaneous symmetry breaking was the 't Hooft-Veltman work.

The problems that confronted the quantum description of a (spontaneously broken) non-abelian gauge theory – which the 't Hooft-Veltman work resolved – can be understood by going back a few decades when QED was being developed. Calculations of physical quantities like mass and charge gave rise to infinite values which did not make sense. The problem was resolved by Shin-Itrio Tomonoga, Julian Schwinger and Richard Feynman for which they were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1965. The method developed by them is called *renormalisation.*

In simple terms, renormalisation is a prescription to "absorb" the infinities in the definition of physical quantities. That the method actually worked and gave physically meaningful results was demonstrated by Freeman J. Dyson who devised rules to carry out this procedure in a self-consistent manner. In modern terminology, Feynman, Schwinger, Dyson and Tomonoga renormalised an abelian gauge theory.

When the electroweak theory was formulated in the late 1960s, history repeated itself. Calculation of physical quantities, like the masses of W and Z bosons or quantum corrections to any weak process, produced absurd results, which were more vicious than the abelian case. The non-abelian nature of the theory gave rise to twin problems: one, physical quantities became divergent and, two scattering probabilities came out to be greater than one, violating the basic probabilistic interpretation of quantum mechanics. Many researchers at that time were pessimistic about the problems being satisfactorily resolved.

"When Veltman came on the scene, the problem was a major challenge to all the top particle physicists of the time. But Veltman has this knack of seeing through the maze of equations and he could see that it could be solved," pointed out Prof. S. Rai Choudhury of Delhi University. "The key element in their work is the discovery of a renormalisation procedure that preserves gauge invariance, an idea that did not occur to many," he said.

The two showed how non-abelian gauge theories like the Standard Model could make sense and provided a theoretic machinery for precision computing of physical quantities in these theories. In many respects what 't Hooft-Veltman did is similar to what Dyson had done in QED 20 years earlier.

An important consequence of spontaneous symmetry breaking in the electroweak theory is the existence of an as-yet-unseen particle called the Higgs boson. Given the precision calculations that are now possible *a la* 't Hooft and Veltman, physicists feel that the mass of Higgs is more or less fixed. Though it is too heavy to be produced in the present accelerators, it should show up in the future particle factories such as the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) being built at CERN and due to become operational in 2005.

"One of the things that this Nobel work has done," Rai Choudhury said, "is to make experiments look for specific predictions made by the Standard Model, one by one through precision measurements and validate it completely because there are no uncertainties in the theory anymore."

"For elucidating the quantum structure of electroweak interactions in physics," said the Nobel citation for the Award. However, the 't Hooft-Veltman work has had enormous impact on the development of particle physics beyond the Standard Model. "Before the 't Hooft-Veltman work, the richness of the structure of a non-abelian gauge theory was not apparent – that even a non-interacting theory could have such interesting mathematical properties. Today these have given rise to a whole new array of ideas in particle physics which perhaps would not have been possible otherwise," said Rai Choudhury. ■

Software for safety

Interview with Dr. Venkat Venkatasubramanian.

When a safety alarm goes off in an oil refinery, control-room personnel must make crucial decisions in a matter of minutes. Should the process be shut down? Which unit should be stopped? Should the other units continue to run? For how long? Every minute counts, for some poisonous, carcinogenic or inflammable substance that can kill people and destroy property could be escaping into the air.

A case in point is the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, in which more than 3,000 people died and thousands were affected, when a pesticide plant run by the Union Carbide Corporation accidentally released a toxic gas. Had the leak been detected before the safety alarm went off, the disaster could probably have been contained, if not averted. But is such detection possible?

Yes, asserts **Dr. Venkat Venkatasubramanian**, Professor of Chemical Engineering, who leads a research group in the Intelligent Process Systems Laboratory at Purdue University, United States. After working on the problem for 16 years, he and his team have come up with an online, real-time computer program that could quickly determine the cause of process abnormality and recommend appropriate action. Called DKit, or Diagnostic ToolKit, it can serve a variety of industries, including chemical plants.

While DKit works backwards from the symptom to the cause, another program, HAZOPExpert, also developed by the team, works forward, from the causes to the hazard and helps design safer plants.

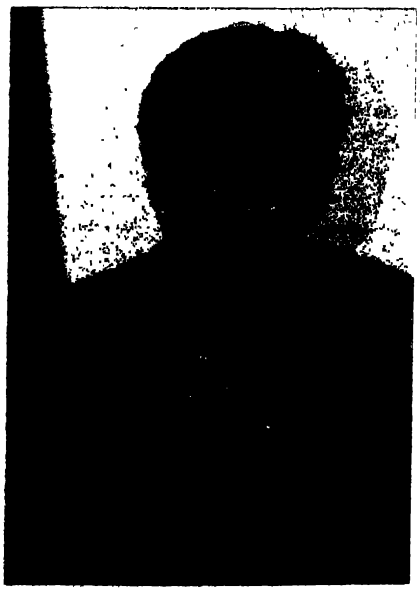
Troubled by the Bhopal tragedy, Venkatasubramanian, who had just completed his Ph.D in chemical engineering from Cornell University, U.S., decided to explore methods to prevent such industrial accidents. After a stint as Research Associate, Artificial Intelligence, in the Department of Computer Science at Carnegie-Mellon and Columbia universities, Venkatasubramanian joined Purdue University's Chemical Engineering Department.

Venkatasubramanian has published more than 100 research papers, which cover areas of process fault diagnosis and supervisory control, hazard and safety analysis, operating procedures synthesis and product design using knowledge-based systems, neural networks, genetic algorithms, artificial intelligence, mathematical programming and statistical approaches.

DKit and HAZOPExpert systems combine Venkatasubramanian's expertise in various specialities. His experience as a consultant to global corporations and institutions such as Exxon, Honeywell, DowElanco, Lubrizol, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, the United Nations Development Programme, the Indian Oil Corporation, Imperial Chemical Industries, American Cynamid, Amoco, Arthur D.Little and G.D. Searle, has helped him understand the needs of various industries.

Recipient of several awards and honours, Venkatasubramanian serves on the editorial board of the *Process Safety Progress* journal published by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. He was recently selected by *Industry Week* magazine as "one of the 50 stars in the U.S. whose achievements are shaping the future of our industrial culture and America's technology".

Recently in Chennai to establish links with academic institutions and industries in order to test DKit and HAZOPExpert, Venkatasubramanian spoke to **Asha Krishnakumar** on his research work. Excerpts from the interview:



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▶ *What motivated you to work on the problem of industrial accidents?*

The 1984 Bhopal incident. Several things went wrong there. Incidents like that do happen when you design complex systems. There are risks involved and we try to minimise them to absolutely low levels. We cannot, however, eliminate them. The role of the plant manager is crucial. He is concerned about how to run the plant not only safely but optimally and economically. In this case I was interested in designing systems which could monitor chemical plants in real time, 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, and recognise abnormal situations. Typically, the alarm system in a plant goes off when the problem has progressed to a considerable extent, but just short of the danger level.

The way alarms are set, it may not be too late before they go off. But when several things conspire to happen at the same time and when people do not know how to react, it may be too late. Most often there is a panic reaction to abnormal situations as it is difficult to reason through all possibilities within a few minutes.

I was interested in designing a system that could detect the problem and warn people of the abnormal situation much before the alarms went off and tell operators what had gone wrong and why, and suggest solutions. An alarm does not tell you why something has gone wrong.

The control systems in chemical plants do not do this. For example, if a system has to control a plant at a certain temperature, it takes periodic temperature readings and compares them with what is required. If the reading is higher or lower than normal, it will open or close the valve appropriately. The problem is that the sensors that take the readings may fail, or the valve that has to open or close may fail or something else might fail. This is when you need human help. But, then, it may be difficult for humans to diagnose what went wrong and how to rectify it quickly. So, I was interested in designing the next generation control systems.

▶ *What represents next generation control systems?*

Systems that are capable of sophisticated reasoning. So, in some sense I was,

and still am, interested in designing computers that can reason like humans but much faster, covering a lot more ground. This is where artificial intelligence comes in – designing systems to think and reason like people. With this knowledge-base we developed DKit, the first part of our research work, and HAZOPExpert systems, the second part.

▶ *What is DKit?*

It is an intelligent control system that can help figure out what is going wrong in a plant and what should be done. That is, abnormal situation management (ASM) wherein you reason from symptoms to causes.

▶ *What kind of research work is involved in DKit?*

We began laying the foundation for DKit in 1984-85, soon after the Bhopal incident. We looked at the different approaches to ASM. Reasoning backward was not easy. To understand ASM we worked on neural networks, trend monitoring, causal and analytical modelling, artificial intelligence and statistical techniques. Each had its own strengths and weaknesses. No single approach addressed all the complexities of industrial diagnostic problems. So, we combined all the five approaches in DKit.

DKit is equipped with a moderator or a scheduler, which pools recommendations from different approaches, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each, applies conflict-resolution algorithms and comes to a conclusion

If DKit does not offer one answer, it narrows the possible causes of an abnormal situation for the plant operator's consideration.

▶ *What is HAZOPExpert?*

In order to have a safe plant, it is best to design one to begin with. This is called process hazards analysis (PHA). When you design a new plant or take an existing plant and make changes to it, retrofitting, you analyse all the implied hazards. That is, you build into the system all that can possibly go wrong with the various parts of the plant, their causes, consequences and ways to protect the system. All these things have to be worked out by a detailed, systematic analysis, involving an enormous number of man-years.

Since we had already developed some techniques for going back, I figured that I must be able to develop techniques to go forward as well using a computer. So, we designed a whole series of systems, called the HAZOPExpert. In PHA, the well-known approach is hazard and operability analysis, or Hazop. So we developed two systems, HAZOPExpert for continuous process plants such as refineries and Batch HazopExpert for batch processing plants such as those used by pharmaceutical and speciality chemicals companies.

For this we developed algorithms using which, sitting in front of the computer screen and looking at every single unit of the process drawing, you can identify thousands of things that can go wrong in a plant, identify the causes and consequences, and provide the results in a summarised form, as a table

When people do PHA, they look at two scenarios. First, the routine functioning that is common to all plants. You ask the same kind of questions and go through the same kind of logic. These are the routine hazards. Some situations are unique to particular plants. We have focussed on routine situations, as 80 per cent of the effort is expended on solving routine problems.

So Hazop models hazards that may arise routinely in a plant are common to all plants. So, the Hazop system can take care of 80 per cent of the problems quickly.

For a large chemical plant it is almost impossible to analyse and build into the system all possible system failures. A typical chemical plant has hundreds of units, each responsible for 10 different activities. And there may be thousands of such combinations. It is humanly impossible even to identify all possible hazards. But that is how it is done now. This takes enormous amounts of time, effort and money. In the U.S., industries spend $ 2-3 billion a year on PHA.

For long, people did it because it was the right thing to do. But after the Bhopal incident, U.S. companies became concerned; they carried out a number of investigations. PHA was always being done by good chemical companies because that was the right thing to do. But in 1992, when Hazop was made mandatory, all U.S. plants became interested in our work at Purdue.

We are in the process of commercialising all our software. Batch HAZOPExpert is being tested in G.D. Searle and Company in Chicago.

Ideally, we would like to have one comprehensive system that is both diagnostic, like DKit, and predictive, like HAZOPExpert. As they are both related and part of the same problem, our team is now working on combining the two programs.

▶ *Are you thinking of marketing your product?*

One of the techniques we developed was recently licensed to Honeywell Inc. to make it into a product. It is the first of its kind – a technique licensed from a university for control purposes – anywhere in the world. It is called the qualitative trend analysis (QTA) technique.

▶ *Have you had a trial run of the process safety software in industries?*

I have been working on this technique for over 10 years, and in the last year and a half it has been on real-time trial in a major chemical plant, Exxon, in the U.S. and the results have been spectacular. It detected problems in the plant long before the alarms went off and advised the operator about what went wrong and what to do.

▶ *After the Bhopal tragedy there has been a lot of research work to understand the problem. How is your work different from the rest?*

There is nothing like this (HAZOPExpert). We are acknowledged as the leaders in process safety, both on-line and off-line design. It is something of a pioneering effort.

▶ *How long did it take to complete the program?*

Since we had to start from scratch, we took longer than would have been the case otherwise. QTA and the diagnosis work took us 15 years, roughly about 50 man-years of work. HAZOPExpert and Batch HAZOPExpert took nearly half of that.

▶ *How relevant are the products for India?*

They are especially relevant for developing countries, such as India. After all, the worst accident in the history of chemical plants happened in India. Also, a number of chemical plants are being built in India. Many plants are also shifting base from developed countries to countries like India because of the advantages of cheap labour, environmental considerations and so on.

▶ *Have you patented your work?*

We have licensed part of our work to Honeywell. The intellectual property rights are with Purdue. When we set up the company and market the products, we will acquire the rights. Purdue encourages the faculty to start companies to disseminate knowledge as it sees its role not only as one which creates knowledge but also one that transfers the knowledge to society. The two ways of transfering knowledge are through licensing and by setting up companies. Purdue does both.

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INTERFACE 18053

Of courts and freedoms

A military court probing the leakage of alleged confidential official documents relating to the Kargil War summons as witnesses journalists, civilians not subject to the Army Act, raising a host of questions.

ANUPAM GUPTA

"FREEDOM of discussion," said Professor A.V. Dicey, father of the concept of rule of law, writing sardonically in 1885, is "in England little else than the right to write or say anything which a jury, consisting of twelve shopkeepers, think it expedient should be said or written." It is hardly an exaggeration to say, he wrote, that from this point of view the "liberty of the press is not recognised in England."

Hardly a soul in England would adhere to that position today. But a century and 14 years later, on the threshold of the third millennium and almost 50 years after India gave itself its own democratic Constitution, the Indian Army, or its legal advisers, apparently believe that the position is no better in India today than it was in England during Dicey's time. How else can anyone explain the unprecedented summoning of journalists by a military court of inquiry at Leh, set up to probe the leakage of alleged confidential official documents relating to the Kargil War? The documents are associated with Brigadier Surinder Singh, commander of the 121 Infantry Brigade at Kargil, and his advance warnings of a Pakistani intrusion then dismissed as alarmist.

In an action clearly calculated to intimidate the media as a whole and dampen the investigative ardour of the journalists concerned in particular, the court of inquiry has used its statutory power to summon civilian witnesses not subject to the Army Act – *Outlook* and *Frontline* reporters who first revealed to the public the damning evidence contained in Brig. Surinder Singh's letters. "Whereas a Court of Inquiry has been ordered to assemble at Leh," reads the summons, "for investigating the circumstances under which allegedly contents of confidential communications were made available to unauthorised persons by Army personnel in contravention to the Official Secrets Act 1923, I do hereby summon and require you to attend as a witness at the sitting of the said Court at Leh.... and so to attend from day to day until you shall be duly discharged, whereof you shall fail at your peril." It is signed by the Presiding Officer of the Court of Inquiry, Brigadier A.K. Duggal, Deputy General Officer Commanding, 3 Infantry Division.

The power to summon civilians not subject to the Army Act, enjoyed earlier only by courts-martial, was conferred on courts of inquiry in September 1992 by an amendment to Section 135 of the Army Act. The Section is a part of a fasciculus of provisions, Sections 128 to 152, grouped together in Chapter XI of the Act under the general title "Procedure of Courts-Martial". Apart from Section 135, none of the provisions in the chapter refers to a court of inquiry.

As a matter of fact, only three other provisions in the Army Act, which has 194 sections, speak of a court of inquiry, though the Act is replete with provisions relating to courts-martial. They are Section 89 (levy of collective fines by a commanding officer for weapons lost or stolen after obtaining the report of a court of inquiry); Section 106 (court-of-inquiry probe into a person's absence from duty without leave for 30 days or more and any deficiency in arms, equipment or other property entrusted to his care); and Section 191 (the Central Government's power to make rules regarding, *inter alia*, the assembly and procedure of courts of inquiry). None of them defines what a court of inquiry actually is, or explains why and how it is called a "court". Nor does Section 3, the introductory definitional provision of the statute, shed any light on this vital semantic point. It is made up of 24 clauses, each defining a distinct term or expression of the Act, plus a last, residuary clause which adopts the definitions given in the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The Section goes to the extent of defining terms such as "Chief of Army Staff", terms one would have thought needed no definition, but leaves out a court of inquiry.

The IPC, on its part, defines "judge" (Section 19) as also "court of justice" (Section 20), and defines them in terms which would exclude without any doubt courts of inquiry from their ambit. A "court of justice" denotes a judge acting alone or a body of judges acting as a body, while a "judge" denotes a person who is empowered by law to give in any legal proceeding, civil or criminal, and subject to appeal or confirmation, a definitive judgment. Even a magistrate exercising jurisdiction in respect of a charge which he has power only to commit for trial to another court is not a judge (Section 19, illustration 'd').

Unlike a court-martial and unlike even a commanding officer, a court of inquiry can neither try nor commit (or remand) anyone for trial nor award any punishment to any person subject to the Army Act. It is no more than what Rule 177 of the Army Rules candidly describes it to be: "an assembly of officers... directed to collect evidence and, if so required, to report with regard to any matter which may be referred to them."

Just two rules later there is, in fact, intrinsic evidence of a striking nature to show that not only is a court of inquiry not a court but that it is the very antithesis of a court or even a quasi-judicial authority. A court of inquiry, says Rule 179, "shall be guided by the written instructions of the authority who assembled the court. The instructions shall be full and specific and shall state the general character of the information required. They shall also state whether a report is required or not." Report or no report, after the inquiry is over the "whole of the proceedings of a court of inquiry shall be forwarded by the presiding officer to the officer who assembled the court."

A court or a quasi-judicial authority taking instructions or directions from a superior is an idea repugnant to the rule of law. Even when expressly conferred by statute (and not merely rules or delegated legislation framed under it), the power to issue such directions was unequivocally condemned by the Supreme Court in Raman's case (1959) as a "naked arbitrary power capable of being used to compel quasi-judicial tribunals to dispose of cases in a particular way".

It is a "basic and elementary postulate of the rule of law", a Constitution Bench

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INTERFACE 180538

of the court reiterated five years later in Rajagopala Naidu's case, that a judge or quasi-judicial authority "must be left absolutely unfettered by any extraneous guidance by the executive or administrative wing of the state". Directions which forge fetters on quasi-judicial authorities in the exercise of their discretion, said Chief Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar, are "completely inconsistent with the well-accepted notion of judicial process".

And yet, despite all this, despite the fact that it is not a court at all or anything approaching a court, the military court of inquiry at Leh, exploiting the mystique that surrounds the processes of any institution called a "court", has chosen to subpoena the Fourth Estate in a bid to scare it into committing an obvious professional sin: the disclosure of its sources.

Accustomed as they are to restriction, even wholesale "abrogation", of their fundamental rights and freedoms courtesy Article 33 of the Constitution, it is ideologically and temperamentally difficult, if not impossible, for the armed forces to appreciate the constitutional rights and obligations of others not subject to military law.

The right of journalists to protect their sources of information is as integral and indispensable a part of their constitutionally guaranteed right of freedom of speech and expression as their right to write and publish itself. The one cannot exist without the other. "After studying the cases it seems to me," Lord Denning, one of the greatest judges this century has produced, said in 1980 in the Granada Television case, "that the courts are reaching towards this principle: the public has a right of access to information which is of public concern and of which the public ought to know. The newspapers are the agents, so to speak, of the public to collect that information and to tell the public of it. In support of this right of access, the newspapers should not in general be compelled to disclose their sources of information..."

The reason, he explained, writing in his own inimitable style, is that "if they were compelled to disclose their sources, they would soon be bereft of information which they ought to have. The sources would dry up. Wrongdoing would not be disclosed. Charlatans would not be exposed. Unfairness would go unremedied. Misdeeds in the corridors of power, in companies or in government departments would never be known."

His colleague on the Bench hearing one of the leading English cases on the subject, Lord Justice Watkins, was no less forthright and lucid. He said: "It is well founded on ample legal authority that newspapers and television and broadcasting authorities and their servants are in principle immune from disclosing their confidential sources of information. This principle has been applied in a number of cases before courts and tribunals, some of which have achieved public prominence. The public can be said to approve of it. It is in their interest to do so. It is, therefore, a public interest immunity."

Dealing then with the possible exceptions to this general principle, Watkins concluded with a pregnant statement. Save in "very rare and exceptional circumstances", he said, "it is impossible to foresee a claim for disclosure which a court would entertain being brought by anybody whose iniquity has been exposed."

That was in the Court of Appeal, which occupies a position in the British judicial hierarchy midway between the High Courts and the Supreme Court in India. In an appeal to the House of Lords, the highest judicial forum in England, the views of Denning and Watkins were approved by Lord Salmon but rejected by the remaining four Law Lords led by Lord Wilberforce. Each of the four delivered a separate judgment (called "speech" in the House of Lords), all equally hostile to the very concept of the freedom of the press.

In less than a year, however, the law as settled by the majority was overturned by Parliament. Section 10 of the new Contempt of Court Act, 1981, barring courts from requiring journalists to disclose their sources of information "unless it be established to the satisfaction of the court that the disclosure is necessary in the interests of justice or national security or for the prevention of disorder or crime," embodies, in substance, the liberal and enlightened views of Salmon, Denning and Watkins.

Even though England has no written Constitution and no Bill of Rights, non-disclosure of a journalist's sources is now the statutory rule and disclosure the exception, the onus of establishing the necessity of which lies on the party which seeks such disclosure.

The position in India, with a written Constitution and Fundamental Rights expressly protected from encroachments, can only be better, not worse. This constitutionally fortified position has been recognised by Parliament in Section 15 of the Press Council Act of 1978. Sub-section (1) of Section 15 confers on the Press Council the "same powers throughout India as are vested in civil court" in respect of summoning and enforcing the attendance of witnesses and examining them on oath, requiring the discovery (or disclosure) of documents, etc. Sub-section (2) of Section 15. And it provides complete, unfettered immunity to journalists from disclosing their sources. "Nothing in sub-section (1)," it reads, "shall be deemed to compel any newspaper, news agent, editor or journalist to disclose the source of any news or information published by that newspaper or received or reported by that news agency, editor or journalist."

This immunity has been granted despite the fact that the Council is obligated, under Section 13 (which sets out its objects and functions), to foster among journalists a "due sense of both the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" as also a "sense of responsibility and public service". It is apparent that in the opinion of Parliament a journalist's right to protect his or her sources is consistent with his obligations as a citizen and in no way detracts from his responsibility as a journalist.

As and when the issue is directly raised before the Supreme Court under Article 19 of the Constitution, as it is bound sooner or later to be in view of the Army's conduct, the latest 1996 verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in Goodwin's case will also be of tremendous significance. And that is because of the similarity between the provisions of Article 19(1)(a) read with Clause (2), dealing with freedom of speech and expression, and those of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights which, after the collapse of Communism, has begun to exert an increasing influence on constitutional jurisprudence the world over.

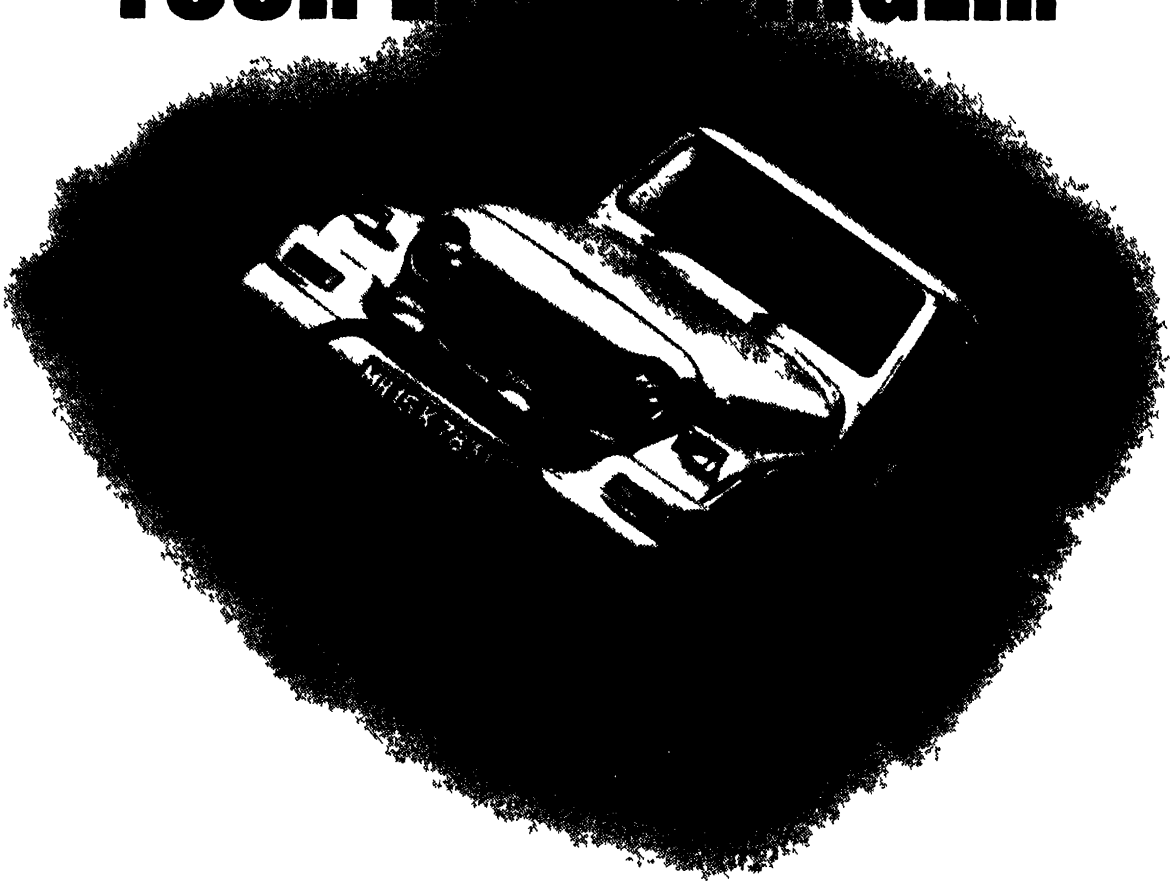
"Protection of journalistic sources," ruled the European Court, "is one of the basic conditions of press freedom." Absent such protection, the "vital watchdog role of the press may be undermined and the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information may be adversely affected. Having regard to the importance of the protection of journalistic sources for press freedom in a democratic society and the potentially chilling effect an order of source disclosure has on the exercise of that freedom, such a measure cannot be compatible with Article 10 of the Convention unless it is justified by an overriding requirement in the public interest."

Flush with the victory in Kargil, the military authorities at Leh have clearly bitten off more than they can chew. ■

Anupam Gupta is a Chandigarh-based advocate practising in the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

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INTERFACE 180534

Lessons from Pakistan

Gloating over the military takeover in Pakistan and self-congratulation over the 'inherent' strength of Indian democracy is unwarranted, even dangerous.

If there were a nuclear Doomsday Clock for India and Pakistan, we would now have to advance its hands by two minutes. After the Pakistan military *coup d'etat* of October 12, it would stand at three minutes to midnight. The clock, whose concept was invented by peace-minded atomic scientists to warn humanity of the gravest threat to its existence, has registered many nasty advances since 1974 in South Asia, especially with the nuclear tests last year. Kargil took it forward by two minutes: Indian and Pakistani Ministers and senior officials exchanged veiled nuclear threats at least 13 times during the conflict.

With the coup, a crucial assumption about the low likelihood of an India-Pakistan nuclear exchange has broken down – namely, the integrity of the establishments of the two countries and their ability to take rational decisions about the life and death of millions of people. The coup has exposed the fragility of the Pakistan establishment. Generals who can plot against one another (as ISI chief Khwaja Zia-ud-din did against Gen. Pervez Musharraf) and overthrow elected governments, can also overturn norms of rational strategic conduct. They can invent, and over-react to, threats; they can panic, or pull the nuclear trigger – in hubris or desperation, to assert "national pride", or in pre-emptive "self-defence".

This should alarm us and induce salutary sobriety in the Indian responses to the events in Pakistan. Instead, India's policy-makers and -shapers have gloated over them, indulged in self-congratulation over the "inherent strength" of Indian democracy, and ridiculed Pakistan and its people. Beneath bland official statements of neutrality, and declarations of willingness to deal in a mature manner with all regimes in Pakistan, whether civilian or military, lurk many Indian suspicions and calculations. The main calculation is how to use Pakistan's present crisis to court Washington through slogans such as "cross-border terrorism".

The Foreign Office did India no credit by pooh-poohing Pakistan's unilateral troop withdrawal from the international border, and summarily rejecting its offer of an "unconditional", "results-oriented" dialogue. In today's situation, tension defusion and dialogue resumption are so important that it really does not matter whether Gen. Musharraf's intentions are sincere, or whether the pullback extends to the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. Any pullback is unreservedly welcome and in our own interest. Had it responded positively to the Pakistani proposal, New Delhi would have heightened its stature and also won the Pakistani people's goodwill. Instead it has chosen to be petty, and thus strengthened the view that, led by a traditionally anti-Pakistan party it is not interested in conciliation.

Some of our self-styled strategic analysts – read, Pakistan-baiters who predictably recite little *mantras* memorised over the years – have put their own spin on the coup by saying that military rule is the normal or "natural" state of Pakistan: the army merely acted as the guardian of the Two-Nation Theory; there is nothing unusual about this. The Pakistanis don't know how to manage democracy. Only we Indians do. Jaswant Singh pompously said "the events are themselves a commentary on the events".

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

This view ignores the steps – wobbling and indecisive, and yet definite and numerous – that Pakistan has taken towards democratisation during the past decade. It makes light of the evolution of Pakistani civil society: which is more powerful than anything existing in Ayub Khan's or Zia's time. And the analysis portrays misgovernance as a fundamental and necessary failure of democracy. Rather than deal with the specifics of the present crisis and its roots in leadership failure, it makes sweeping generalisations about the unviability of the Pakistani state itself. The coup was always waiting to happen!

THIS monocausal, conjuncture-non-specific, one-glove-fits-all hypothesis is methodologically wrong. It does not consider the dynamics of Pakistan's evolution half a century after its formation. It assumes that once a state is founded on religious identity, it is doomed to remain so forever. Historically, this is belied not just in "Christian" or "Buddhist" societies, which have evolved into broadly secular systems, but also in "Muslim" Iran, Iraq or Turkey. Iran is an excellent contemporary example. Twenty years after the Islamic Revolution, it is transiting towards some kind of pluralist, liberal democracy, with a greatly reduced weight for religion in politics.

The usual premise beneath Pakistan's "unviability" thesis is even worse: namely that Islam and democracy are mutually incompatible. This is communal nonsense. Secular democracy is not meant to reflect or capture a particular religion in politics. It is about basic separation between *all* religion and politics. If predominantly "Muslim" Turkey or Bangladesh can sustain modern democracy, so can Pakistan.

Pakistan's failures are explained by the crisis of its leadership under specific circumstances, not the fundamental conditions of its formation. The army did not intervene because Sharif was jeopardising the Two-Nation Theory. A different conflict was being played out. Sharif tampered with the military line of command, creating resentment. This surfaced during Kargil. His decision to withdraw the Mujahideen further sharpened tensions with Gen. Musharraf. His more recent meetings with some Corps Commanders precipitated the final act, leading to the mid-

air dismissal of Gen. Musharraf and attempt to prevent his aircraft from landing at Karachi. The coup came as a reaction.

THE context-setting backdrop to all this was Sharif's 21 month-long, feudal-style despotic rule which lost him all credibility despite a thumping parliamentary majority and a cooperative bureaucracy. Sharif could have put Pakistan on the road to progress and set exemplary standards of governance. Instead, he proceeded to corrupt, subvert and destroy all democratic institutions. His Cabinet did not meet formally even once during the past year. Decisions were taken by personal fiats and ordinances. The National Assembly has not passed a single piece of legislation since late 1997. In Sindh, the Assembly was prevented from conducting legislative business altogether. Corruption under the Sharif kleptocracy became monumental. Crony capitalism reached new heights as the economy went into a tailspin. The breakdown of public services was total. The army was drafted to collect electricity and water bills. Little wonder, then, that three-fourths of Pakistanis polled by Gallup shed no tears for Sharif, although three-fifths want civilian democracy.



B K. BANGASH/AP

Pakistani troops firing at Indian positions during the Kargil War. Kargil takes forward the nuclear Doomsday Clock for India and Pakistan.

It is not clear if and how Musharraf will put Pakistan back on the road to democratisation. The situation in Pakistan is fluid and there is some relief at Sharif's departure. But it is clear that Pakistan's 140 million people have lost democratic rights, the Constitution stands suspended, and the military is back overtly interfering in public life after 12 years. Pakistan seethes with problems: severe economic inequalities and low growth, intense regional-ethnic tensions, and rising fundamentalism. Both the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League stand discredited, having been tried twice, and found wanting. There is no obvious democratic alternative on the horizon. The events leading to the coup, and the coup itself, are a terrible setback for the Pakistani people. We must sympathise and solidarise with them.

THE Pakistan crisis comes in conjunction with two other developments: the swearing-in of a hardline right-wing government in India, and a global setback to nuclear disarmament. Whatever Vajpayee's protestations, he belongs to a political current, itself tied to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which believes in Akhand Bharat (annexation of Pakistan and Bangladesh) and is viscerally anti-Pakistan, indeed sees Pakistan as intrinsically inimical. Such currents in both India and Pakistan have fomented exclusivist nationalism, militarism and jingoism. These, in turn, promote mutual tension and hostility. This vicious cycle is part of what is the world's longest-lasting hot-cold war. It must be broken. The BJP-led government is least equipped – and least willing – to do so. At its core is a party dedicated to a Hindu Rashtra and anti-Islamic prejudice.

After the May 1998 nuclear watershed, India-Pakistan relations have decisively changed. Renewed tensions between them, within a few months of the Kargil war, could have profoundly negative consequences for their people. The coup and hardline responses to Pakistan from India are liable to strengthen hawkish sentiments and reliance on the armed forces in that country. Once "security" and "defence" are put at the top of the agenda, the military naturally gets the top priority: who else will defend the "nation"?

Two months ago, India ignited a new nuclear arms race by publishing a "draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine", which calls for a huge, open-ended arsenal with triadic (land, air- and sea) capabilities. Pakistan has said it has no choice but to match India. Even China is re-evaluating its nuclear posture. All this is likely to stoke militarism in the region further.

Global developments have been equally dismal, especially the U.S. Senate's rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The treaty cannot come into force for a couple of years. This takes the pressure off India and Pakistan to sign it. Although the CTBT does not prevent nuclear weapons manufacture, it will create conditions conducive to restraint. Absent restraint, India and Pakistan are likelier to persist with nuclear preparations. The CTBT failure signifies a larger setback. The Republican Right in the U.S. is now out to sabotage all arms control initiatives. The whole global agenda of nuclear arms restraint and reduction – including START-II ratification and progress on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) – is liable to suffer, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (which bans full-scale 'Star Wars') is likely to get jeopardised. This could lead to a collapse of the entire post-Cold War momentum in favour of nuclear abolition. This will strengthen hardline approaches everywhere, including in South Asia.

ALL this underscores the danger from India's myopic and mean-spirited response to the coup, in particular New Delhi's high-handed rejection of Musharraf's offer of unconditional dialogue and its spurning of the chance to effect mutual disengagement. Pakistan is bursting with tension. It is in India's own long-term interest that it does not disintegrate or collapse. Surely, we do not want a Nuclear Somalia at our doorstep. Making a dialogue conditional upon withdrawal of support to "cross-border terrorism" is a retreat from Lahore. Even after the Kargil conflict, India repeatedly said it remains committed to improving relations with Pakistan and resuming the dialogue begun at Lahore.

The coup does not alter the rationale of such a dialogue. Indeed, if Musharraf is followed by an elected leader, she or he will have an added incentive to do one better and take the process of conciliation even further. Musharraf's idea of talks on

a "package deal" including Kashmir, does not sound totally incompatible with India's own "composite dialogue" concept. Questioning Pakistan's intentions on this score leaves New Delhi vulnerable to the charge that its own intentions are not honourable. Did it not do "bus diplomacy" mainly to appear reasonable to the world after the nuclear tests?

To respond rationally, New Delhi must stop looking at Pakistan through the prism of Indo-U.S. relations, and give up its deplorable attempt to establish an exclusive strategic relationship with Washington. This agenda diverts attention from India's own priorities and problems, including strains on its democracy. Surely, given India's institutional erosion, corruption in public life, growing elitism in economy and society, and the subversion of so many norms of Cabinet functioning, this democracy too has become vulnerable. Its health, while far better than that of Pakistan's democracy, cannot be taken for granted. It has to be nurtured and guarded carefully. We should not be smug about it.

Nor should we ignore the peculiarity of the military-civilian relationship in India. The principal reason the Indian military has not got overtly politicised, and not meddled with or defied civilian authority, is not that this society is inherently resistant to militarism, or that its army comes from a different tradition than Pakistan's. The reason is that the military understood a long ago – as did the rest of our Establishment – that in a plural, diverse society, you cannot build, work or sustain any institution unless you act consensually and take the bulk of society with you without relying primarily on coercion. Insofar as the political leadership performs well, it can do this reasonably. Its increasing failure to deliver should worry us. Indeed, the Sangh Parivar's recent efforts to communalise the military should alarm us.

We must remember – and Pakistan is an extreme-case reminder – that democracy is not about elections and majority rule alone. It also involves fundamental liberties and freedoms, and the rule of law and legal entitlements. It has to be inclusive. It must be based on robust representative institutions, and on separation of powers among them. Free debate and an unshackled media are indispensable to it. And it cannot do without institutionalised mechanisms to promote accountability. When these are weakened, democracy can erode, even collapse. ■

■ COLUMN

'Big Tickets' for Big Business

Why privatisation may be hardly the solution to India's fiscal problems.

C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

IT cannot be dismissed as pure coincidence. Immediately after resuming his post as Finance Minister in the new Cabinet of the National Democratic Alliance, Yashwant Sinha announced that crossing his own target of mobilising Rs. 10,000 crores through public sector disinivestment was crucial to his game plan of capping the fiscal deficit. Promising to use "unconventional and innovative approaches" to cross that target, he declared that he was looking at "a couple of big ticket items" to achieve his goal. The Finance Minister's need for a strategic disinvestment drive of this kind is obvious. It exploits size and the promise of handing over control to the acquirer to meet the disinvestment target within the end-March, fiscal year deadline in order to dress up the size of the fiscal deficit. And it could achieve this goal even if international institutional investors temporarily withdraw from the markets in response to the Y2K threat.

Barely days after Yashwant Sinha's statements, Anil Ambani, managing director of Reliance Industries Limited, announced that the RIL subsidiary, Reliance Petroleum Limited, was keen to acquire public sector oil refining and marketing companies such as Bharat Petroleum, Hindustan Petroleum and IBP, so long as the government was willing to hand over the management control of these companies to the private sector. Ambani's message was that if the government was willing to retract from its strategy of mobilising resources by promoting cross-holding of equity among oil companies, which keeps both equity and management within the public sector, he had the cash-flows needed to fund these acquisitions

The keenness the government displays in making strategic sales of "big ticket" PSUs can give rise to speculation that the intent is to dispose of public assets, even if it involves prices that imply significant public losses.

Ambani's interest in acquiring these companies is understandable. They would be in keeping with the company's original strategy of integrating vertically down the production chain from synthetics through intermediate hydrocarbons to refining and oil production. Moreover, these are companies which, despite being hamstrung by price control and lack of administrative autonomy, have been performing extremely well. According to the Bureau of Public Enterprises, the three-year average rate of return during 1994-95 to 1996-97 as measured by the ratio of gross profit to total capital employed stood at an attractive 35.13 per cent in the case of Bharat Petroleum, 31.24 per cent in the case of Hindustan Petroleum, and a modest but comfortable 18.71 per cent in the case of IBP. Thus, based on both short-run, profit-maximising considerations and a strategic point of view, these acquisitions by RPL would amount to buying a gold mine when gold prices are set to rise.

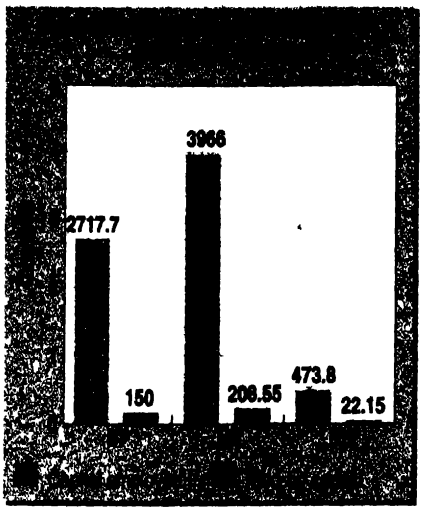
WHAT about the government's point of view? At the end of 1996-97, the government's shareholding in these three corporations amounted to 66.2, 55.4 and 59.6 per cent respectively. At par, that holding was valued at Rs.228 crores. The current market value would be many multiples of that amount, making the shareholding in these corporations alone more than adequate to fund the government's resource-mobilisation-through-privatisation target of Rs.10,000

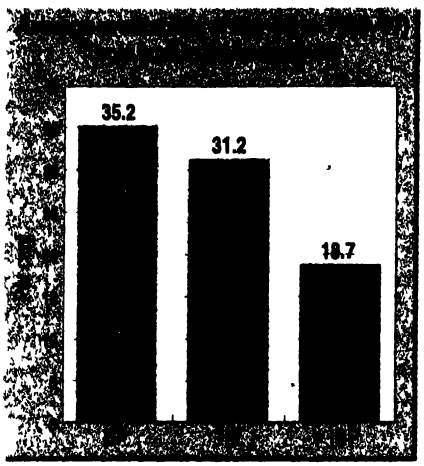
crores. This "matching of interests" of the government and one of India's leading private sector groups seems to make the case for privatising these corporations self-evident.

The difficulty with this argument is that while it does evaluate RIL's interests appropriately, it fails to assess correctly what is good for the government. Consider, for example, the current obsession with the fiscal deficit. Even if that version of the budgetary deficit crosses 6 per cent this financial year, it does not appear to pose any major inflationary threat. With food stocks and foreign exchange reserves being comfortable, the government has the wherewithal to manage the supply situation. It can, through the release of those stocks or by resorting to imports of essentials, meet any unexpected surge in prices.

However, it is argued, the deficit is still a matter of concern, since it could contribute to a rise in interest rates by increasing the government's borrowing from the open market. That is, the cause for concern is not the possible erosion of real incomes of the ordinary citizen, but the likely adverse impact of a possible increase in interest rates on private sector growth and profitability. Even if such concern is warranted, the actual source of the problem remains unidentified in the logic leading up to the privatisation solution. The deficit on the central government's budget remains high because of the erosion of the government's tax base in the wake of the customs duty reductions and the excise and direct tax concessions that have accompanied liberalisation. According to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) estimates, the ratio of the Centre's gross tax revenue to gross domestic product fell from 10 per cent in 1991-92 to 8.5 per cent in 1996-97. This has meant that even when capital and social sector expenditures have been curtailed, the fiscal deficit has remained high. Dealing with the fiscal deficit, therefore, requires efforts aimed at reversing the erosion of the tax base.

BUT, setting that aside for the moment, even the current deficit need not have affected interest rates if the government had not chosen to do away with the practice of borrowing from the RBI at relatively low rates of interest, or "monetising" a significant part of this deficit. However, as part of the International Monetary Fund-influenced drive to give the central bank greater freedom, its autonomy is not merely being





institutionalised, but ensured through attempts to pre-empt any adverse impact of the government's borrowing arrangements on the RBI's independence. With tax revenues under squeeze and borrowing from the central bank against ad-hoc Treasury Bills foreclosed, the government has virtually tied its hands. It cannot but run up a large fiscal deficit and resort to large-scale borrowing, unless it curtails spending massively and slows growth or it garners funds through privatisation, which has been rendered the only other source of finance. Since in the view of both business and government it is the role of the latter to revive growth, spending cuts are now not on the agenda. Nor are efforts to increase taxes and widen the tax base. That leaves only privatisation as an option. It is this view that Yashwant Sinha espouses when he argues that, in order to avoid an internal debt trap, the government must push ahead with privatisation.

Unfortunately even this limited perspective is valid only in the short run. By selling off some of its best assets to reduce the fiscal deficit in any particular year, all that the government is doing is reducing the extent of its additional borrowing; it does not wipe out any of its already accumulated debt. Adopting the privatisation solution to the fiscal problem means that while the burden of past borrowing in the form of interest and amortisation commitments has to be borne, significant, non-tax sources of continuous income generation are being whittled away. As reported earlier, the returns on capital employed earned by some of corporations targeted for privatisation are remarkably high. And the value of capital employed in the cases being discussed stands at between 18 and 21 times the par value of their paid-up capital. The return on paid-up capital would therefore be much higher than on capital employed. Hence, unless the shares of these companies are sold at a huge premium, the interest payments saved by using the revenue from that sale to reduce debt would be lower than the return forgone through privatisation.

Past experience suggests that the government is not always a maximiser when selling off assets. Controversies over the price at which oil blocks explored and discovered by the public sector were handed over to the private sector (including Reliance) to exploit, still persist. And, quite recently the government sold a part of its holdings in Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) at a discounted price of Rs.750 a share, when the prevailing market price was around Rs.1,100 a share.

Given this experience, the manner in which the government has tied itself down to the privatisation option and the keenness it displays in making strategic sales of "big ticket" public sector undertakings (PSUs), can give rise to speculation that the intent is to dispose of public assets, even if it involves prices that imply significant public losses. Clearly, the Reliance management has sensed such a prospect. Not surprisingly, it has zeroed in on a tendency in government which many have been critical of – that of forcing public sector corporations to use their surplus funds to buy into the government's shareholding in other PSUs, rather than invest in modernisation and expansion, so as to ease the fiscal problem facing the administration. What RIL wants instead is a near-outright sale to the private sector.

That, however, appears to be the worse of the two options. It merely provides the "big ticket" option to big business, without touching the structural problems afflicting the government's finances. ■

The path to privatisation

The M.S. Verma Committee's report, apart from recommending the restructuring of three major banks, lays the basis for the eventual privatisation of India's banking industry, which is now dominated by the public sector.

V. SRIDHAR

THE report of the Working Group on restructuring weak public sector banks, headed by M.S. Verma, former Chairman of the State Bank of India (SBI) and honorary adviser to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has sent shock waves through the banking industry. More than 20,000 employees from the three banks identified for restructuring – Indian Bank, United Commercial Bank (UCO Bank) and United Bank of India (UBI) – are in danger of losing their jobs if the panel's recommendations, submitted to the RBI on October 4, 1999, are acted upon. Moreover, the wages of other employees of these banks would remain frozen for three years.

Although the report has basically outlined a restructuring strategy for the three "weak" banks, there are fears among the 13 lakh bank employees in the country that such harsh measures will soon be extended to other public sector banks. The basis for the fear is the panel's identification of six other banks – Allahabad Bank, the Central Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank, Punjab and Sind Bank, Union Bank of India and Vijaya Bank – as being in the "distress zone". Bank employees feel that aggressive downsizing of the public sector presence in banking is just round the corner.

Bank employees, represented by their unions, are outraged that they are being asked to pay with their jobs for the ills of the banking system. They allege that the Verma panel has failed to address the basic causes for sickness in the industry. For instance, massive irregularities have directly contributed to the present plight of Indian Bank *(Frontline,* July 30, 1999). Bank employees allege that the institutions have suffered either because of *mala fide* actions of persons occupying senior positions in the banks or the because of banks' inability to recover huge amounts outstanding from big industrial and corporate borrowers. The problem of making provisions for non-performing assets (NPAs) in the bank's balance sheet has thus been a major drain on the bank in the last several years.

The panel has estimated that the restructuring package for the three banks is likely to cost about Rs.5,500 crores. This includes Rs.300-400 crores for technology upgradation and Rs.1,100-1,200 crores for the 25 per cent reduction of the workforce through Voluntary Retirement Schemes (VRS). The panel has warned that if the VRS is not accepted by enough employees, they will have to face the prospect of an across-the-board wage cut. The panel has suggested provision of Rs.1,000 crores for the buyout of NPAs from the three banks. This is to be done from an asset reconstruction fund (ARF) that would be run by a privately managed asset management company (AMC). The panel has also recommended the recapitalisation of Rs.3,000 crores by the government in the three banks so that they fulfil the capital adequacy norms. However, the panel has suggested that recapitalisation be accompanied by stiff conditions imposed on the managements and unions of the three banks.

Although Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has welcomed the recommendations, he has refused to provide recapitalisation to the three banks, a key aspect of the report. The Finance Ministry believes that providing budgetary allocations to banks, whether weak or strong, will amount to a deviation from its policy of letting banks raise capital from the market rather than from the government. The unions believe that this posturing by the Finance Minister is aimed at arm-twisting the employees into accepting the harsh measures.

THE Verma panel's report is the third in a series that has charted financial sector reforms in India since 1992. The first report, of the Committee on the Financial System (CFS), headed by M. Narasimham, was released in 1992. It advocated reforms that would align the Indian banking sector with the global financial markets. It recommended the introduction of capital adequacy norms and norms that would result in a transparent reflection of NPAs in the balance sheets of banks. In bankers' parlance, advances to borrowers are classified as assets. When these assets fail to generate returns because of the borrowers' inability to repay their loans, they are termed as NPAs. The total value of such assets in the books of public sector banks in India is about Rs.50,000 crores. This figure is only for the principal amount; including the interest payable, the total would exceed Rs.100,000 crores.

In 1998, the Committee on Banking Sector Reforms, again headed by M. Narasimham, published its report, which advocated changes in the organisational structure of the banking business. Among its crucial recommendations were those relating to the dilution of government stake in banks.

The thrust of the recommendations of the two Narasimham-led panels was that banking operations should be governed predominantly by profit considerations and that banks, in order to be linked to the global economy, should adopt international prudential norms. Norms relating to capital adequacy and NPA provisioning thus acquired overarching importance in the context of financial sector reforms. The Verma panel's report is remarkable for its continuity with the Narasimham Committee's reports.

It was on the basis of a set of seven criteria that panel identified Indian Bank, UCO Bank and UBI for restructuring. A crucial element in the exercise of determining weakness was the NPA levels. At the end of the last financial year (1998-99), gross NPAs in the case of the three banks amounted to Rs.6,974 crores – Rs. 3,709 crores for Indian Bank, Rs.1,716 crores for UCO Bank and Rs.1,549 crores



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Employees of Indian Bank demonstrate in front of the bank's central office in Chennai on October 11 in protest against the M.S. Verma Committee report.

for UBI. Significantly, the panel did not attempt to find why their NPA levels have been high.

In the case of Indian Bank, the high level of NPAs was caused by reckless lending to various business groups. Several accounts with the bank are under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Almost one-third of the total NPAs is accounted for by the top 15 borrowers. In the case of UBI too, a significant level of NPAs are from industrial and business houses. A sub-group constituted by the Verma panel, whose report is annexed to the main report, observes that about 21 per cent of the advances to industry are non-performing and that another 24 per cent "appear vulnerable". The bank's operations have also been hit by the prolonged recession that has swept the ferrous and non-ferrous metal industries in the eastern region where it has a major exposure.

Just before the Verma panel submitted its report, Indian Bank constituted a four-member committee headed by the Chairman of Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd., Deepak Parekh, to recommend a restructuring strategy. This committee is expected to "prioritise" the various restructuring options. The Chairman and top officials of Indian Bank have avoided the media since the Verma panel's report was released on October 4.

About 43 per cent of the branch network of UCO Bank and 87 per cent of that of UBI are in the eastern and north-eastern regions. They have borne the burden of the development objectives that were part of the agenda for banks after nationalisation. The panel observes that the presence of the banks in these regions has been "disadvantageous to them". How the market mechanism will ensure access to banking facilities for people in these regions is obviously outside the narrow framework that the panel has chosen to adopt for restructuring.

Two aspects of the Verma panel's report on NPAs stand out. First, the committee does not appear to be interested in making a fine distinction about NPAs in banks, particularly about how they have accumulated over a period of time. For instance, the NPA-related problems in Indian Bank are vastly different from those faced by UBI or other banks whose credit portfolios have suffered as a result of the prolonged industrial recession. Referring to the report, the Chairman and Managing Director of UBI, Biswajit Chaudhuri, remarked that "any straitjacket type of approach is bound to be counter-productive." Regarding the recommendation that the bank close its overseas operations, he asked why the bank should shut down a profitable operation.

The second aspect relates to problems that impair banks' ability to recover loans. For instance, NPAs amounting to more than Rs.900 crores in the three banks are accounted for by industrial units that have been referred to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR). In addition, the three banks have launched recovery proceedings before Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRT); suits in these cases involve more than Rs.3,600 crores. Besides, cases involving more than Rs.600 crores are pending in other courts. Although the panel observes that the DRTs "are not helping recoveries of bank dues", it has not seen it fit to address this issue before recommending full-fledged restructuring for the banks.

K. Krishnan, general secretary of the Indian Bank Employees Federation, affiliated to the Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI), alleges that while the reforms in the sector have concentrated on making banks comply with the NPA provisioning norms, their ability to make recoveries from defaulting clients have been severely restricted. He says that the reforms in general, and the Verma panel's work in particular, have failed to bring to book corporate and business interests that have borrowed heavily from the banks. Indian Bank has already put in operation a "compromise proposal" which emphasises lenience with defaulters so that the bank can recover whatever it can. Krishnan asks: "Why the RBI is not allowing the bank to display the list of defaulters." He says that this will put social pressure on the defaulters. Among the top defaulters in the case of Indian Bank is a company believed to be promoted by a Union Minister from Tamil Nadu. Interestingly, while the Verma panel has said that there are "moral hazards" in government funding the bailout of banks, it is silent on the greater moral hazards of allowing defaulters – primarily corporate and business interests – a free ride at the expense of public sector banks.

The panel's recommendation on the formation of the ARF has also come in for criticism. It has suggested a two-tier structure to manage the ARF: while the ownership of assets would vest with the government – to prevent legal challenges from borrowers or anyone else – the ARF will be managed by the AMC. The panel says that this is necessary because the "government body owning the asset may not possess the necessary skills and attitude to ensure (their) recovery." The panel has skilfully skirted the question of how the conflict of interest between government ownership and private management will be managed.

The plan as envisaged by the panel is as follows. The AMC, managed by a private company and with funds of Rs.1,000 crores, is to purchase all NPAs that amount to more than Rs. 50 lakhs, adding up to Rs. 3,000 crores. This implies a dis-



count rate of almost one-third The AMC is to issue interest bearing bonds to the banks after the transfer of the NPAs The three banks, already desperate to make whatever recoveries they can, will thus be able to remove NPAs of about Rs 1,000 crores from their balance sheets

The All India Bank Officers Confederation (AIBOC) has alleged that the affluent and wilful defaulters would thus be able to go scot-free Significantly, industry organisations, ranging from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) have welcomed the Verma Committee report but have skirted the question of large-scale defaults by business and corporate interests While the CII has expressed scepticism over the manner in which the assets may be valued, Krishnan told *Frontline* that the valuation of the assets implies a "scandal in the making" The unions fear that the shedding of NPA assets at a 'throw-away price', coupled with the massive VRS is meant to make these banks attractive for eventual takeover by private interests The panel, drawing on the "international experience", observed that "transfer of ownership to reputed corporate groups or to foreign banks' was a possible path of restructuring the three banks However, it said that the "prohibitive cost" of restructuring was a disincentive to private entities that may want to take over the banks It also noted that the 'present staffing pattern" in the banks is one of the 'deterrents'

Krishnan said that the banks needed strong legislative protection, the lack of which had led to their present plight According to him, strong action should be taken against persons responsible for the present situation He wanted action to be taken against the RBI and government nominees on the boards of the weak banks for having failed to protect the interests of the banks"

Sharda Singh, Chairman and Managing Director of UCO Bank, has demanded that reforms in the banking sector be supported by legal reforms to enable banks to recover dues from defaulters Sharda Singh, who was recently in Chennai to address a conference of UCO Bank employees, observed that "even the AMC suggested by the Verma Committee cannot do any better" in the absence of legal reforms to protect public sector banks

Krishnan is also critical of the Verma panel's observation that banks cannot lay any special claims to the large volume of funds in government and public sector company accounts The panel has observed that banks' accessibility to accounts should be determined by market forces Krishnan says that the SBI, which enjoys monopoly access to cheap funds in many of these accounts, is able to enjoy better interest spreads in its banking operations "The panel," says Krishnan "has evaded the question of the SBI's monopoly on these accounts "

The adverse impact on workers through job losses and frozen wage levels is only one facet of the panel's report More important, the panel has laid the basis for the eventual privatisation of the banking industry in India, which is predominantly publicly owned It has thus provided the new government with the ammunition it needs for accelerating the pace of reforms in the financial sector

The Verma panel's report has laid the ground for the first major confrontation between the new government and the unions. The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) organised rallies in front of RBI offices The UFBU has planned demonstrations at the head offices and branches of various public sector banks. It is also sending delegations to central trade unions and members of Parliament, seeking their support. ■

Verdict '99

"Managing to lose" (November 5) analyses the reasons for the worst ever performance of the Congress(I) in Lok Sabha elections. Blaming it on Sonia Gandhi, the party's star campaigner, is too simplistic. A combination of factors put paid to the party's dream of returning to power. Organisational weakness still plagues the party. Although large crowds attended the election meetings addressed by Sonia Gandhi, the lack of follow-up action resulted in the party winning fewer seats than last time. Three Chief Ministers campaigned for the party in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh but the majority of people in these States voted for the BJP. The Kargil factor and Sonia's inexperience in politics may have weighed with the voters, who chose to play it safe by preferring an experienced leader like Vajpayee.

D.B.N. Murthy

Bangalore

★ ★ ★

The results are seen as a major setback for the Congress(I), and Sonia Gandhi's "immature leadership" is blamed for it. The ground reality is totally different. The Congress(I) has come back to power in Karnataka and Maharashtra. Earlier, under Sonia's leadership, it wrested Rajasthan and Delhi from the BJP. The best course for the Congress(I) now is to work as a responsible Opposition in Parliament, reposing faith in Sonia.

Pawan Malhotra

Jammu

Reservations

This has reference to the article, "Standing up for a right" (November 5).

It is undeniable that the Supreme Court rulings (August and September 1999) and the office memorandums of the Department of Personnel and Training amount to social discrimination in a refined form to deprive the Scheduled Castes and Tribes of their constitutional right to reservation in educational institutions and government jobs. In the long term, such actions will perpetuate and reinforce social inequality which is at the root of political, economic and other inequities.

The higher judiciary and administration are manned by people from privileged castes and classes. These sections have always felt that it was because of reservations that their youth do not get jobs. They also feel that their hold over the higher echelons of the power structure is under threat. Hence the attempt to dilute the benefits of reservation and block the rise of the S.C.s and S.T.s in institutions of science, technology and medicine.

Over the years the entire issue of reservations has been raised and debated in public and in courts. It has been recognised that social groups that have suffered atrocities, indignities, injustices and exploitation over the centuries need the support of the government and society as a whole. Even today the problems of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are widespread among S.C.s and S.T.s. They continue to be exploited and discriminated against and deprived of even their political right to vote ("Targeting Dalit voters", October 8).

In this situation it is necessary for the S.C.s and S.T.s, as also non-governmental organisations, to come together and launch a campaign to protect the right to reservation.

It is the duty of the Ministry of Law and Justice to ensure that this constitutional right is not hijacked. The media should also highlight these problems.

Sanjai Kumar

Hazaribagh, Bihar

China

It is appropriate that *Frontline* covered the 50th anniversary of the formation of the People's Republic of China as a Cover Story ("People's China at 50," October 22).

The world is keenly watching the experiment conducted by Chinese society in its march towards egalitarianism. Some people say that the reforms undertaken by the country mark a clear break from its traditional path of socialism. But, as Prabhat Patnaik argues, the economic development that has taken place in China in the past 20 years has its foundation in the policies pursued prior to the reform period. I also share the opinion of Utsa Patnaik that during the transition to market socialism China has lost some of the gains it made in the first three decades after the Revolution. It is to be hoped that the Chinese leaders will take steps to counter this trend.

S. Vijayan

Baroda

★ ★ ★

In the past, China has struggled a lot but today it is emerging as the only power that is capable of challenging U.S. hegemony. China has realised that a strong economy is the foundation of a powerful nation.

India has two lessons to learn from China. First, China employs market economy but it is not controlled by the market. Secondly, it has adopted a prudent economic policy with regard to foreign investments and government expenditure.

For decades India has adopted a negative attitude towards China. It should take a pragmatic approach. China is not an expansionist dragon but a loving and friendly one. Thanks to some of the pronouncements of the Vajpayee government, the relations between India and China are at a new low. While hostilities and a proxy war continue on the western border of India, there is peace and tranquillity on the eastern side. If only Vajpayee had directed his bus towards Beijing instead of Lahore, India would have benefited a lot.

Pravin Chaubey

Raipur

Opinion polls

In 1995, it was Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan. In 1999, it is the Election Commission itself.

The judgment of the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court upholding publication/telecast of opinion and exit poll results during the election process has dealt a major blow to the Election Commission, which has been working tirelessly to provide a 'level playing field' to political parties and thus achieve the goal of free and fair elections ("Polls and opinions," October 8). The Election Commission has rightly observed that the Indian electorate, being largely poor and uneducated, is likely to be influenced by these surveys. They also provide an opportunity to political parties to influence media organisations and have survey results that are in their favour published. The spirit behind the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression should not be misused.

The Election Commission does not have the power to enact laws, but as a watchdog it surely can exercise the option to bark if not bite. As suggested by the Chief Election Commissioner, such sensitive issues should be debated at the national level before they are legislated upon.

S. Balakrishnan

Jamshedpur

The nuclear question

The Indian voter, who would vote out

a government when the price of onions rises and then vote against the newly elected government if he finds his water tap dry, cares little for the danger posed by nuclear weapons. He worries little about the prospect of his children and grandchildren being turned into ashes instantaneously or left alive with radiation-induced cancer.

Now that the Vajpayee Government is relatively stable, it can afford to unwind itself of its aggressively populist posture on the nuclear issue. The first step is to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). India's decision on signing the treaty should be linked only with that of Pakistan, for which that country is agreeable. It will be unwise to think that all nuclear weapon powers are our potential enemies and that we should have arms to deter all of them. No one can dispute that our technical capability is above that of Pakistan and by stopping tests at this stage we shall be able to maintain our superiority. Pakistan may be more backward than India, but if India begins testing for the purpose of achieving weapons sophistication, Pakistan will do the same. This will result in a disastrous nuclear arms race in the subcontinent.

N. Kunju

Delhi

Minorities and the BJP

The students of Vidyajyoti Jesuit College of Theology, New Delhi, have written that the killing of Fr. Arul Doss and Sheikh Rehman took place in Orissa "on the eve of the general elections" ("Letters," October 22). I am not a supporter of the BJP, nor do I sympathise with fundamentalists, whether they are Hindus, Muslims or Christians. But is it not ironical that a party branded as the Saffron Brigade and a Hindu party would mastermind such a heinous crime on the eve of the elections? While all political parties try to improve their image prior to elections, how could a national party like the BJP have committed such a mistake?

If at all there is any political support given to the killers of Fr. Arul Doss and Sheikh Rehman, it is by the so- called secular forces. This is done with the intention of arousing the religious sentiments of people, for obvious reasons.

Mukesh Mohan Sinha

Patna

Water policy

It is a great misfortune of our country that when one part of it is submerged in floods another is in the grip of drought ("The Kosi untamed", September 25).

In a country where 75 per cent of the

RESPONSE

Of development and deprivation

The emotional outburst of H.M. Desarda in the debate "Of Development and deprivation" (*Frontline*, October 8) makes interesting reading. One can hardly disagree with him when he says that the dominant ideology of the past 50 years has been: "growth, unlimited". He specifically points out to the pursuit of growth in terms of mega irrigation and power projects and perhaps industries. Unfortunately, what he has forgotten to point is that we have also vigorously pursued growth in another field: India's population has increased from 350 million at the time of Independence to a billion now. It is strange that those who crusade against the so-called unsustainable development of natural resources have nothing to say about the unsustainable growth of population, which has proved to be the biggest cause of pollution and over-exploitation of scarce resources. All the problems these well-meaning activists have been highlighting and also anticipating stem from the population explosion and the resultant additional demand for basic necessities.

If it is "erroneous to equate waters and energy with mega-projects", it is equally erroneous to equate them with "age-old" and "time-tested sources of energy and methods of tapping them". The age-old practices – the burning of fuel-wood, agricultural refuse and cow-dung cakes, and the use of biogas, wind mills and so on – were evolved by the rural people for their local needs. With the increase in the population and the division of families, local sources were no longer adequate to meet their needs. The result was migration and concentration of population in urban centres, requiring concentration of water and energy needs. One fails to understand how these "age-old" practices would be able to run trains, buses or planes, operate tractors, produce fertilizers or supply pure tap water. Perhaps we must revert to the age-old practices of travelling in bullock-carts, using animal-driven ploughs, vegetable-oil lamps, cow-dung manures and manually drawn well water. It would be interesting to know how Desarda hopes to meet the present-day energy and water needs of both rural and urban population through age-old methods. Large-scale urbanisation has become a reality which one cannot wish away.

Statements such as "Plans and projects involving thousands of millions of rupees have not helped the toiling millions. On the contrary, the so-called development projects have affected them adversely and accentuated their daily suffering" are too sweeping to be believed. The fact is that through planned effort the country increased foodgrain production from 50 million tonnes in 1950-51 to 203 million tonnes in 1998-99. Otherwise millions would have starved, as was the case at the time of Independence when sustenance was provided by imported wheat.

Figures relating to the displacement of people by large dams are also blown out of proportion. It has now been proved by Surjit Bhalla and many others that the total number of people displaced by large dams in India could be only 5 to 8 million and not 40 million as estimated by Arundhati Roy. It is nobody's case that these 5 to 8 million people should not be given the best rehabilitation package and should not be placed in conditions much better than those in which they lived earlier. But to say that there should be no displacement at all is to deny survival to some potential beneficiaries of the project, who live in conditions much worse than those of people facing displacement.

Even China, opposed to the western model of development, has 21,600 of the world's 40,000 large dams. It is at present building one of the world's largest dam projects, the Three Gorges Dam, to produce 18,200 MW of power (India's total existing hydroelectric capacity does not add up to this), which involves the displacement of some two million people.

It is surprising that such a hue and cry is being raised about mega-hydropower projects as if hydropower is India's main energy source. In fact, even 20 per cent of the country's total hydropower potential of 85,000 MW has not been tapped because of resistance to submergence caused by reservoirs. The opponents of large dams prefer the use of coal (one has only to see the plight of coal miners, who live in worse conditions than

population depends on agriculture for livelihood, provision of water should get priority. Owing to the absence of a proper water policy, we are not able to take advantage of the 4,000 trillion litres of rain water the country is estimated to get every year. Priority should be give to the transfer of water from water-surplus areas to other parts of the country.

Alok Sharma

Gwalior

An appeal

For nearly 50 years, I have shed tears for the young, bright persons who became vegetables after suffering brain injury in accidents involving two-wheelers. Young widows with children evoke our sympathy, but it is more distressful to see young women struggling to support brain-damaged husbands and young children. Similar is the plight of elderly parents who are left with a son or a daughter who has suffered brain injury in a two-wheeler accident.

I invite the members of the public to visit with me the hospital wards in Tamil Nadu to see parents and young wives weeping for their sons and husbands. This will convince them not to worry about minor inconveniences caused by the wearing of helmets. People avoid wearing helmets on the ground that their hair style would be disturbed. But only if there is a head can there be hair or a hair-style. If hair really falls off owing to the use of helmets, most of the bike-riders in the West, Japan and South-East Asia and even New Delhi would be bald by now.

Some people say that it is difficult to wear helmets in hot weather. This is true but people in Delhi, West Asia and many places in South-East Asia, which are hotter than Chennai, for instance, wear helmets for safety. The headache that a helmet causes is temporary and certainly less intense than the pain resulting from fractures of the skull or brain injury.

Nobody denies that carrying a helmet and keeping it safe are inconveniences. But if you had shed one thousandth of the tears I have shed for my patients and their wives and parents, you will immediately demand that wearing crash helmets be made compulsory for two-wheeler riders.

Dr. B. Ramamurthi
Neurosurgeon

Chennai

Correction: In the Maharashtra Assembly elections, the BJP won 56 seats and the Shiv Sena 69 seats. The seats position with regard to these two parties got interchanged erroneously in the table accompanying "Fractured mandate in Maharashtra" (November 5).

dam-affected people) and also imported oil which involves the spending of thousands of crores of rupees in foreign exchange. The fact that hydropower is renewable, clean, cheap and eminently suitable for peaking does not appear to appeal to them.

Desarda makes yet another sweeping statement when he says that Indian as well as global experiences amply proves that mega-projects for irrigation and power generation are antithetical to the interests of the common people. He, however, does not cite examples. Dams such as Bhakra, Nagarjunasagar, Hirakud, Hoover, Tennessee Valley, Aswan, Itapu, Ataturk and hundreds of others prove this wrong. These dams have boosted the economy of the countries in which they are situated.

After visiting the High Aswan Dam (HAD) in 1990, J. Cotillon, the then Secretary-General of the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD), said: "My first surprise was to learn that HAD had saved Egypt from famine in 1972-73 and between 1979 and 1987, when there were nine consecutive years of drought, and that the main objective of the dam was fulfilled in the early years of service..."

In the concluding part of his report, Cotillon says: "Back in Paris, I met a journalist writing an article on the misdeeds of the world's large dams. I mentioned the famine averted by Aswan, Nothing more. She was so amazed that she changed the title of her article to "Large Dams: A necessary evil:They feed the Third World and give it electricity"."

The main objection to Sardar Sarovar is that it affects some 40,000 families in the reservoir area. The exact number of people who will be affected is 1,27,446 of whom only 63,223 are tribal people. In 82 of the 193 villages that will be affected in Madhya Pradesh, less than 10 per cent of their land will be submerged.

In another 32 villages, only 11 to 25 per cent of the land will be submerged. In 21 villages, only the dwellings will be affected, and that too only temporarily, owing to the reservoir backwater effect during floods. In another nine villages, only government wasteland will get submerged. Only in 18 villages will more than 5 per cent of the land get submerged. In the three States, only 11,279 hectares of cultivable land will go under the reservoir. The area of forest land (which is degraded land) that will be submerged is only about 13,385 ha.

All the affected families (even an adult son is considered as constituting a separate family) need not necessarily be displaced. In fact, of the 33,014 affected families in Madhya Pradesh, 18,890 have opted to stay on as they will only be temporarily affected by flood backwaters. They only need to shift to nearby higher ground temporarily when such floods occur. Thus the displacement issue is blown out of portion by critics. They, like Desarda, make a vague claim that a vast number of villages will be submerged if the height of the dam is raised even by 5 metres. The Grievance Redressal Committee headed by a former Chief Justice of a high court has already certified that those who run the risk of being affected if the dam height is raised by 5 m have been shifted. Many people fail to appreciate the fact that during high floods, many overbank areas get inundated even if there is no dam. Was the city of Bharuch flooded this September by the backwaters of a dam? Any flooding on the Narmada's banks should not be attributed to the Sardar Sarovar project. When the critics cannot find fault with the Sardar Sarovar project, they conveniently use the phrase "Narmada Valley" and assemble people affected by other dams.

The State has tried to provide amenities to the displaced people to an extent that is not available to the majority of its rural population. Gujarat has enough land to rehabilitate all the affected people who want to settle in the State.

The author is welcome to ensure that these people get the most reasonable treatment in Gujarat so that they can forget their miserable past. But I request him not obstruct the Sardar Sarovar Project, because if it is stalled some 20 million people of Gujarat's semi-arid and desert areas will be doomed, without water.

M.U. Purohit
Consulting Engineer
Sardar Sarovar Project

Sanctions: an uncertain status

Have the nuclear-related sanctions imposed by the United States against India and Pakistan got kicked in again or not? No one seems to know.

R. RAMACHANDRAN
in New Delhi

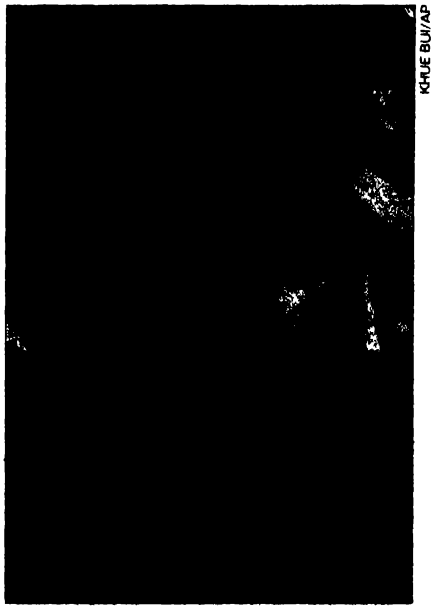
THE imposition of sanctions against India and Pakistan by the United States as a consequence of the nuclear tests conducted in May 1998, or their waiver, would seem to be stuck in a legislative conundrum in the administrative machinery in the U.S. as a fallout of the standoff between the Republicans and the Clinton administration. The sanctions, pursuant to Section 102(b) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), also known as the Glenn Amendment, were imposed soon after the tests and were partially lifted through waiver provisions of the Agriculture Export Relief Act (AERA) 1998 and the India Pakistan Relief Act (IPRA) 1998.

But these expired on October 21, 1999. Legislative action or a presidential executive order that would dictate the course of action by the U.S. administration in this regard is not in place. Though a bill that would grant authority to the President to waive the sanctions beyond October 21 was sent to him by the Senate on October 14, he had not signed it into law because of disagreements over other provisions of the bill. So, at the beginning of the last week of October, the fate of the sanctions remained unclear.

The issue would appear to have got caught in the politico-legal mess which seems to have been created over the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the Senate. Early in October, the Senate deliberated on the Treaty after a delay of over two years and rejected it (article on page 55). In what would appear to be Clinton's way of getting back at the Republicans, he has not signed into laws many pending appropriation bills for financial year 2000. In fact, he exercised his veto on the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and ...ed Programmes Appropriations Bill ...aining the provision for sanctions in ...ent of a coup that would be applied on Pakistan) on October 18 and returned it to the Senate alleging that the Republicans were shortchanging expenditure on key foreign policy affairs.

The provision for the waiver of sanctions against India and Pakistan is contained in the House Joint Resolution 2561 which has been tagged on to the Defence Department Appropriation Bill (DDAB) for financial year 2000 and sent to the President for assent. The President had not signed it on the ground that it went beyond what had been sought and that it budgeted for things which the Pentagon had not asked for.

The administration is apparently making a last-ditch effort to sort out the issue with Congress and find politically feasible measures to address the expiry of the sanctions waiver, pending the enactment of a new presidential waiver authority. Given that such an authority has been passed by Congress in the DDAB, the attempt apparently is to see whether this can be interpreted to imply a continuation of the waiver until a new piece of legislation takes effect. This they think is possible because of the Continuing Resolution H.J. Res 71 which was signed into a public law as of October 21. If this is (legally and politically) feasible, the imbroglio with regard to the sanctions may be viewed as a merely technical one, and business as usual (with the limited waivers on the sanctions as they were in place till October 21) could go on. In any case, though the waiver has expired, a renewal of AECA sanctions in full will take effect only if the President decrees a fresh imposition. In legal terms, therefore, it all appeared very confusing, and everything may be put on hold till things get sorted out.



KHUE BUI/AP

President Bill Clinton.

TO trace the course of sanctions so far, after Clinton announced in May 1998 the sanctions, which flow from Section 102(b) of the AECA, the administration announced the details on June 18. These included: (a) the termination of the assistance under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, except for humanitarian assistance and food or agricultural commodities – which includes U.S. developmental assistance and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme funding; (b) the termination of the sale of defence articles, defence services or design or construction services under the AECA, and the termination of licences for the export of any item under the United States Munitions List; (c) the termination of all foreign military financing under the AECA; (d) the denial of any credit, credit guarantees, or other financial assistance by any department or agency of the U.S. government – such as the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Exim Bank, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Trade Development Agency (TDA); (e) opposition to any loan for financial or technical assistance by any international financial institution – such as the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - except for humanitarian purposes; (f) the prohibition on U.S. banks from making any loan or providing any credit to the government of the country against which sanctions have been imposed, except for the purposes of purchasing food or other agricultural commodities; and (g) the prohibition of exports of dual-use goods and

echnology controlled by he Export .dministration egulations (EAR).

After its enactment in 1994 as part of the Nuclear Proliferation revention Act (NPPA), ne Glenn Amendment anctions were being mplemented for the first ime. However, the U.S. farming community was concerned over the loss of its market in India and Pakistan, particularly the latter, because of suspension of USDA export credit guarantees. (Pakistan is a major user of these credit guarantees under USDA's scheme called GSM-102. India has a credit line but has never made use of it.) This led to the enactment of the Agriculture Export Relief Act (AERA) on July 14, 1998, which exempted USDA export credit guarantees from the Glenn Amendment provisions till September 30, 1999.

The overthrow of a democratically elected government in a military coup in Pakistan attracts its own set of sanctions which would override the waivers that were in place till October 21.

Pursuant to the above-mentioned bar on loans or assistance by international financial instituions, the U.S. administration claimed on June 18, 1998, that it had gained the support of the G-7 countries and Russia to postpone consideration of "non-basic human needs" loans for India and Pakistan. On the same date, the U.S. administration announced that bank-related sanctions (item 'f' as mentioned obove) would be implemented through an "executive order". But these remained in the draft stage with the Treasury Department and were not implemented. That is, that particular categtory of sanctions was not in place.

The dual-use export sanctions were implemented by means of guidelines of the Bureau of Export Administration (BXA) of the Department of Commerce issued on June 22, 1998. These were formally incorporated into the EAR as an "interim rule" on November 19, 1998. This rule included an Entities list comprising 40 Indian and 46 Pakistani end-users, along with more than 200 subsidiaries. The sanctions meant a presumption of denial of export licences for items subject to export controls to these entities. A ceiling of 2,000 million theoretical operations per second (MTOPS) on high performance computers (HPCs) was imposed, above which level a licence would be required for exports with a strong presumption of denial to all the entities.

On October 21, 1998, Congress passed the India-Pakistan Relief Act (IPRA) of 1998. Section 902 of the Act (the Brownback Amendment) authorised the President to waive "for a period not more than a year upon enactment of the Act" certain parts of the Glenn Amendment sanctions. This was necessary because the Glenn sanctions do not provide for the lifting or waiving of sanctions. Significantly, IPRA also gave an authority to waive sanctions pursuant to Section 620(E)(e) of the Foreign Assistance Act (the Pressler Amendment), which allows economic and military assistance to Pakistan. As regards the Glenn sanctions alone, this allowed a waiver of sanctions (a), (d), (e) and (f) as given above but not (b), (c) and (g).

President Clinton partially exercised this authority on December 1, 1998. Even within the scope of (a), (d), (e) and (f) of 102(b), sanctions were lifted only with respect to (1) Eximbank, OPIC and TDA operations; (2) IMET programmes; (3) loans or credits to the two governments by U.S. banks (though this part had not been imposed); and (4) any loan or financial or technical assistance (only) to Pakistan by international financial institutions in support of the assistance programme that Pakistan was negotiating with the IMF. (On January 14, 1999, a $575-million IMF loan was approved, in the voting of which the U.S. abstained.) The lifting of sanctions on USDA credits ran concurrently but only till September 30, 1999, since (1) above did not include the USDA.

Interestingly, on October 1, 1999, the President extended the waiver on USDA credits till October 21 so that all waiver provisions expired on that date, although a 20-day difference between the two sets of waivers should not have caused any problem. This seems to have been specifically done in order to enable Pakistan to complete the negotiations with the USDA for a pending $60-million credit line that was opened in January 1999. Between September 3 and October 6, 1999, $36.80 million seems to have been negotiated and approved while $23.20 million remained to be approved. Now if the coup-linked sanctions are put in place, the remaining ones cannot be negotiated unless this amount too has already been approved between October 6 and the imposition of sanctions following the October 12 coup.

While with regard to India it would be easy for the U.S. administration to adopt the interpretation of a continuing waiver beyond October 21, with regard to Pakistan the issue may be more complex because of the coup-related sanctions. The overthrow of a democratically elected government in a military coup attracts its own set of sanctions under Section 508 of the Foreign Assistance Act which would override the waivers that were in place till October 21. However, while the coup-related sanctions cover all manner of U.S. assistance, they do not include the provision to oppose loans from multilateral funding organisations such as the IMF, and the World Bank as the sanctions pursuant to Section 102 (b) of the AECA do. So, unless the G-7 and Russia decide to postpone decisions on loans to Pakistan, the U.S. will not oppose such multilateral assistance to Pakistan.

Unlike the India-Pakistan Relief Act (Brownback I), the new waiver authority bill (HJRes. 2561), which now forms part of the DDAB, is a permanent waiver with a provision of reimposition only if the country detonates a nuclear device subsequent to the enactment. Otherwise the scope of the waiver is identical to Brownback I in the sense that it does not allow any waiver on (b), (c) and (g) of 102 (b) of the AECA, which means restrictions on dual-use technologies and goods will remain and so will the opposition to loans from international financial institutions. From the Indian perspective, these would be the key considerations for a long-term impact (*Frontline*, May 21, 1999).

Also, as in the case of Brownback I, it provides authority to waive the Pressler provision. Therefore, if this bill – which is the only one that has been sent to the President – becomes an act, exercising the waiver authority to any of its elements become a permanent feature, unless another detonation takes place. Given this fact, it is not clear why so much of noise was being made about the waiver on the Pressler provision. As in the case of Brownback I, it only gives a waiver authority and it is up to the President to exercise it or not. However, in the wake of the coup, Republican Frank Jr. Pallone introduced another bill on October 18 (H.R. 3095) that seeks to amend DDAB so that the authority to waive the Pressler Amendment sanctions is not there.

Now Brownback I or IPRA required the Secretary of State to report to Congress one month before the expiry of the sanc-

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tions on the economic and security developments in India and Pakistan. As part of this exercise, and in anticipation of congressional action during 1999 on sanctions reform legislation and the consideration of the renewal of the presidential waiver authority, the House Committee on Ways and Means had directed the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) to examine the impact of the sanctions. The USITC submitted its report on September 17. The findings of the report, "Overview and Analysis of the Economic Impact of U.S. Sanctions with Respect to India and Pakistan", must have formed the basis for the joint resolution seeking a permanent waiver authority for some provisions of the Glenn Amendment sanctions. Besides other factors, including the October 12 coup, this report is also likely to influence the President's decision on extending the waiver in the manner of the joint resolution or otherwise.

The USITC report says that the economic sanctions had a relatively minimal overall impact on India's economy... They, however, had an adverse effect on Pakistan's economy.

The USITC investigation employed three methods – a telephone survey of 269 U.S. companies and associations; market share and lost export sales analysis to the extent data were available; and modelling. The Commission obtained additional views from the industry through a public hearing held on June 22, 1999, and through written submissions. According to the findings of the telephonic survey, the U.S. companies most affected by the Glenn sanctions were those involved in the sale of certain agricultural products, industrial machinery, transportation, construction and mining equipment, electronics products and infrastructural development services. Restrictions on customer or company access to project financing or loan guarantees from Exim Bank and OPIC were noted as factors hindering their business in the two countries. Financial services firms stated that their operations were affected by the uncertainty regarding how the sanctions would eventually be implemented.

Industry representatives stated that one result of the sanctions was the increasing perception of U.S. companies as unreliable suppliers and many customers were turning to sources in Europe, Japan and elsewhere. The U.S. Embassy in Delhi apparently reported to the USITC that sanctions continued to have a negative impact on U.S. business in India as U.S. companies were reluctant to pursue business opportunities because of the uncertainty over sanctions.

As regards the overall economic impact of sanctions, the Report says they had a relatively minimal overall impact on India's economy, although it would be difficult to isolate the effects of sanctions from the effects of other concurrent economic events and policies. They, however, had a small adverse effect on Pakistan's economy, says the Report. According to it, since U.S. was a relatively small provider of aid, trade and investment, the sanctions alone may not have had a large impact, and moreover most economic assistance was terminated as a result of other sanctions which were already in place, such as those pursuant to the Pressler Amendment.

On the likely impact of the reimposition of sanctions, the Report, based on submissions from the private sector U.S. companies, says that the reimposition of prohibition of USDA credits is likely to affect U.S. wheat exports to Pakistan and that wheat producers in the Pacific Northwest would be affected most. U.S. agencies also expressed concern that prohibiting Eximbank and OPIC financing might harm U.S. competitiveness and diminish the perception of U.S. companies as reliable partners. It was felt that sanctions would make it difficult for U.S. companies to participate in major infrastructural projects. Prohibiting Eximbank and OPIC financing could delay projects in India and Pakistan until alternative sources of financing were arranged, the companies stated. Pakistan could be adversely affected if the U.S. and other major countries opposed future IMF loans to Pakistan.

The implication of the Report that sanctions have had only a marginal impact on the economies of India and Pakistan, as well as that of the U.S., save loss of business to individual companies, probably served as a guide in formulating a legislation toward a permanent waiver. But what President Clinton is likley to do is anybody's guess.

Meanwhile, administration officials are likely pulling their hair out. Are the sanctions in place or not? ■

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Popular perceptions

Most Pakistanis seem relieved that the Nawaz Sharif regime has been toppled, and look to the military regime to clean up the economic mess. But this does not quite conceal the real concerns about the country's future.

RASHEEDA BHAGAT
recently in Pakistan

A COUPLE of days after the Nawaz Sharif Government was toppled in Pakistan, Bilal Musharraf, son of General Pervez Musharraf who led the coup, had quite a lot to say about his father and his action.

Evidently smarting from the international criticism that his father had been subjected to since the coup, Bilal, who lives in the United States, said in a message posted at a Web site popular among overseas Pakistanis: "My father is a self-made man and I wish to state this up front that he has made a conscious effort to never abuse his influence for personal gain." He described his father as being "thoroughly professional" and justified the coup by saying that the Army chief had no choice but to resort to it. "My immediate family," Bilal claimed, "has managed with the income of a military officer and there have been no complaints. There is only relief that he has made it this far without compromising on his ethics... Today, he is the Chief Executive of Pakistan."

At about the same time that Bilal was preening over his father's success, Hasan Sharif, son of the ousted Prime Minister and now a student in London, was issuing an appeal to the international community to use its weight to secure his father's release.

The Commonwealth suspended Pakistan, and the rest of the international community urged the military ruler to restore democratic rule at the earliest. In this background, the rest of the world is puzzled by the fact that Pakistanis themselves do not seem to be overly worried about the toppling of a democratic regime in Islamabad. On the contrary, Pakistanis seemed to be celebrating the fall of the "corrupt government of Mian Nawaz Sharif".

In Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi, people have been openly saying: Yeh *lootmar aur jhoot bolney ki sarkar se tau army-walley behtar hei* (Compared to this looting, lying and fraudulent government, the Army people are better). Stunned as it was by such expressions of popular approval for the coup, the Pakistan Muslim League, the ousted party of government, took almost a week to demand the release of the dismissed Prime Minister and the restoration of democracy.

KHALID MUSTAFA, a Karachi-based industrialist, said that Pakistanis were celebrating the advent of a military regime "because they believe that what we have had for the last 10 years is not real democracy."

According to Mustafa, the belief that a democratic system would be more sensitive to the problems of the people and improve their lot had been belied in Pakistan. The people, he said, were tired of one regime coming in "only to investigate the corruption and bank frauds committed by politicians of the previous regime. Then those in power would go ahead to commit an even bigger fraud on the people." But this time around, Mustafa added, politicians from the ousted ruling party as well as the former Opposition would be in the dock. "There is a lot of hope that corruption cases against all of them will be investigated without fear or favour."

However, not many people share this optimism. Ghulam Kibria, a former United Nations consultant who served as a technocrat in the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto regime, has little hope that the "looted millions from bank defaulters and other corrupt politicians can ever be brought back into the exchequer because the money has already gone out of the country."

In a telephonic interview from Karachi, Kibria said: "This is the fourth time that Generals have taken over the governance of Pakistan. But there are two big differences. One, this time it was a counter-military coup against a civilian coup that was planned against the Generals. Two, this time there is no jubilation as had been experienced following the previous three military coups. But there is definitely a huge sigh of relief over the fact that the corrupt Sharif government is gone."

Kibria acknowledged that the rest of the world and a section of the intelligentsia in Pakistan were worried about the dismissal of a democratically elected government and the prospect of a spell of military rule. "But," he said, "what the rest of the world, and even some people within Pakistan, do not understand is that there has been no real democratic political process in Pakistan. People have not really been involved in the democratic process... I would even say there is no real political consciousness among the people of Pakistan. They have always looked for saviours in their politicians, whether it was Benazir Bhutto or Nawaz Sharif. The All India Muslim League had neither a political process nor inner-party democracy and we inherited this."

Kibria attributed the relative success of Indian democracy to the fact that the political system had over the years become inclusive and had accommodated the traditionally underprivileged sections of society. "Things changed in India to a certain extent, with the result that backward classes and Dalits were involved in government and became MLAs and MPs."

Describing Sharif as "an elected dictator", Kibria said that his regime had not granted autonomy to the provinces or to municipalities. "Municipal elections have not been held in Karachi for several years," he added.

A Karachi-based executive who writes poetry under the pen name Baligh said that the dismissal of the Sharif regime had been greeted with relief, especially by the people in Karachi, "who had to bear the brunt of the increasing lawlessness and violence".



K.M. CHOUDARY/AP

Celebrations on the streets of Lahore after the military takeover. Public opinion within Pakistan has been largely supportive of the coup.

All talk of democracy was a sham in "this aristocratic land", he said: most Pakistanis were bitter that "in the last 10 years our democratically elected leaders have used every opportunity to take advantage of their positions for personal gain. The country is on the brink of bankruptcy but the personal assets of these people are ever-increasing; a handful of them can, with their off-shore assets, pay off the entire debt of the country."

Baligh added that there was a lot of expectation that the military regime would introduce accountability and bring the bank defaulters and tax evaders to book. In his opinion, geopolitical and regional considerations today – "with barely 100 days to go for the new millennium" – were such that it would not be possible for a military ruler to stay on for long. "It will not be possible for the current CEO to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors like Gen. Zia-ul-Haq and hold office for an extended period. I think he should remain in power for a maximum of two years and bring in technocrats and experienced politicians to take Pakistan out of the present economic mess."

The consensus in Pakistan is seemingly in favour of a "civilian government made up of technocrats and experts". But as an editorial in the Pakistani English daily *Dawn* cautioned, although such "well-meant" advice from various quarters was "driven by a sincere desire to see the country put back on the right path... prolonged deviations from the democratic path have invariably led to more problems than have been solved. All the stretches of military rule proved disastrous for Pakistan."

Sounding a note of caution against excessive expectations from "technocrats and experts", the editorial noted that in "all previous military regimes technocrats and bureaucrats have played major roles. They did not work wonders then. It strains credulity to think that they will do any better now."

PAKISTANIS are at the moment celebrating their release from years of misgovernance: successive elected governments have demeaned democracy by indulging in large-scale corruption and chipped away at institutions such as the judiciary and the executive, and even the office of the President. However, the present euphoria cannot last long.

There are no magic wands or formulae to repair the damage done to the country's economy, which has been reduced to one of the wobbliest in the developing world. The educated sections and the intelligentsia in Pakistan wonder sceptically how long it will take the new rulers to step into the shoes of their predecessors and amass wealth.

It is in this light that Bilal Musharraf's claim about his father's integrity and ability to withstand pressure and not compromise on his ethics acquires significance. There are conflicting reports about Pervez Musharraf: one says he is an Islamic fundamentalist and is soft on the Taliban; another, echoed by the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, William B. Milam, describes him as a "moderate man". Observers will be looking at the events of the coming days, the kind of people he appoints to key administrative positions and the manner in which he presides over Pakistan's destiny, to draw inferences on Musharraf's beliefs and commitments. However, India, which perceives him as the architect of the Kargil misadventure, is certain to view him and what he says with scepticism.

MEANWHILE, there is speculation in Pakistan about Sharif's fate. Lt. Gen. (Retd) Moin Uddin Haider, who was the Sindh Governor for two years before he was replaced by a Sharif crony in June 1999, says that Sharif will "reap as he sowed"; he, however, rules out the possibility of Sharif's execution.

Kibria agrees. "It is difficult," he says, "to make a prediction now as there is no political process in the country at the moment. But I doubt very much that he will ever be tried. Even if he is... I believe he will get away and will not be punished."

At the moment, however, the mood of the common person and what she or he thinks of the military regime may be summed up in what a Karachi-based businessman has to say: "We Pakistanis are tough guys. We love to be ruled by iron hands. Are we shedding tears for democracy, did you ask? What rubbish. The people on the roads do not give a damn about the system. They want only *roti, kapada aur makan*... and of course occasional peace." ■

In the cause of peace

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has played a crucial role in defusing many a crisis, including a near-disaster involving two superpowers. An anecdotal account of a few of the important moments in the history of the world body.

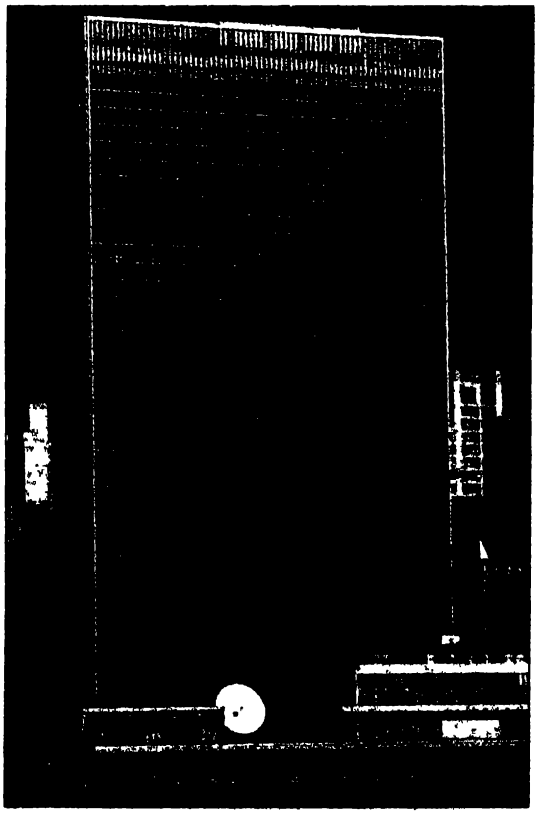
C.V NARASIMHAN

EVERY year, October 24 is observed as United Nations Day. It was on that day in 1945 that a sufficient number of ratifications from member-states to bring the world body into existence was received. During my long tenure at the U.N., one particular U.N. Day stands out in my memory – October 24, 1962.

In mid-October 1962, an international crisis developed over the presence of Soviet-made missiles in Cuba. From the time Cuba became a Communist nation under Fidel Castro, there had been considerable hostility between the United States and Cuba. It was not generally known that Cuba, the only Communist country in the western hemisphere, was arming itself with Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM) provided by the Soviet Union. These missiles were capable of hitting any destination on the eastern seaboard and the central part of the U.S. Although the arms build-up had been going on clandestinely for some time, it became a crisis on the night of October 22, 1962, when President John F. Kennedy made a statement on television and radio that the Soviet Union was building offensive missile sites in Cuba. Kennedy decided to impose a naval and air blockade to prevent the import of more missiles and equipment into Cuba by the Soviet ships that were already proceeding towards Cuba. The world was on the verge of a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers.

The crisis came to a head on October 24. Being U.N. Day, there was the usual Western music concert at 3 p.m. in the huge General Assembly Hall. Interestingly, the music was provided by the Leningrad Symphony orchestra under the baton of the maestro, Mravinsky. The violin soloist, David Oistrakh, was one of the great violinists of the century. After the concert was over, the leading members of the orchestra and senior members of the Soviet mission to the U.N. went up to the Secretary-General's conference room where a big reception was held for them. As soon as the event was over, Secretary-General U Thant called me to his room and we decided on the course of action to be taken in the Security Council which was due to meet late that night.

U Thant made a statement in the Security Council. He said: "Today the United Nations faces a moment of great responsibility. What is at stake is not just the interests of parties directly involved, not just the interests of all member-states, but the very fate of mankind." He went on to express the profound hope and conviction that moderation and good sense would prevail over all other considerations. He also stated that at the request of the Permanent Representatives of a large number of member-governments, he had sent identically-worded messages to President Kennedy and Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev. He made an appeal to the parties concerned to enter into negotiations "even tonight if possible". He went on to say: "The Secretary-General cannot serve on any other assumption (subject to human frailty and honest difference of opinion) than that all member-nations honour the pledge to observe all articles of the charter." What he meant in effect was that if his appeals were not heeded he might seriously think of resigning his post.



STEPHEN FERRY/GAMMA

The United Nations headquarters in New York.

The Security Council met on the morning of October 25 but even before the meeting U Thant had sent further messages to Khrushchev and Kennedy. Around 3 p.m. that day, Khrushchev sent a very friendly reply, accepting U Thant's proposal that the Soviet ships stop in their course and not challenge the blockade imposed by the U.S. He went on to request that the U.S. also act in this spirit of moderation. He concluded his message by saying, "I thank you for your efforts and wish you success in your noble task."

This came as a tremendous boost to U Thant. Kennedy also sent a message, through Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. It said: "If the Soviet Government accepts and abides by your request that Soviet ships already on their way to Cuba stay away from the interception area you may be assured that this Government will accept and abide by your request that our vessels in the Caribbean do everything possible to avoid direct confrontation with the Soviet ships in the next few days to minimise the

risk of any untoward incidents."

The situation was thus defused but by no means was it certain that there would be no further confrontation. In fact, on the night of October 28, it looked as if the U.S. was getting ready to send its bombers over Cuba to destroy the missile sites. However, the day passed without any incident.

U Thant had also been corresponding with Castro, who was the Prime Minister of Cuba then. During these discussions Castro invited him to visit Cuba. U Thant accepted the invitation. He left for Havana on the morning of October 30, on a Varig Brazilian airline plane chartered by the United Nations. (At the time there was no direct plane service between the U.S. and Cuba.) He was accompanied, among others, by Brigadier-General I.J. Rikhye.

U Thant hoped that Castro might agree to permit a small group of observers to be stationed in Cuba to certify the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. However, it was not possible to get Cuba to agree to stationing any observers on its soil. Eventually the withdrawal was done without the presence of any observers and the world breathed a sigh of relief. On January 7, 1963, Adlai Stevenson and V. Kuznetsov, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, sent a message of thanks to U Thant for his efforts. The cooperation of the Soviet Union was won on the basis of an assurance that Cuba would not be attacked by the U.S. These diplomatic efforts helped preserve the peace and averted a nuclear confrontation.

Towards the end of his meeting with Castro, U Thant asked the Cuban leader to return on humanitarian grounds the body of Major Rudolf Anderson, a U.S. Air Force pilot whose reconnaissance plane had been shot down (with a Soviet missile) by Cuba on October 27. Castro replied that Anderson was killed when he violated Cuba's air space, but agreed to return the body. U Thant returned to New York as a "conquering hero".



C.V. Narasimhan with U.N. Secretary-General U Thant.

PERHAPS the darkest days in the U.N.'s history were those that followed the tragic death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold in an air crash on the night of September 16, 1961. On a peace mission to the Congo, Hammarskjold was going to meet Moise Tshombe of Katanga in Ndola. The bodies were found only the next morning, and flown back to New York. Hammarskjold's body was flown to Stockholm. I attended his funeral at Uppsala a few days later. For the first time in U.N. history, the U.N. Day came and went without a Secretary-General. After a great deal of secret negotiations U Thant of Burma (now Myanmar) was appointed Secretary-General on November 3, 1961.

V.K. Krishna Menon, India's Defence Minister, was the leader of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly in 1961. He knew he was not very popular in the U.S. He also had a macabre sense of humour. In September 1961, he had to undergo major surgery at a hospital in the Bronx which involved making an incision in his skull. When I went to visit him at the hospital, he said: "Narasimhan, your American friends think I am a lunatic. You can now tell them on good authority that you had indeed seen me at hospital and I am a man with a hole in the head."

In mid-December 1961, acute tension developed between India and Portugal on the subject of Goa and other Portuguese enclaves in India. It looked as if an invasion of Goa by the Indian military forces was imminent. U Thant sent identically-worded messages to the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and India requesting them to settle the dispute through peaceful means. This appeal fell on deaf ears and on December 18, Indian troops marched into Goa and completed the takeover of the territory in short order. This left a bad feeling amongst several delegates, who felt that India, a founding-member of the United Nations, had blatantly violated the U.N. Charter.

In the U.S. press there was comment about the fact that Krishna Menon had organised this military adventure and there was a cartoon depicting him as a python swallowing Goa and describing him as the "Goa Constrictor"!

In the summer of 1962, U Thant had some interesting visitors from India – C. Rajagopalachari, R.R. Diwakar and B. Shiva Rao. (It was a delegation from the Gandhi Smarak Seva Samithi, led by Rajaji, and its mission was to plead for complete cessation of nuclear testing. They had already made this plea to Khrushchev in Moscow. They were on their way to Washington to meet President Kennedy.) U Thant was happy to meet them. He knew Rajaji very well and had great respect for him. I invited Rajaji and his associates for lunch in my home. U Thant and Ralph Bunche also graciously attended this luncheon. We had a very interesting discussion, full of good humour. Taking advantage of the spirit of humour, I asked Rajaji whether he had heard the joke about himself which went like this:

Question: "Which famous studio in Hollywood is named after the last Governor-General of India, the Hon'ble Sri Rajagopalachari?"

Answer: "20th Century Fox."

U THANT had another important success in his mediation efforts, in this case between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Towards the end of 1961, tension developed between the two countries in regard to a territory which was known as West New Guinea, one of the largest islands in the world. The eastern part of the island is called Papua New Guinea and it was under the trusteeship of Australia, which discharged its responsibility to the full satisfaction of all concerned. In 1975, Papua New Guinea became an independent and full sovereign member of the U.N.

West New Guinea was an immense territory with an approximate population of 750,000, all aborigines. Since it was ruled by the Netherlands as part of the Netherlands East Indies, Indonesia claimed that this territory should also be transferred to it. The Dutch resisted this claim and the situation became very tense.

In early 1962, U Thant began a series of informal talks with the Dutch and Indonesian representatives through the good offices of a well-known U.S. diplomat, Ellsworth Bunker. The Netherlands was not willing to transfer the territory straightaway to Indonesia. Bunker devised a plan that envisaged a phased transfer of the territory. He proposed an

interim period during which the U.N. would take over the administration of the territory. This proposal was endorsed by the Security Council on August 15, 1962, and Indonesia and the Netherlands signed an agreement. On September 21, a resolution sponsored by Indonesia and the Netherlands was approved by the General Assembly and the agreement between the two states concerning West New Guinea (West Irian) was ratified.

Administering a territory was an immense responsibility for the Secretary-General because it was for the first time in the history of the U.N. that executive authority was vested in the U.N. itself, in the form of the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA).

U Thant entrusted the responsibility for this operation to me. I conducted it with my small staff in the Secretariat. In the field we had an array of international officials provided by the U.N. and by specialised agencies. For example, the World Health Organisation provided a hospital in Hollandia (now Djadjapura), the capital of West New Guinea. We had to have, as usual, a peace-keeping contingent in the territory. On my recommendation, the Secretary-General approached the Government of Pakistan, which provided a battalion to serve in this area under the leadership of General Saiduddin Khan. An administrator had also to be appointed to run the territory and U Thant chose a distinguished Iranian diplomat, Djalal Abdoh, for the job. Abdoh was assisted by N.S. Subaraman, who had come to serve the U.N. from the Government of India. (He had at one time served as a private secretary to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.) He was a very able international civil servant and his help was much appreciated by the administrator.

The General Assembly resolution provided that UNTEA would transfer the territory of West New Guinea to Indonesia on May 1, 1963. I was deputed by U Thant to represent him on this occasion. U Thant had also prepared a message which I delivered on his behalf and the transfer of the territory to Indonesia was completed. Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio represented Indonesia. The same night, the entire U.N. contingent consisting of about 100 officials, including me, left for New York by a KLM flight. From Hollandia the nearest airport was Biak, which was in the north-westernmost tip of West New Guinea. The plane arrived on time and we all boarded it. Most members of the team were going on to New York, but some officials were to transfer to a flight to Geneva. I stayed on at The Hague for a couple of days in order to meet the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands. When we arrived in Amsterdam the next morning, I learnt to my pleasant surprise that I was also to be received in audience by the Queen of the Netherlands. The meeting was scheduled for 10 a.m. The queen received me graciously and expressed her great concern that, after the transfer of jurisdiction to Indonesia, the interest of the people of West New Guinea should be safeguarded. I told her that we had received all possible assurances on this from the Indonesian Government, and there was also, of course, the provision to ascertain the wishes of the people in 1969. She seemed satisfied with this assurance.

I completed my discussions on the same lines with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands. They told me about their plan to set up a separate fund for the benefit of West New Guinea to be administered by the U.N. This fund was established and the contributions from the Netherlands were matched by those from Indonesia in local currency. This fund also came under my control and we did the best we could with this money for the benefit of the people of West New Guinea.

Two features about the West New Guinea operation are noteworthy. It was the first time that a peace-keeping operation was authorised, not by the Security Council, but by the General Assembly. The second point is that the entire cost of the operation was met by Indonesia and the Netherlands.

U Thant was a splendid host and loved to entertain. On one occasion his guest of honour was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Harold Macmillan. As per U.N. protocol the permanent mission of the U.K. was asked what the favoured main course for the distinguished guest would be. The reply was: "Roast beef, of course."

At the luncheon in the Secretary-General's private dining room, U Thant was sitting opposite Macmillan. Macmillan had on his right Adlai Stevenson and I was sitting next to Stevenson. In those days, being a "vegetarian", I invariably had an omelette at lunch as the main course. When the roast beef was brought to Macmillan he said, "No thank you", to the consternation of the chef and myself. At that point I observed Macmillan taking some interest in the omelette that had just been brought in. I turned to the Prime Minister and said, "Would you rather have an omelette?" Macmillan said, "Yes, very much so, but do not want to take away your omelette from you." I said, "Mr. Prime Minister, let me share this omelette with you. Your omelette will be ready in another five minutes and you can give me half of yours; and then, I can truthfully claim that while many have broken bread with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I am the only one who has broken eggs with him." Macmillan laughed heartily, and it was done accordingly. At that point, Stevenson, a great phrase-maker, said: "Egg-heads of the world, unite! you have nothing to lose but your shells." Stevenson was a great wit. He used to say: "There is one thing common to flattery and smoking, they are both dangerous only if you inhale."

IN September 1962, Trinidad and Tobago became a member of the U.N. Eric Williams was the Prime Minister of Trinidad, He was my collegemate at St. Catherines, Oxford, between 1934 and 1936. Later on, he was a Professor at Howard University in Washington D.C. He became the first Prime Minister of an independent Trinidad and Tobago. He called on me at my office after having visited U Thant, and invited me to visit his country as his personal guest. This visit took place in the summer of 1963. Tobago is a beautiful island with a very fine beach and cottages. Trinidad has a very large Indian population. The capital, Port of Spain, has an Indian quarter with many Indian street names. The island-nation also has a large Chinese population, and the Governor-General was a Chinese, Sir Solomon Hochoy. I stayed at Government House and the Prime Minister hosted a dinner in my honour. All his Cabinet members were present and he introduced me to them as his old personal friend going back to his Oxford days in the 1930s. This was for me a very heartwarming occasion.

ONE anecdote of earlier years comes to my mind. In October 1957, Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari was on a visit to New York to meet the heads of major American banks. V.K. Krishna Menon was also in New York as the leader of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly. When someone asked, "Why are the two Krishnas from India in New York at the same time?" The answer was: "For exactly opposite reasons, one has come for Cashmere, the other for mere cash!" ■

C.V. Narasimhan, a former Indian Civil Service officer, was the Under-Secretary General of the United Nations.

Stable, for now, in Maharashtra

ıe Congress (I)-NCP Ministry in Maharashtra is essentially on unstable ground; yet if it puts into action a ear programme to reverse the damage the Hindu Right has inflicted on the State, it might survive.

RAVEEN SWAMI
Mumbaı

PEOPLE who throng Ramlila performances in this festival season may have found familiar parallels in the fortnight-long theatre preceding the formation of the Lokshahi Aghadi (Democratic Front) government in Maharashtra For all its moments of high drama and low farce, the formation of the Congress (I)-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) front was in essence predictable But if both the Congress(I) and the NCP knew how the spectacle would end, the future of the Lokshahi Aghadi is less clear Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh could well find himself overtaken by crisis sooner than most observers might expect

The dismal performance in the Assembly elections of the NCP led by Sharad Pawar set the stage for the new political order The NCP was decimated through the State, making its core political position of maintaining equidistance from both the Congress(I) and the Bharatiya Janata Party unsustainable Pawar managed to secure just five of 46 seats in Marathwada to the Congress(I)'s 10, and he could take just one of Mumbai's 12 Assembly seats. Even in its western Maharashtra heartland, the NCP won only 43 of 111 Assembly seats, while the Congress(I) took 26 and the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance took 31.

Having won just 58 of 288 Assembly seats, Pawar had few options. At least a few powerful figures in the NCP made clear that they preferred to go with the BJP. Former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma's assertion that the NCP would under no circumstances ally itself with the Congress(I) was rapidly joined by former Maharashtra Chief Minister Sudhakarrao Naik. On October 10, Naik announced that a Shiv Sena-BJP-NCP alliance would be put in place "within a few days". In defence of this alliance, Naik claimed that his party's principal objective was to ensure that "the Italian lady does not come to power" While Naik's position may in part have been polemical, it is evident that he spoke for at least some sections of the NCP

BJP leaders negotiating with the NCP offered other carrots Party spokesperson Prakash Jawdekar, speaking about discussions between the BJP and Sudhakarrao Naik, pointed out that if "the NCP joins hands with the BJP-Shiv Sena, then the national level gains for Pawar would increase'

But the BJP had its own problems Former Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde's negotiations with the NCP had incensed the Shiv Sena, which understood clearly that its level of influence in any alliance with Pawar would be limited Shiv Sena boss Bal Thackeray was alarmed enough by October 13 to issue a statement making it clear that he would only support a BJP-NCP front from the outside A day later, all three Union Ministers from the Shiv Sena underlined the threat by failing to show up at their new offices in New Delhi

Shiv Sena fury at the BJP's negotiations with the NCP had not a little to do with the realisation that Munde was likely to be its principal beneficiary. While Sudhakarrao Naik had gone public with his backing for giving former Chief Minister Narayan Rane a second term in office, sources say this idea found little backing even among the pro-BJP faction within the NCP Instead, the pro-BJP MLAs in the NCP suggested that either one of their own, or failing that Munde, lead the alliance Both Rane and Thackeray were incensed at the prospect of Munde becoming the Chief Minister, violating prior agreements that the larger party in the Hindutva front would command the top office

Events soon snowballed into an ugly BJP-Sena spat Rane claimed that the BJP had sabotaged the Shiv Sena's efforts to recruit independent MLAs through Babanrao Gholap Gholap, facing charges of embezzlement of funds meant for the welfare of Dalits, had retained close links with the Shiv Sena apparatus despite having been sacked from his ministerial job earlier this year 'Whenever we collected supporters,' Rane said of the BJP, "they would go and threaten these people not



Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh. (Right) NCP leader Sharad Pawar and Deputy Chief Minister Chhagan Bhujbal with supporters in Mumbai.

to support us. They also went around asking people to support the NCP."

"From their behaviour," the former Chief Minister concluded, "I feel that the BJP is not interested in having an alliance with us." "All this," he said, although without naming Munde, "is because of the personal ambitions of one person, which are not being fulfilled."

Munde denied the charges, insisting instead that the BJP was indeed committed to its alliance with the Shiv Sena. But efforts for an alliance with the NCP continued. One last-ditch measure was a campaign to install former Housing Minister and Jalgaon MLA Suresh Jain in Rane's place. The bid, carried out without Sena Rajya Sabha member Mukat Patel's backing, incensed Thackeray. At his usual Dasara-day rally in Mumbai, the Shiv Sena boss attacked Patel for his role in the affair. Jain, in turn, dared his party leader to expel him for anti-party activity, adding that he "never licked anyone's boots". With an evident understanding of the Shiv Sena's weak position, Jain added that he would leave the party the "day I wish".



VIVEK BENDRE

Former Chief Minister Narayan Rane of the Shiv Sena and former Deputy Chief Minister Gopinath Munde of the BJP at the Raj Bhavan in Mumbai.

It was now clear even to the pro-BJP faction in the NCP that its efforts were rather pointless. More disturbingly for Pawar, there were signs of revolt from anti-BJP figures within the NCP. Chaggan Bhujbal, the one-time architect of the Shiv Sena's expansion out of Mumbai's ghettos into rural Maharashtra, made his displeasure clear to Pawar, along with powerful NCP figures such as R.R. Patil, Arun Mehta, Vasant Chavan and Digvijay Khanvilkar. The group, which was responsible for taking on the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance in the Assembly over the past five years, protested the influence pro-BJP figures such as sugar baron Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil had come to have within the NCP.

Bhujbal and his pro-Congress(I) associates, however, had their own problems in striking a deal. Sushil Kumar Shinde, the All India Congress Committee general secretary in charge of the party's affairs in Uttar Pradesh, who had been seen by the NCP as an ally within the Congress(I), resigned taking responsibility for the party's "debacle" in the Lok Sabha elections. Since the Congress(I) had done relatively well in Uttar Pradesh, the State entrusted to Shinde, the resignation was seen by the NCP as having been engineered to remove a pro-Pawar figure. In effect, Shinde was out of the race to be Chief Minister. Deshmukh, for long hostile to Pawar, was made head of the Congress Legislature Party, signalling the Congress(I)'s unwillingness to negotiate on the NCP's terms.

The problems mounted. From the outset, the Congress(I) had rejected the NCP's demands that it be given the power to choose the Chief Minister. Bhujbal, desperate to sell an alliance with the Congress(I) to his party, and aware of Sudhakarrao Naik's parallel negotiations with the BJP, became increasingly desperate. "How can any talks progress," he asked on October 12, "when they are not even budging from the first point – of the Chief Minister?" The same day, Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh joined Bhujbal's calls for the Congress(I) to support an NCP Chief Minister. "If Mayawati could form a government in Uttar Pradesh with just 40 MLAs," he said, perhaps oblivious to the ironies, "why cannot the NCP do so in Maharashtra?"

But with the collapse of the BJP option increasingly evident, the Congress(I) was unwilling to concede any ground to the NCP. Other events too strengthened the Congress(I)'s hands. Eleven MLAs – five from the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP), two from the Janata Dal, two from the Samajwadi Party, and two from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – made clear that they would only support a secular formation in Maharashtra. Since both the PWP and the Samajwadi Party had fought the elections in alliance with the NCP, the October 12 meeting signalled to Pawar that his allies' patience was running out. Hopes that the Congress(I) would be weakened by dissent, in the likeness of protests by former Minister Ranjit Deshmukh against Vilasrao Deshmukh's appointment, also proved abortive.

The fact that no formation could command a majority held out the possibility of Central rule. Should that happen, NCP leaders were clear, the party would split down the middle. Cornered, and with the Congress(I) showing no sign of relenting, the NCP gave in. By October 15 it was clear that Sureshdada Jain's last minute enterprise to replace Rane had failed, and that Munde had been unable to carry the Shiv Sena with him. On October 16, Bhujbal announced that a deal had been formalised. The NCP would agree to Deshmukh becoming Chief Minister, in return for Bhujbal's appointment as Deputy Chief Minister and Arun Gujarathi being made the Speaker.

As Deshmukh was sworn in Maharashtra's 21st Chief Minister on October 18, Rane was left complaining about the events that robbed him of a second term. Of his resentment against Munde, there was no doubt. "The entire party," he said ruefully, "cannot be held responsible for the folly of one person."

NCP spokesperson Devendra Dwivedi, meanwhile, attempted to explain just why it was appropriate for his party to ally itself with the BJP in Meghalaya, and the Congress(I) elsewhere. "I will call it pragmatism and not opportunism," he said wryly. Asked to define the difference between the two, Dwivedi was candid. "The dividing line between the two concepts is extremely thin," he said.

WHAT prospects await the Lokshahi Aghadi? Despite media speculation, the threats against it are unlikely to materialise immediately. Arun Gujarathi's October 22 election as Speaker threw up no signs of dissidence within the alliance's ranks, with 154 members voting for him and 132 for the Shiv Sena-BJP nominee, Girish Bapat. The Lokshahi Aghadi won one vote less than expected owing to the

eath of MLA Marzaban Patrawala. ıpport for Bapat was four votes fewer than it claimed by the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance ıen it staked its claim to form a government. That would suggest that four independents have gone the Lokshahi Aghadi y. The fact that the members of the Shiv na-BJP alliance chose to walk out rather ı an oppose the confidence vote on October 23 illustrates the numerical solidity of the Lokshahi Aghadi.

But this early stability is unlikely to last. For one, Prakash Ambedkar's Republican Party of India has been complaining of its exclusion from the 26-member Ministry, set up on a rough proportional representation principle. Congress(I) dissident Ranjit Deshmukh, already bitter over his exclusion from the Cabinet, has pointed to regional biases in the Ministry. Eight of the 26 Ministers belong to western Maharashtra, and half are Marathas. Ranjit Deshmukh had opposed Vilasrao Deshmukh's appointment on the ground that the Chief Minister's loyalties to the Congress(I) had been somewhat fickle. "Only four members of the Council of Ministers are loyalists," he claimed.

While such bickering is perhaps not unusual, the fact remains the Lokshahi Aghadi is an unstable formation. The reasons are not difficult to discern. Within the NCP it is evident to most people that Sharad Pawar, who has never led any party to an Assembly election victory, must seek some form of affiliation with the Congress(I) in order to survive. What form such an affiliation could take is not clear, but that in turn could lead to fresh alignments. At least a section of the NCP could choose to go the Shiv Sena-BJP way. Finally, if allies such as the PWP and the Samajwadi Party find themselves marginalised or isolated, they along with small groups of independent MLAs could create problems.

In important senses, the Lokshahi Aghadi is most likely to survive if it puts into action a clear programme to reverse the damage the Hindu Right has inflicted on the State. Deshmukh has announced a review of several controversial Shiv Sena-inspired development and housing schemes, as well as of the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry into the Mumbai riots of 1992-1993. Thackeray has been unnerved enough by the prospect of prosecution for his role in the riots, to threaten public disorder should legal action be taken. But if the Lokshahi Aghadi remains too mired in its inner factional struggles to act decisively, it could find itself in real trouble. ■

POLITICS

Promises to keep

Having raised popular expectations to high levels, N. Chandrababu Naidu is bound to find his tasks in his second term as Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister tough.

DASU KESAVA RAO

RETURNED to power with a fresh and decisive mandate, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has settled down to business, apparently determined to pursue his much-publicised goal of building a "Swarnandhra Pradesh" (golden land) via economic reforms. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief began his second innings in power with a compact eight-member team and with a promise to expand it "at the earliest". Apart from retaining his trusted lieutenants – P. Ashok Gajapati Raju, T. Devender Goud and A. Madhava Reddy – he took in Yanamala Ramakrishnudu, Speaker of the 10th Assembly, and K. Vijayarama Rao, former Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). While Ramakrishnudu was given Finance, Vijayarama Rao got Roads and Buildings.

Even before the victory celebrations were over, the new Government was faced with two major challenges – a severe drought in several parts of the State and extensive damage caused by a cyclone in Srikakulam district in the northern coastal region. Over 450 of the 1,000-odd rural mandals were declared drought-affected, and the recovery of loans and the collection of tuition fees were suspended in these mandals. Shortage of drinking water and fodder spurred the migration of people and cattle. Groundnut crops on 9.75 lakh hectares were the worst-hit. The prospects of the kharif crop appeared bleak – a disturbing fact, when seen in the context of the bumper crop of 1998.

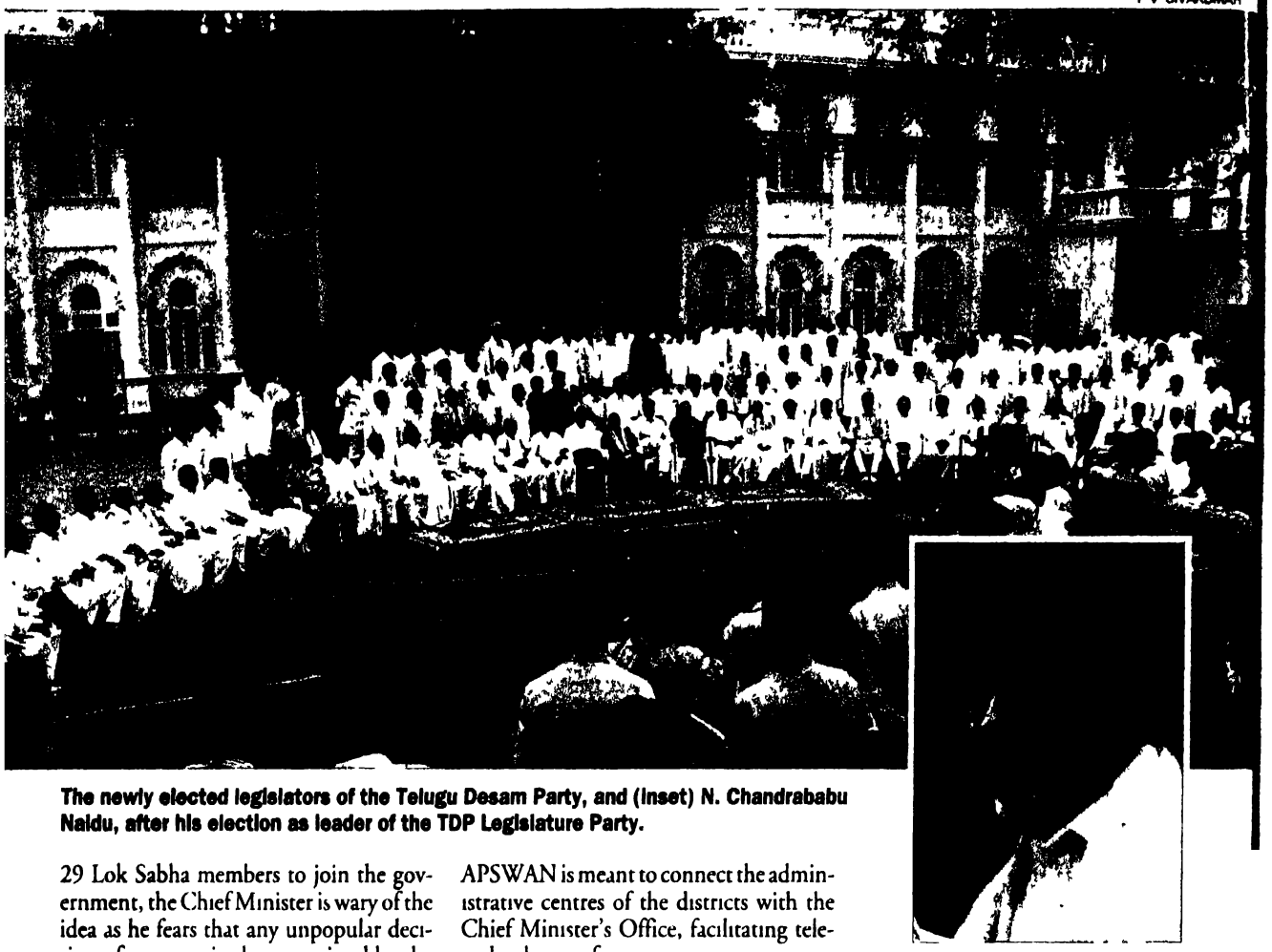
The Chief Minister lost no time in resuming the Deepam scheme he had introduced (providing cooking gas connections to poor households); he made a visit to Delhi to streamline its implementation with the help of Central government officials. He is keen that the welfare and development programmes, including programmes that involve interaction with the people, are reviewed and their deficiencies identified and corrected. He wants these programmes to be redesigned and made "fool-proof" within a month.

Chandrababu Naidu is one of the few Chief Ministers who could overcome the anti-incumbency factor and win a renewed mandate in elections held in recent years. He describes the electoral verdict as a decisive mandate in support of his performance and as a "clear, positive vote". His claim is, however, disputed by the Congress(I) and other parties as well as by some political analysts.

The Congress(I) contends that the TDP owes its victory to its alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party and "sympathy" for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. This is a clear turnaround on the part of the party; its earlier contention was that the alliance was doomed to fail because the minorities and the oppressed sections would move away from the TDP. The Congress(I) also claims that the percentage of votes it polled is higher than that polled by the TDP, although the ruling party, together with the BJP, obtained a larger vote share. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), an ally-turned-critic of the TDP, said that the 1999 verdict could in no way be construed as an endorsement of the Chandrababu Naidu Government's policies of reforms. The party pointed out that the vote share (49.5 per cent) of the TDP-BJP combine is marginally less than the combined vote share (50.27) of these two parties, which contested the 1998 elections separately. The Congress(I), on the other hand, had improved its vote share, from 38.6 per cent in 1998 to 42.79 in 1999, the CPI(M) said.

For his part, Chandrababu Naidu is now less apologetic about his party's alliance with the BJP than he was earlier. At the swearing-in of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Ministry, he made a significant statement that his party's support to the Vajpayee Government this time was "unconditional" (and not "issue-based" as earlier) and would continue for its full five-year term. Although under pressure from the party's

P V SIVAKUMAR



The newly elected legislators of the Telugu Desam Party, and (inset) N. Chandrababu Naidu, after his election as leader of the TDP Legislature Party.

29 Lok Sabha members to join the government, the Chief Minister is wary of the idea as he fears that any unpopular decision of or any mistake committed by the government will have an adverse impact on the TDP's future. In his view, the promotion of the State's interests is more important than obtaining a few berths for the party in the Union Ministry.

Unfazed by the debate on the mandate, Chandrababu Naidu has made it clear that he intends to keep his promises, whatever the hurdles. Expectations are high and the tasks daunting. The World Bank-driven economic reforms have evoked hostile criticism from the Left Opposition and caused apprehensions among government employees that computerisation and e-government might lead to loss of jobs and curtailment of employment avenues.

It is precisely this fear that forced the Government to drop the Andhra Pradesh Value Added Network (APVAN) project and delay the Andhra Pradesh State-wide Area Network (APSWAN) project. The first envisaged the offer of "citizen-friendly" services such as receiving payments for bills and answering enquiries through a single window, at the press of a button. It was to have been taken up in collaboration with a Singapore-based consortium. APSWAN is meant to connect the administrative centres of the districts with the Chief Minister's Office, facilitating tele- and video-conferencing.

His professed commitment to economic reforms notwithstanding, Chandrababu Naidu has "miles to go" in achieving progress through them. Admittedly, he saved the State's finances from tottering by taking some steps, unpopular though, such as the closure of loss-making public sector undertakings, the relaxation of prohibition, a hike in taxes and an increase in the issue price of subsidised rice. Yet, public spending in non-productive areas continues to be on a scale that has affected fiscal health and capital investment. The industrial prospects are also bleak in the absence of any substantial increase in investments. Chandrababu Naidu is also accused of pushing the State into a debt trap by "reckless borrowings". However, the TDP avers that debt-servicing by the State Government has been satisfactory and notes with pride that thanks to Chandrababu Naidu's credibility the World Bank pumped in substantial funds, part of them as grants, despite the sanctions imposed on India following the Pokhran tests. Unlike during Congress(I) rule, the party contends, the borrowed funds were not siphoned off in collusion with contractors but put to optimal use for the creation of infrastructure or for the development of human resources.

The Chief Minister personally oversaw reforms in the power sector and the unbundling of the State Electricity Board. He has succeeded in optimising its functioning, improving its collections and streamlining supply and distribution, but other objectives such as value addition through more investments, increase in generation capacity or the launching of new power projects are yet to be accomplished. Within days of his swearing- in, the watch unit of Allwyn, a State government undertaking, was ordered closed. This has generated fears that more such closures are in the offing.

Chandrababu Naidu, who is eager to correct "the mistakes of the past", has to set the record straight in respect of the criticism that the introduction of the nodal officers system in the case of the Janmabhoomi programme and the constitution of education committees, mothers' committees and so on to oversee government-run schemes were aimed at undermining the powers and authority of panchayati raj bodies. ■

Playing it safe

Chief Minister S.M. Krishna sticks to convention in the constitution of his Ministry.

PARVATHI MENON
in Bangalore

THE Congress(I) in Karnataka has chosen not to depart from the guidelines that have governed ministry formation in the past, although its return to power has come about after a 10-year gap. Indeed, Chief Minister S.M. Krishna's promise that he would have a small and efficient Ministry, with political accountability as its watchword, had suggested that he would strike an independent path in the crucial matter of portfolio allocation. However, the final list shows that he has opted to play it safe by giving representation to various pressure groups. On the face of it, experience and capability do not seem to have been the guiding criteria.

After confabulations with the party leadership in Delhi, Krishna announced a 42-member Ministry, including 25 Cabinet Ministers, nine Ministers of State with independent charge and eight Ministers of State. Surprisingly, many of the senior and experienced leaders have not been given the portfolios best suited for them, while relative newcomers with unproven administrative skills have been allocated vital Ministries.

Despite the large size of the Ministry, the Chief Minister has chosen to keep the most important Ministries and civic bodies under his control. These include Finance, Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Information Technology, Energy and the Bangalore Development Authority, the Bangalore City Corporation, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board, the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority, and the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure and Finance Development Corporation. The significance of Krishna retaining the Finance Ministry under which falls the politically sensitive Excise Department, has not been missed. (Excise is a major source of revenue for the State. The liquor lobby in Karnataka has had a close relationship with politics and has been a major source of election funds for political parties.)

Senior Congress(I) Minister Mallikarjuna Kharge has been allocated the Home Ministry. Kharge, now in his seventh consecutive term as Member of the Legislative Assembly, was the Leader of the Opposition in the last House. He was a contender for the post of Chief Minister. M.Y. Ghorpade, another veteran Congressman, who represents the Sandur constituency in Bellary district, has been given Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, a portfolio he has held before. H.K. Patil, who was the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council and Textiles Minister in the Veerappa Moily Cabinet, has been allocated the important portfolio of Medium and Major Irrigation. K.H. Ranganath, who has won six times from the Hiriyur constituency and has wide administrative experience, has been given Forest, Ecology and Environment.

R.V. Deshpande, former Minister of Medium and Heavy Industry in the J.H. Patel government, has retained the same Ministry. Deshpande, who quit the Patel government to join Ramakrishna Hegde's Nava Nirmana Vedike, joined the Congress(I) well before the elections were announced. The allocation of this portfolio is seen as a reward for having joined the Congress(I) and as a recognition of his performance as a Minister. He has also been given Infrastructure Development, which was taken away from him when he was in the Patel Ministry.



SAGGERE RAMASWAMY

S.M. Krishna (left) being sworn in Chief Minister by Governor Khurshid Alam Khan in Bangalore.

THERE is some opposition from within the party to the allocation of Cabinet positions to R. Roshan Baig and Qamarul Islam, both last-minute "defectors" from the Janata Dal. While Baig has been given Tourism and Haj, Islam has been allocated Housing. Syed Yasin, son-in-law of former Union Minister C.K. Jaffer Sharief, who is leading the opposition, plans to submit a memorandum on this issue to the central leadership. (There are six Muslims in the Ministry, four of whom have Cabinet rank.)

The Primary and Secondary Education portfolio has been given to H. Vishwanath, who

Focus on development

Interview with S.M Krishna.

Chief Minister S. M. Krishna hopes to put the past behind him and work towards initiating a dialogue with his Tamil Nadu counterpart on the Cauvery question on the basis of shared concerns. "We are profoundly concerned about the plight of farmers in Thanjavur," he said in an interview he gave **Parvathi Menon** a few days after assuming office. Krishna also spoke about his government's other priorities. Excerpts:

▶ *You had said that your Ministry would remain small, efficient and accountable. But you have now chosen to have a 42-member Ministry. There is a perception that although the Ministry has a great deal of experience within it, there is a mismatch of portfolios and expertise.*

A small team need not necessarily be efficient and a bigger team need not necessarily be inefficient. Politicians are not experts. They are men with a general educational background. So the kind of mismatch that you are talking about is not well-placed. Secondly, I have drawn the best talent available in the Congress(I) Legislature Party. Many of them have been associated with government earlier. So I think that the general perception is that it is a good Ministry and that the distribution of portfolios in terms of regions and various other equations has been a good exercise.

▶ *You have kept a large number of key ministries with yourself. Will there be a reallocation of some of these?*

Well, the Chief Minister is the leader of the team and he chooses, depending upon the importance of the portfolio, what he should keep. As of now I feel that Finance and Power are very crucial portfolios and that I should keep them, apart from General Administration for which I am held responsible. I don't think a reallocation is warranted immediately.

▶ *There is the expectation that your government will take a fresh approach towards the settlement of the Cauvery dispute with Tamil Nadu. Hitherto governments have tried to look for solutions only during periods of crisis brought on by water scarcity.*

I have purposely raised the settlement of the Cauvery waters issue at this time, when the Krishnarajasagar dam is full and there is no anxiety in Mettur and Thanjavur. I think that the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu would be gracious enough to think in terms of talking things over with his Karnataka counterpart. We are both mature and experienced, and Mr. Karunanidhi is much more experienced in government than I am. So I have made a modest and humble suggestion that we meet and try to talk things over. But there is a Tribunal, we are stuck with it; there is the Cauvery River Authority, we are stuck with it. In spite of these, can we not sit together and look for areas of agreement?

For example, there are five or six hydel power units that can come up along the river in both States, if we both agree. Let us explore the possibilities of doing things together at least on the power front. After all they need power for their farmers and we for ours.

Let us start somewhere. We cannot go on fighting and suspecting each other. We are profoundly concerned about the plight of farmers in Thanjavur. They should also be concerned about what is happening in Mandya and Mysore and how much storage we have in the reservoirs. Anyway, given the goodwill on both sides we should be able to arrive at some settlement.

▶ *Some of your senior Ministers have said that you are planning to have senior civil servants and Ministers sit together and draw up a blueprint of what you plan for the next five years. What are likely to be the priority areas?*

Developmental issues are going to be our focus. We will pay special attention to rural health care, rural education and drinking water facilities. Task forces will be created in these areas. We have not talked much about them; they are not fashionable. If I say that I want to provide good drinking water, it does not catch the imagination of the people. If I talk about an international airport, it catches the imagination of lots of people. Look at the literacy situation. The emphasis has been lopsided. I am worried about the high dropout rate among the rural poor. I would like the literacy rate to go up to 80 per cent from the present rate of hardly 56 per cent. These are all alarming developments and we would like to address ourselves to them. ■

has little experience in handling this portfolio; he was in charge of Forests and Kannada and Culture earlier. Also, S Kumar Bangarappa, actor-son of former Chief Minister S. Bangarappa, a newcomer, has been made Minister of State with independent charge of Minor Irrigation, apparently following pressure from Bangarappa. Kagodu Thimmappa has been put in charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare, overlooking his controversial record as a senior Minister in the Bangarappa regime. A. Krishnappa, who has been elevated to Cabinet rank, has been given the unrelated portfolios of Animal Husbandry and Sugar.

Senior Congressman D.B. Chandre Gowda has been given the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs. The important Ministry of Higher Education has for some reason been clubbed with Science and Technology, and has been allocated to G. Parameswara, a relatively inexperienced legislator who has earlier been in charge of the Sericulture Ministry.

A.B. Maalakareddi, who has been given Health and Family Welfare, is well suited for this Ministry since he has headed it before. He is a former faculty member of the Gulbarga Medical College B.K. Chandrashekhar, the party's spokesman, has been made Minister of State with independent charge of the Ministry of Information and Publicity. Chandrashekhar joined the Congress(I) from the Janata Dal last year. He has a background in law, having taught at the Indian Institute of Management for several years and, more recently, at the National Law School of India University.

S.M. Krishna has given only a token representation to women. Of the four, only Mottama is a Minister of Cabinet rank. She gets the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, a Ministry that has, as an unwritten rule, been reserved for women by all governments. Rani Satish, a senior Congressperson with an excellent administrative record, has been made a Minister of State in charge of Prisons and Parliamentary Affairs (yet another example of clubbing unrelated portfolios under one Minister). The two other women Ministers of State are Uma Vasanth (Planning) and Nafees Fazal (Medical Education).

North Karnataka has been adequately represented and crucial portfolios have been allocated to Ministers from that region. These include the six key portfolios of Home, Irrigation, Industry Panchayati Raj, Public Works and Urban Development. ■

Politicking time in U.P.

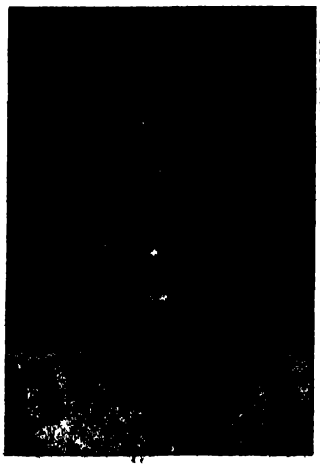
The BJP in Uttar Pradesh is in ferment, with personal and group equations and the balance of power, changing constantly.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

THE mood in the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh during the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections was one of despondency. Many BJP activists stated candidly that the party was in for an adverse verdict and that some post-poll developments could prove even more disastrous. Among the possible adversities they identified were the collapse of the BJP-led State government headed by Kalyan Singh and a split in the State unit of the party on the basis of caste identities.

The election results have borne out the first part of their prediction, but it is not clear yet whether the second part would also come true. It is, however, a fact that the party unit is in ferment. There have been swift developments in both Lucknow and Delhi. Personal and group equations within the BJP in the U.P. keep changing, and as a result the balance of power in the party has been alternating almost on a day-to-day basis.

The most dramatic of the shifts related to the equations between the Kalyan Singh-led backward classes group and the group in the central party organisation, led by Union Home Minister L.K. Advani. During the run-up to the polls, Advani and also Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, national president of the party Khushabhau Thakre, and Union Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi threw hints that Kalyan Singh would be replaced as Chief Minister after the elections. According to some followers of Kalyan Singh, the central leadership had even told the Chief Minister that Rajnath Singh, the State president of the party, would be the replacement. However, after the polls Advani has become Kalyan Singh's chief benefactor.



V. SUDERSHAN

Chief Minister Kalyan Singh.

During the election campaign the consensus in the national leadership was that replacing Kalyan Singh was the best way to strengthen the party in U.P. The leadership felt that upper-caste groups such as Brahmins, Thakurs and Banias were increasingly getting alienated from the BJP because of what they perceived as the pro-backward class actions of Kalyan Singh. In the Central leadership's perception, the upper-caste support base could be retained by replacing Kalyan Singh with Rajnath Singh, a Thakur, as Chief Minister. However, after the elections Advani and his close associates such as national general secretary K.N.Govindacharya find that the BJP is losing the support of not only the upper castes but also the backward classes. In their estimation, the erosion of backward class support has led to the party's defeat in at least 15 constituencies. They attribute the erosion mainly to the active campaign carried out against the party by Sakshi Maharaj, a former BJP member of Parliament who has turned a supporter of the Samajwadi Party (S.P.). The campaign influenced a large section of the Lodh Rajputs, traditionally BJP supporters. The Advani group reportedly told inner-party meetings that the BJP became a potent force in U.P. since the 1980s only by expanding its support base, beyond the upper castes and including the backward classes. The group sees Kalyan Singh as having been responsible for this to a great extent. Its leaders now fear that any hasty action might further alienate the backward classes.

The change in the Advani group's stand has created confusion in the national leadership of the party. Vajpayee and his supporters such as Jaswant Singh and Lalji Tandon, Urban Development Minister of the State, do not agree with the assessment. They want the party to go ahead with the pre-election plan of replacing Kalyan Singh.

These two opposite view-points gain the leadership's support alternately. Two days prior to the swearing-in of the Vajpayee Government, the Advani camp's line held sway and the leadership almost implemented its "revised formula for organisational changes in Uttar Pradesh". According to this formula, Kalyan Singh was to continue as Chief Minister but a representative of the upper-caste group would be given an important position in the Union Ministry. Rajnath Singh was tipped for this position, and he was all set to take over as a Minister of State with independent charge.

However, a section of the upper-caste lobby, led by Lalji Tandon, sabotaged this plan. A group of Tandon supporters, including Rajesh Pandey, Member of the Legislative Council, represented to Vajpayee against inducting Rajnath Singh into the Union Ministry "at this juncture". They argued in favour of a package deal for U.P. that would include organisational changes in the State party, besides the induction of one State representative in the Union Ministry in a key position. The group would not budge on its demand to replace Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister. Vajpayee gave in, and the invitation to Rajnath Singh to join the Union Ministry was withdrawn.

Kalyan Singh, who had welcomed the move to shift Rajnath Singh to the Centre, was apparently upset over the talk of a package deal. He demanded to know what the Central leadership planned for Uttar Pradesh. He told mediapersons on October 17, after a closed-door discussion with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue Nanaji Deshmukh, that there were several rumours about the central party leadership's action plan for U.P. and that that was not good for the party. He wanted the leadership to clarify its position. "Personally I am happy to be an ordinary worker of the party," he said, and added, "I am not looking for any position, whether of Chief Minister, Union Minister or Governor. I just want to be a disciplined soldier of the party."

This posture of "a disciplined soldier of the party" was, however, not lost on the leadership, including his detractors. The anti-Kalyan Singh lobby intensified its pressure tactics and floated the name of Public Works Minister Kalraj Mishra, a Brahmin, as a possible replacement to Kalyan Singh. In a show of strength, Mishra's supporters gathered at his residence about 100 MLAs belonging to the ruling coalition. The MLAs were ostensibly greeting the Minister on the eve of Dasara.

These developments have had a divisive impact on the BJP's allies such as the Uttar

Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC) and the Janatantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP). Indications are that while UPLC president Naresh Agarwal and seven Ministers support Kalyan Singh, the deputy leader of the legislature party, Amar Mani Tripathi, and seven or eight Ministers are with the anti-Kalyan Singh group. Similarly the dominant group in the JBSP, consisting of 12 MLAs, is reportedly opposed to the Chief Minister, while five Ministers belonging to the breakaway Kisan Mazdoor Bahujan Party (KMBP) support him.

Although Kalraj Mishra is the most prominent name to have emerged from the anti-Kalyan Singh group as a potential replacement as Chief Minister, other names too are in circulation, such as national secretary of the party Sangha Priya Gautam, Union Minister Santhosh Gangwar and Assembly Speaker Kesri Nath Tripathi. Gautham is a Dalit, and Gangwar belongs to a backward caste. Tripathi is seen as more experienced than Mishra, and he has greater popular appeal. Whatever the final result of these power games, governance has been the immediate casualty.

THE two principal rivals of the BJP in the State – the S.P. and the BSP – are making use of the confusion in the ruling party in their preparations for Assembly elections. Both S.P. president Mulayam Singh Yadav and BSP leader Mayawati have launched their campaign at the grassroots level with workers' meetings. The S.P. and the BSP, which have improved their strength in the Lok Sabha to 26 and 14 seats respectively from the 1998 tally of 20 and four, performed impressively in the Assembly segments. While the S.P. registered a lead in 129 Assembly segments, the BSP led in 88. The S.P. emerged as the single largest party in terms of leads in Assembly segments, pushing the BJP to the second spot. The BJP's allies led in 11 Assembly segments and the Congress(I)-Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) alliance in 58.

Meanwhile, the Congress(I) has revived its efforts to align itself with the BSP. According to the party's leadership, an alliance with the BSP is a winning strategy, especially in the context of the shift in upper-caste and Jat votes of the BJP towards the Congress(I) and the RLD. An alliance with the BSP would bring to the Congress(I)-RLD combine the Dalit vote bas of the BSP. By all indications, BSP pre dent Kanshi Ram is open to this idea alth ugh Mayawati is not. In Mayawati's pe ption the BSP will come within striki stance of power on its own with further support from Muslims. ■

■ POLITICS

Targeting the Pope

Sections of the Sangh Parivar fire salvos against the visit of Pope John Paul II to India scheduled from November 5 to 9.

V. VENKATESAN

"WE welcome the Pope's visit, but we oppose 'Churchianity'." This is how the position of the Samskriti Raksha Manch (Save Culture Forum), a Sangh Parivar outfit, on the visit of Pope John Paul II to India was enunciated by B.P.Singhal, Bharatiya Janata Party member of the Rajya Sabha and younger brother of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) president Ashok Singhal. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-VHP-Bajrang Dal combine, however, is grabbing every opportunity to make the visit controversial. The Pope's visit, in response to an invitation extended by I.K. Gujral when he was Prime Minister, is scheduled from November 5 to 9.

Although the RSS and the VHP have sought to use the papal visit as an occasion to attack Christianity, they have refrained from launching any formal protest at the national level, in view of the embarrassment such an action could cause to the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government. Apparently, they use the SRM as a cover. It was not surprising therefore when the SRM launched a "Dharma Jagran Rathyatra" from Panaji to Delhi on October 20. The rath yatra would pass through Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, before reaching Delhi immediately after the Pope's arrival. Sadhvi Rithambara, the VHP demagogue who launched the rath yatra at Rivadi, Goa, said that the Pope could visit India if he put an end to the induced conversions of Hindus to Christianity. She alleged that a mass conversion campaign organised by the Vatican under the "2000 and Beyond" programme was to be launched following the Pope's visit. The BJP and the government have both kept a distance from the Sangh Parivar propaganda but have not condemned it or stopped the rath yatra which is blatantly communal. Instead, the government appears to have bought peace with the Sangh Parivar by seeking from it an assurance that despite the sabre-rattling, things would not be allowed to go out of control before and during the Pope's visit. This explains why irrespective of its vicious campaign the RSS-VHP combine tries to clarify that it is not against the visit as such. B.P. Singhal, for instance, promised to restrain SRM activists who threatened to burn the Pope's effigies.

RSS general secretary H.V. Seshadri, addressing activists on the occasion of Vijayadasami in Nagpur, congratulated the Vajpayee Government on its electoral victory, thus identifying the Sangh's interests with those of the coalition government. Seshadri said that the Chinese and Sri Lankan governments had denied the Pope permission to visit their countries for fear that such a visit might give a fillip to religious conversions by Christian missionaries. "Since India has welcomed his visit, the Pope should reciprocate the gesture by not only following state protocol but declaring all religions as equal," he said.

Ashok Singhal stated that the VHP had no objection to welcoming the Pope as a guest as per age-old Hindu traditions. "It is even ready for a dialogue with him on contentious issues either here or in Rome," he said. However, he urged the Pope to tender an apology for what happened in Goa, Kerala and Vasai, where "Hindus were constantly subjected to harassment at the hands of Christians".

The SRM referred to the Goa Inquisition between A.D. 1567 and 1808, when "lakhs of Hindus were slaughtered and hundreds of temples destroyed", and claimed that the Pope had reportedly expressed his intention to apologise for this. However, a Church spokesman, Dr Dominic Emmanuel, denied the claim.

The SRM publicised its appeal to the Pope to recognise Hinduism as an institution and stop every type of assault on it. It stated that conversion by any method inevitably led to the destruction of traditions and uprooted deeply-held beliefs, resulting in social turmoil. Trying to make it appear as though the Pope is coming to India for proselytisation purposes, the



Janata Sangharsh Samiti activists protest against the Pope s visit, at the Red Fort, New Delhi, on October 22

coming to India as a pilgrim of peace fascinated by the culture and people of this land that he so profoundly loves therefore we should turn this into a celebration of our essential oneness and not allow vested interests to abuse it for promoting communal dissention and disunity

The Shankaracharya dismissed the fears that the Pope s visit would trigger conversions If we are so weak and vulnerable to accept conversions then we are to blame ourselves he said He advised persons who protested against the Pope s visit to work for the eradication of poverty and illiteracy He said it was not fair to ask the Pope to apologise for events that took place centuries ago he said one of the papal visit to welcome the Pope as he carries the message of love and peace

Meanwhile Dominic Emmanuel said that the Catholic Bishops Conference of India had been tipped off about intelligence reports including VHP and Bajrang Dal activists plan to intrude into gatherings to be addressed by the Pope by securing invitations in large numbers and raise slogans to disturb the meetings

The VHP s request for an appointment with the Pope has been turned down by the organisers who plan the Pope s engagements

POPE JOHN PAUL II arrives in New Delhi on the evening of November 5 On November 6 he will perform Mass in the Vatican Embassy chapel in the capital He will then meet President K R Narayanan at Rashtrapati Bhavan after a ceremonial welcome He also has meetings scheduled with Vice President Krishan Kant and Prime Minister Vajpayee After paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi s samadhi at Rajghat he will meet the bishops of the synod and promulgate the synod document at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi and make a speech On November 7 he will lead a Mass at the conclusion of special assembly of the Asian synod bishops In the evening he will meet representatives of various religions The Pope will leave for Georgia on the morning of November 9

The present Pope was in India for 10 days starting February 1 1986 when he visited several parts of the country ■

SRM warned that as per a Supreme Court ruling there was no fundamental right that allowed one to convert a person to one s own religion

The SRM is reluctant to call its propaganda a protest against the visit It does not even refer to the questions raised to the Pope as demands B P Singhal asked *Frontline* How can we demand something from our guest However much of the SRM s press releases addressed to the Pope use expressions such as the Pope ought to and the Pope must On October 22 the Janata Sangarsh Samiti a little known organisation allowed its activists in New Delhi to burn effigies symbolising religious conversion by Christian missionaries

The SRM urged the Pope to tell the Church in India that it cannot call itself a casteless or creedless entity if it continued to demand reservation for Dalit Christians A draft Bill to extend the reservation for the Scheduled Castes to Dalits among Christians is yet to be approved by the Cabinet and Parliament

THE CPI(M) demanded immediate steps to curb the Sangh Parivar propaganda The propaganda material which is being brought out by the VHP and other RSS outfits spew hatred against the Christian minority the party said and warned that it would damage the secular image of the country It is a sign of the changed circumstances that under the BJP led government hostile propaganda against a religious group is freely conducted the party observed Congress(I) leaders Rajesh Pilot and Ajit Jogi too condemned the campaign

While the Government and the BJP have failed to curb the anti Christian crusade opinion makers from various religious groups have acted Religious leaders from different communities who gathered on a common platform in New Delhi on October 21 hailed the papal visit Shankaracharya Swami Madhavanand Saraswati Maharaj of Puri Jagadguru Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Dr Mohinder Singh Jain Acharya Nagraj and Reverend Professor Valson Thampu appealed to all people to respond unitedly to this historic event in the true spirit of India s religious traditions all of which teach us to love and to treat one another with respect and dignity They urged the Government to ensure that due courtesies were extended to the Pope and that nothing that detracted from the spiritual significance of the visit be allowed to happen

Any discourtesy shown to the Pope will cause agony and embarrassment not only to the Christian community in this country but also to all well meaning people who care for basic human values they stated They also said that the Pope was

The burden of diesel price

The Government's decision to raise the price of diesel, which may be followed up with increases in the prices of kerosene and cooking gas, holds rather grim prospects for a substantial chunk of the population.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

HARDLY had polling for the 13th Lok Sabha been completed when the Bharatiya Janata Party-led caretaker government effected a hefty rise in the price of diesel. The timing of the announcement was crucial, coming as it did just after the elections, although such a proposal had been there since April when international diesel prices began to harden.

The price hike, the sharpest in recent times, is seen as a forerunner of what the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government has in store for the common man. Soon after assuming office, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha warned of tough measures on the economic front.

Not satisfied with the sell-out on the telecom migration package by the previous BJP-led government, the NDA now talks of second-generation reforms. The Disinvestment Commission is on the verge of being dismantled because the Government is in a hurry to sell the remaining public sector units without intermediation by the Commission. The Cabinet has already approved privatisation of the insurance sector. The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) is to be replaced with a much-diluted version, the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), while a Prevention of Money Laundering Bill that cannot prevent large-scale accounting jugglery and laundering of money siphoned off from corrupt deals is to be passed in the current session of Parliament.

THE ex-storage price of high speed diesel (HSD) has been increased from Rs.6,882.15 a kilolitre to Rs.9,634.60. With this, the retail sale price of diesel has gone up from Rs.10.35 to Rs.13.91 a litre in Delhi. It has gone up from Rs.11.27 to Rs.15.24 a litre in Chennai, from Rs.10.52 to Rs.14.20 a litre in Calcutta, and from Rs.12.23 to Rs.16.54 a litre in Mumbai.

The price increase has kicked up a storm, with the Opposition parties demanding a rollback of the hike. The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), a constituent of the NDA, has even threatened to pull out of the alliance if the hike is not revoked. In West Bengal, the Left Front has organised a State-wide protest against the hike.

From October 21, truckers all over the country went on an indefinite strike. By the fourth day of the strike, inflation – fuelled by higher freight costs as well as by hoarding – had begun to hurt the common man in a very bad way. The wholesale price index (WPI), which was just below 2 per cent in the beginning of October, was set to go up by 0.75 points by the Government's own admission. Chief Economic Adviser Shankar Acharya was reported to have confirmed that the hike in diesel price was likely to have a direct impact of about 0.8 percentage point. Considering the cascading effect, this might go up to 1 percentage point.

The Government claimed that it had set up a high-powered committee on prices, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, to handle the supply-side preparations to manage inflation in the coming months. According to the Government, even with the price increase, the oil pool account deficit will not be wiped out, although the rate of accumulation of deficit would slow down. In fact, it claimed that the financial year-end would witness a deficit of Rs.3,400 crores. In order to wipe this out, it is likely to increase the prices of kerosene and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as well. The Petroleum Ministry wants the subsidy on LPG brought down to 15 per cent of the import parity price. It has therefore proposed a hike of Rs.90 for a 14.5-kg LPG cylinder and Rs.2 for a litre of kerosene. Sources said that the Government may eventually settle for a lower quantum of hike – around Rs.40 a LPG cylinder and Rs.1.50 a litre of kerosene.

Raising the price of kerosene, predominantly the common man's fuel, has become inevitable because the greater the difference in the prices of kerosene and diesel, the higher the incentive to adulterate the latter with the former. The prognosis appears to be rather grim for a substantial chunk of the population, especially the middle and lower income groups. Bus fares have already gone up in many cities and towns – in some places by as much as 100 per cent.

According to reports, the oil pool account recorded a deficit of Rs.5,200 crores in end-September. The deficit comprised the claims of oil companies amounting to Rs.2,100 crores, the proceeds of oil bonds to be redeemed at Rs.385 crores, interest on bonds amounting to Rs.900 crores, miscellaneous claims of Rs.1,000 crores and a cash deficit on account of increases in international prices, amounting to Rs.815 crores. The Government claimed that the oil pool account deficit was set to increase by Rs.750-800 crores every month because of the prevailing trends in international oil prices.

By increasing the price of diesel, the Government hopes to raise Rs.6,600 crores during the October 1999-March 2000 period. M.S. Ramachandran, Executive Director of the Oil Co-ordination Committee, justified the increase on the grounds that otherwise the Government would not have been able to pay for crude imports. He said that prior to the increase, domestic diesel price had been pegged to the international diesel price prevailing in April. Since then the international price had gone up from $97.38 a tonne to $162.10 a tonne and therefore a revision in the price was long overdue, he explained

In 1997-98, the Government decided to dismantle the Administered Price Mechanism (APM) for petroleum products. The objective was to permit decanalisation of imports in many products and fix the prices for refined products on the basis of import parity up to the storage level. The process began with the deregulation of prices relating to naphtha, furnace oil, Low Sulphur Heavy Stock (LSHS) and bitumen. Motor spirit, LPG, aviation turbine fuel and kerosene continue to be under the APM. Diesel prices are periodically revised to bring them on a par with import prices.

The linkage to the international market was predicated upon the assumption that the benefits of declining crude prices could be passed on to the consumers. There were

few occasions since September 1997 when diesel prices were revised downwards. However, the current steep revision has been of a much higher magnitude than the previous reductions. Had the Government increased the price even as international diesel price had begun its climb, the impact would not have been huge. However, the BJP-led government shied away from taking such a tough decision at that time since it had its eyes set firmly on the elections.



Farmers protesting against the diesel price increase block the road with tractors near Parliament House in New Delhi.

Under the APM, diesel and kerosene had deliberately been priced low. This, however, led to distortions in the consumption pattern, with the two products finding applications even in areas where other fuels would normally have been used. In fact, it is estimated that the demand for diesel will go up to 52.5 million tonnes by 2001-2002, far ahead of estimates for other petroleum products. In 2001-2002, the demand for petrol is estimated to be 7.9 million tonnes, naphtha 7.2 million tonnes, kerosene 12.2 million tonnes and LPG 7.9 million tonnes. Diesel is used in gensets and pumpsets, apart from trucks, cars and locomotives. However, since diesel is purchased from retailers for use in gensets and pumpsets, it is virtually impossible to separate consumption figures for other applications from those for motor fuel.

Considering the fact that there is a huge demand for diesel cars even in the luxury segment, what prevents the Government from levying a one-time fee on diesel cars at the time of sale? The proceeds could be credited to the oil pool account. Currently, although diesel cars are priced higher than petrol-driven cars, the difference is being pocketed by automobile manufacturers, even as the Government continues to subsidise the fuel cost for the car owner. In fact, there is a suggestion that the Government levy a higher excise duty on diesel cars with the proviso that the amount so collected should be credited into the oil pool account. Evidently, these are tough measures that will not endear the Government to the powerful automobile lobby and the influential segment of automobile users.

The use of diesel gensets, especially by commercial establishments, has been on the rise, adding to the demand for diesel. Levying a higher excise duty on such gensets would have checked the pressure and kept diesel consumption within manageable limits. However, that would have antagonised the trader/shopkeeper lobby, the BJP's own, especially in the Capital. Therefore the Government has opted for the easy way out – putting the burden on the common man.

THE Railways have claimed that the diesel price increase will push up their fuel bill by Rs.678 crores for the year ending March 2000. P.V. Vasudevan, Financial Commissioner, Indian Railways, said: "With the February hike and the current 40 per cent hike, the Railways will be losing over Rs.600 crores in the next few months." He told *Frontline* that the truckers' strike had slowed down railway freight traffic. "Unless there are trucks to load and unload the goods wagons, how can we carry cargo?" he asked. Currently, the Railways account for 40 per cent of the cargo movement in the country. While Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee has said that she is against raising passenger and freight rates, there are indications that an increase in both freight tariffs and passenger fares is inevitable unless the Government makes up for the loss through budgetary support.

CURIOUSLY, Indian industry has welcomed the diesel price hike. Rahul Bajaj, president of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), said that the hike would help control the fiscal deficit in the long term, although he did concede that in the short term it would lead to inflationary pressures. The Associated Chambers of Commerce (Assocham) welcomed the price increase, saying that it came at the right time – when inflation was at its lowest. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has also welcomed the hike, which it believes will reduce the extent of cross-subsidisation in the fuel sector.

MEANWHILE, the truckers' strike continues, with both the Government and the truckers' associations sticking to their respective positions. The All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC), the apex body of various transport associations, claimed that over 22 lakh truck operators across the country were staying off the roads. The Delhi Transport Association claimed on October 22 that even tempos and mini-trucks that ferried essential commodities had gone off the roads. O.P. Aggarwal, AIMTC president, alleged that the Government had increased the truckers' permit fees, further aggravating inflationary trends. This claim was promptly rebutted by the Government.

According to reports, the truckers' strike paralysed the movement of goods. Maharashtra witnessed a partial strike, with some truckers' associations refusing to join the strike. Deputy Chief Minister Chhagan Bhujbal said that his government would consider invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) against the strikers. In some States, the governments themselves commissioned and operated trucks. The Uttar Pradesh Government instructed the District Magistrates to make appropriate security arrangements at important installations such as oil refineries, checkposts and railway stations to prevent the disruption of the transportation of essential commodities.

Chief Secretary Yogendra Narain said that the services of the U.P. State Roadways Corporation would be sought to tide over the difficulty. While the Delhi Government threatened the strikers with punitive action, in Andhra Pradesh, the strike virtually paralysed the movement of goods, leading Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, whose party is a constituent of the NDA, to request the Centre to withdraw the hike. In Tamil Nadu, the prices of essential commodities rose sharply.

Even as the truckers and the Government continued to test their respective strength, the hoarders had a field day. The casualty was the common man. ■

A question of justice

AYEAR ago when 18 year old British *au pair* Louise Woodward was found guilty by a court in the United States of the death of a child in her care there was a wave of outrage in Britain. The press and the public were convinced that she was innocent groups sprang up to lobby her case and money was collected for her defence. When she was eventually allowed to return to Britain she was received like a celebrity.

Earlier in October another British woman was found guilty by a US court of causing the death of a child who was in her care and has been sentenced to 25 years in jail. This time the conviction hardly created a ripple in the public consciousness. The media covered it perfunctorily only for a few days.

The reason for the difference in the treatment of the two cases is difficult to understand. The second woman Manjit Basuta is of Indian origin whereas Louise Woodward is English. Manjit Basuta is a Sikh who came to Britain from East Africa before moving on to the US.

Basuta moved to the US 10 years ago after her husband got a job in a communications company in San Diego. She ran a day care centre at their home in Carmel Valley San Diego. Her problems began last March after one of the children in her care 8 month old Oliver Smith died of head injuries. The prosecution claimed that she had shaken him violently and banged his head on the ground in a rage of frustration because he would not be lured off from watching a TV programme to have his nappy changed. Basuta denied this and her lawyers have said that the child must have suffered the serious head injury earlier. Her lawyers told the court that Oliver had been playing outside when he fell unconscious and that Basuta had rushed to try and revive him.

Basuta's relatives who live in Britain said they would appeal against the sentence. The family as well as Basuta's lawyers convinced there has been a mistrial and say that evidence crucial to her defence was not allowed to be placed before the court. Her lawyer Eugene Iredale described the sentence as an atrocity on justice.

The defence argued that the key prosecution witness Christine Cuillo a Guatemalan who had been working illegally in the US had changed her version several times. Initially she said that the child had fallen in the playground and hurt his head. Later she said that she had seen Basuta shake the child. Basuta's lawyers allege that she changed her story after she was threatened with deportation as an illegal immigrant.

The Mail on Sunday in an investigation said it had seen documents indicating that the boy's mother Audrey Amaral was prone to violence and that the child had been taken to hospital on an earlier occasion with injuries. The boy's father Albert Smith who is separated from his mother had reported to the police that he feared for his son's well being because of Audrey Amaral's unstable moods. *The Mail on Sunday* reported that Albert Smith had told the police that his former wife would shout at strike and shake the baby when he cried. These pieces of evidence were however not placed before the court.

Whether or not there has been a miscarriage of justice this case clearly brings out the difficulties that ethnic minorities and foreigners face in getting justice outside their own countries. This appears to be a particular problem in the US where trial by jury is common and it is difficult to get juries that are familiar with or sensitive to those perceived to be outsiders. ■

Thomas Abraham

Documentary evidence

A DOCUMENTARY on the death of 17 persons in Tirunelveli on July 23 1999 following police action on a procession of tea garden workers has once again brought to the fore the disturbing questions surrounding the event (*Frontline* August 13 and August 27 1999). If the gripping documentary in video format titled *Oru Nadhiyin Maranam* (The Death of a River) highlighted the brutal aspects of the sections of the police force the Tamil Nadu Government's angry response to its screening for an invited audience in Chennai on October 10 has raised issues concerning the freedom of expression and the right to information.

On July 23 the police descended on the procession taken out to press wage related demands of workers of the Manjolai tea estate in Tirunelveli district beat its participants with lathis and chased them into the Tamirabarani river. Seventeen persons including two women and a child were killed. The Government contended that they were drowned in the river the post mortem reports also recorded deaths due to drowning. Political parties and human rights organisations however alleged that the deaths were owing to police excesses. The Government ordered an inquiry by Justice S. Mohan a retired Judge of the Supreme Court. The inquiry commission has in three sittings received about 300 affidavits half of them from the police.

The documentary has enough in it to counter the Government's version. It includes footage from Nila TV, a Tamil satellite channel that is now defunct interviews with the injured poignant narratives by victims relatives and eyewitness accounts by processionists and their leaders.

A day after the screening I. S. S. Mani whose name figures in the credit titles of the film was arrested from his residence in Chennai and produced before a magistrate. He was remanded to 15 days custody. R. R. Srinivasan who directed and produced the film for Kanchanai Film Society Tirunelveli obtained anticipatory bail from the Madras High Court. According to the first information report (FIR) filed by the police the two persons along with the manager of a theatre complex that included the hall in which the film was screened have committed offences under various sections of the Cinematograph Act the Tamil Nadu Exhibition of Films on Television through Video Cassette Recorders and Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act 1984 and the Indian Penal Code. The FIR stated that the documentary had no censorship clearance was exhibited without a licence and contained scenes that intended inducing caste hatred affecting public tranquillity.

The police action was condemned by the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers Association the Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) human rights activists writers and media persons. They said that it showed the extreme intolerance of the state machinery and its attempt at muffling the voice of democracy. P. V. Bhaktavatsalam advocate and president of the Organisation for Civil and Democratic Rights (OCDR) said that no government permission was needed to screen video documentaries. Srinivasan said that it was a private screening arranged by film societies including the Kanchanai Film Society. ■

S. Viswanathan

Supreme Court strictures

THE Supreme Court has expressed its unhappiness with Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) leader Medha Patkar and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy for knowingly making comments on pending proceedings and for disobeying interim injunctions issued by the court. However, the court chose not to initiate contempt proceedings against them supposedly in view of the importance of the rehabilitation effort for people displaced by the Narmada Project which the judiciary has been overseeing for some years now.



Medha Patkar.

The Supreme Court gave its ruling on October 15 on a petition filed by the Gujarat Government which drew attention to the writings and comments pertaining to an interim judicial order permitting the raising of the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam. The court initiated contempt proceedings on July 22. But in a final ruling, Chief Justice A.S. Anand held that "in the larger interest" it may not be appropriate to pursue the matter any further. The Chief Justice did hold out an admonition to the NBA and its leader that they desist from acting in a manner which has the tendency to interfere with the due administration of justice or which violates the injunctions issued by this court from time to time.

The comments that attracted judicial anger were apparently made through interviews and press releases after the court permitted an increase in the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam to 85 metres. The court also expressed displeasure over what it termed the "distorted writings" in Arundhati Roy's extended essay "The Greater Common Good" first published in *Frontline* dated June 4, 1999. It held that whatever may have been the motive, the author had obviously decided to use her literary fame to misinform the public and project a totally incorrect picture of how the Supreme Court had dealt with the issue of resettlement and rehabilitation of people displaced by the dam.

Having said so much, the court chose to disavow any undue sensitivity on its part towards fair or outspoken comment on its judgments and orders. This tolerance did not, however, extend to deliberate distortions of the court's order or attempts to give them a particular slant in the public understanding.



Arundhati Roy

The NBA has chosen not to react to the strictures. That is perhaps the prudent course since its writ petition seeking a direction to the various State governments to implement the tribunal award on the resettlement of dam oustees will be heard on November 1.

On the part of the Supreme Court, the decision not to invoke the power of contempt must be deemed an act of prudence. Contemporary notions of the power of contempt tend to view the freedom of expression as primary with the judiciary's power to abridge this right restricted to instances when the ends of justice are at stake ("Questions of contempt", *Frontline*, October 8, 1999). The ends of justice, needless to say, are not congruent with the reputation of an individual judge or even a collectivity of judges. Neither the ends of justice nor the integrity of the judiciary is preserved in any way through shielding judges from the glare of public scrutiny. ■

T.K. Rajalakshmi

King of cyberchess

A WORLD war waged across 64 squares and countless communication lines ended last fortnight with the reigning monarch of chess proving yet again – in somewhat controversial circumstances – that he is the undisputed King of The World.

On October 22 world champion Gary Kasparov (36) defeated a World Team of Internet chess players after a four month battle on a game zone Web site hosted by Microsoft, the global software giant. In the encounter, an experiment sponsored with the aim of popularising cyberchess, Kasparov considered the greatest player ever, took on the World Team, an online community of chess players. For each of Kasparov's moves, anyone who logged on at the game zone could vote over a 24-hour period, on a variety of countermoves suggested by a panel of four young Grand Masters. The move which proved the most popular was played, to which Kasparov would respond 24 hours later. Over the four months, the site hosted 3 million visitors from more than 75 countries.



GAMMA

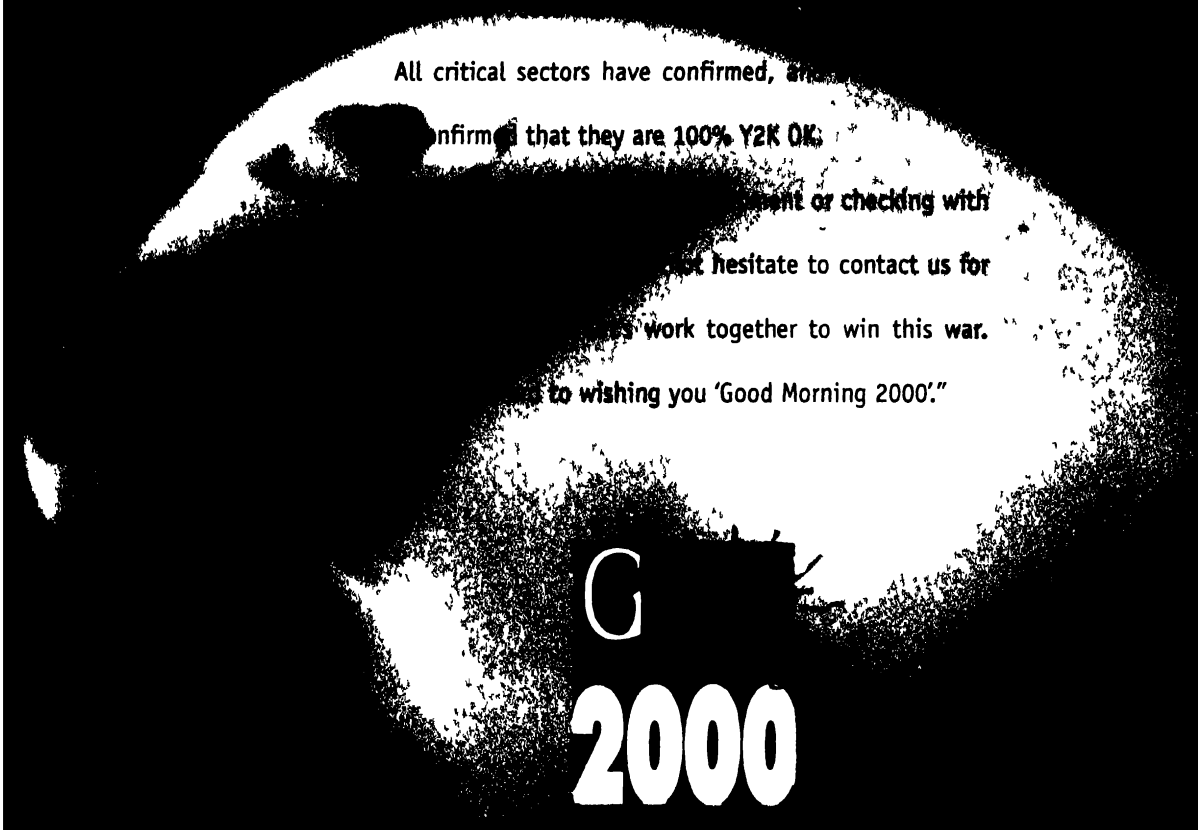
The event was Kasparov's first public match-up with computer technology since the Russian Grand Master was defeated by Deep Blue, a supercomputer designed by the techno-behemoth IBM (*Frontline*, May 30, 1997). The high on hype ended off was however a public relations fiasco for Microsoft which faced accusations that it had mishandled a move by the World Team. On Move 58 with the game poised for an exciting finish the game zone did not post a move recommended by U.S. women's chess champion Irina Krush (15) who was one of the four analysts for the World Team. Microsoft claimed that her recommendation sent by e-mail had been received late owing to a server error. Some analysts believe the move may have forced a draw but without her input and analysis the World Team settled for a weaker move. Outraged chess buffs registered their protest by opting overwhelmingly for a suicidal (but legal) move on their next turn. However, seeking to avert negative publicity, Microsoft disqualified that move, claiming that the vote was rigged and posted a move of its own. But by then the game was up. On Move 62 the World Team, facing certain defeat, conceded the match.

The controversy aside, the experiment showed up the vibrancy – and the limitations – of e-collaboration. The collective mental faculties of millions of players worldwide sustained a high quality of play that broke new ground in chess theory. In the end, however, one man's mastery triumphed over a democratic army's cumulative might. ■

V. Venkatesan

"India is winning the war against the Y2K Bug."

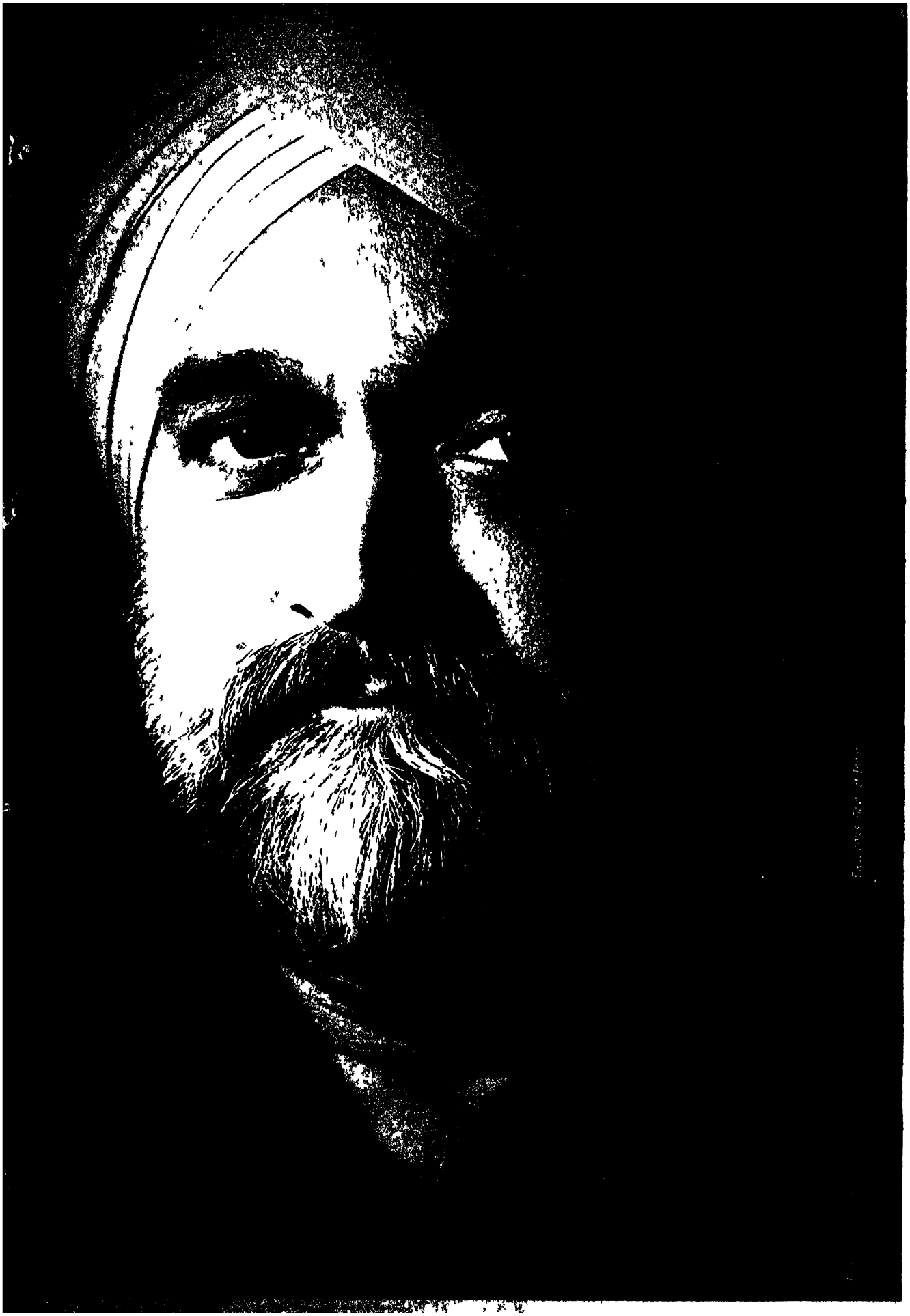
– Montek Singh Ahluwalia, *Chairman, Y2K Action Force*



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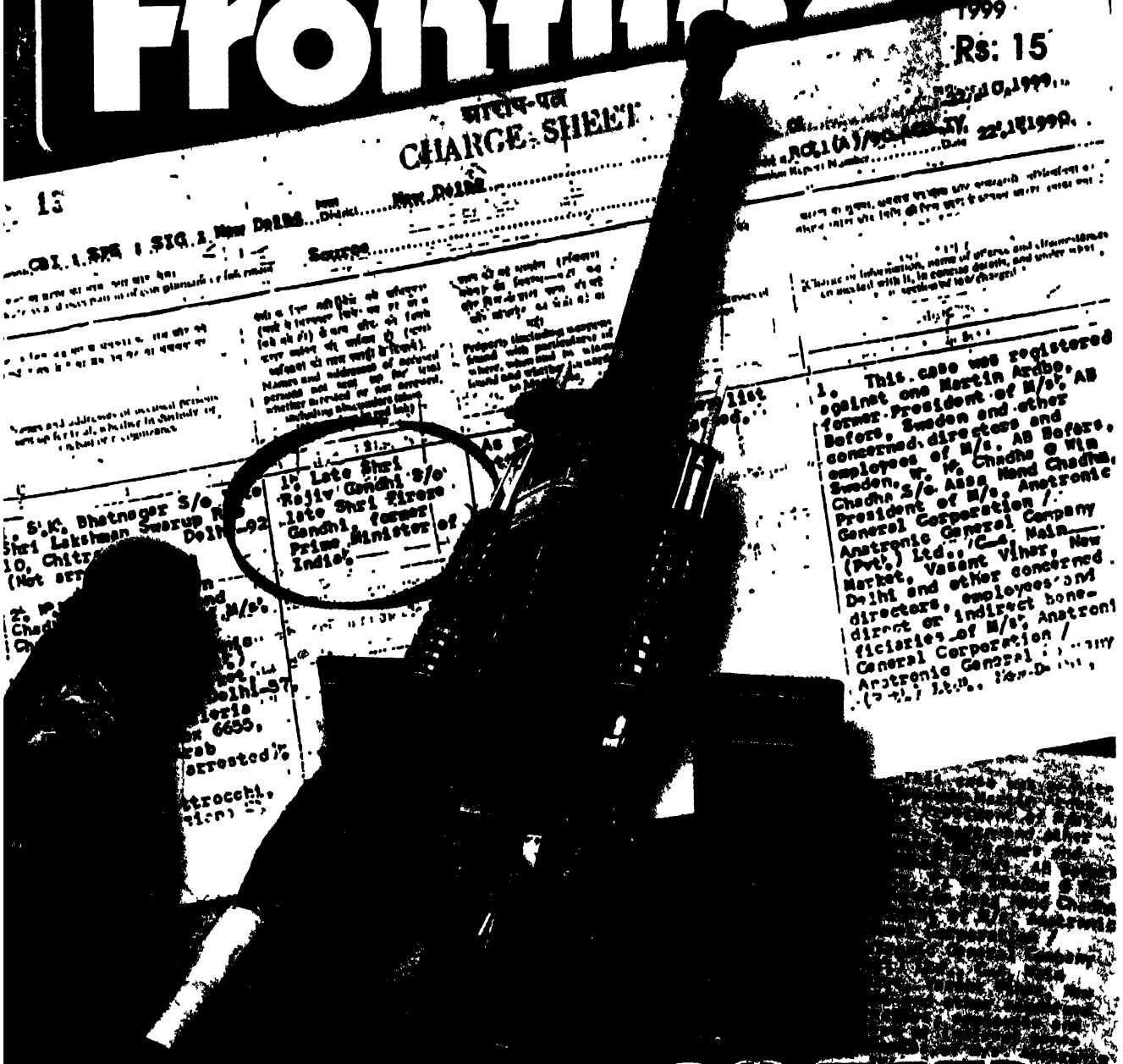
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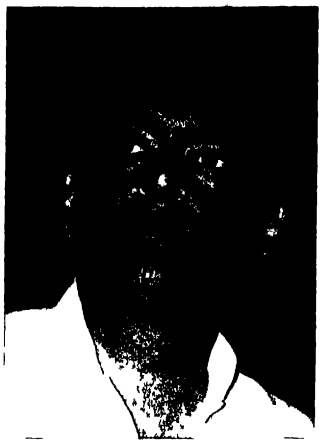
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Frontline





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THE BOFORS TRIAL

As India's most explosive case of political corruption in recent years goes on trial, an examination of the state-of-play and the prospects.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

AFTER a brief interval dominated by political grandstanding, the charge-sheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Bofors payoffs case came up before Special Judge Ajit Bharihoke in New Delhi on November 3. The first hearing, a much-awaited media event, turned out to be anti-climactic. The Judge merely asked to be shown the originals of all the documents that the CBI had cited as evidence in the most explosive case of political corruption in recent years.

Following a scrutiny of the 213 documents appended to the charge-sheet, Judge Bharihoke decided the following day that there was "sufficient prima facie material on record to proceed against the accused". The court proceeded to issue summons to three of the four individuals listed as accused: Martin Ardbo, former chief executive of A B Bofors, Sweden, S K Bhatnagar, former Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, and W N 'Win' Chadha, the long-serving agent for the arms manufacturer in India, were directed to appear before the court on December 13. Also summoned was the Swedish company itself, now known after a series of corporate takeovers, by the relatively uncontroversial name of Celsius, and represented in judicial proceedings by its chief executive.

The court also issued a fresh non-bailable warrant for the arrest of Ottavio Quattrocchi, the Italian businessman whose involvement is proving the greatest political liability for the Congress(I) and its leader. The Judge observed pointedly that the accused had early this year been granted provisional immunity from arrest by the Supreme Court to come to the country from his exile in Malaysia and assist the CBI in its investigations. The opportunity had been squandered, making the issue of a fresh arrest warrant unavoidable.

Appropriately enough for an investigation that has stretched over nine years and run the gauntlet of the judicial systems in India and Switzerland, the CBI has marshalled a voluminous body of evidence for the prosecution. In the reconstruction of the steps that led to the award of the contract for the Indian Army's purchase of 155 mm howitzer guns from A B Bofors, the role of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is crucial. It is on account of this compelling requirement of logical closure that the CBI has included Rajiv Gandhi's name as an accused. In conformity with established procedure, his name is featured in Column 2 of the charge-sheet, as an accused not being sent up for trial because he is dead.



The Bofors FH 77B weapons system in action in Kargil.

"It may well have been a viable strategy for those who are anxious to protect the aura of the former Prime Minister and president of the Congress(I) to keep their criticism on a low key and allow the process of law to take its course. But this manner of sobriety has been conspicuously absent in the reactions of the Congress(I) and its partisans. First off the mark was Kapil Sibal, the Congress(I) MP who served all through the recent election campaign as the party's principal spokesman. Allowing partisan passions to get the better of his legal acumen, Sibal pronounced initially that there was simply no precedent for a dead individual being named as an accused in a criminal trial.

This bungled reading of judicial precedent served as the underpinning for the Congress(I)'s initial vituperations on the issue. The bubble was rather rudely deflated by Minister of State Arun Jaitley, speaking for the Government in the Lok Sabha. Two rather well-known precedents were cited, familiar to anybody with

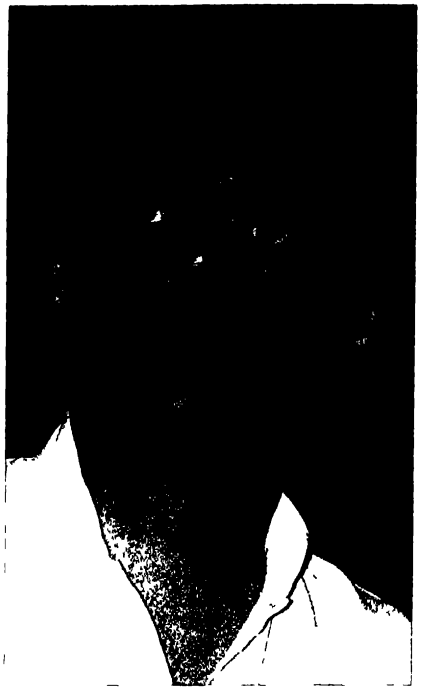
even a passing knowledge of the law – the indictment of Beant Singh in the Indira Gandhi assassination trial and the inclusion of the name of the "human bomb" Dhanu in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case charge-sheet.

The offensive having all too predictably gone askew, the Congress(I) adopted a new strategy. It was not appropriate for a junior Minister who was not yet a member of either House of Parliament to respond to their concerns on an issue of such gravity, claimed Congress(I) spokespersons. The matter warranted an intervention from the Prime Minister himself, they said.

Discretely though, the Congress members had, even while raising this clamour, withdrawn the notice for a discussion on the Bofors matter in both Houses of Parliament. This showed an infirmity of conviction that the Government was quick to capitalise on, meeting the continuing tumult in the Congress(I) benches with the simple assertion that a full-fledged discussion could be scheduled without any delay. Expectedly, the forceful statement of this position by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee had a noticeably sobering effect on some irrepressible elements within the Congress(I).

Logical consistency continued to be at a severe premium in the main Opposition party. In one of many interventions on the issue, the Congress(I)'s deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Madhavrao Scindia said: "Let the Government not determine what the course of the law should be." Curiously, this bore a close resemblance in its spirit to Arun Jaitley's statement that "it would be a sad day" if governments were to influence criminal investigations and decide who should be charged and on what counts. Aware of this uncomfortable symmetry, Scindia's voluble colleague in the party, Mani Shankar Aiyar, took a different approach: "We wish to know whether government will delete his (Rajiv Gandhi's) name. This is our demand and we insist upon it."

The crowning performance came from Sonia Gandhi, Congress(I) president and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Rising to support the motion of thanks for the President's address to Parliament, she took a quick detour to denounce the inclusion of her late husband's name in the charge-sheet. The Government, she said, had acted "maliciously and vindictively" in bringing forward charges against an innocent man without a shred of evidence. To have dragged the honour of a dead man in the mud was simply "despicable", she said.



V. SUDERSHAN

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

STANDING in for an indisposed Prime Minister, Home Minister L.K. Advani caused a minor flutter when he opened his reply to the debate with the assurance that he would give due consideration to the sentiments voiced by the Leader of the Opposition. Was he being correct and courteous in seeking to assuage Sonia Gandhi's deeply felt anguish? Or was he giving the first hint that the Government was prepared to yield on the Bofors issue in order to secure the Congress (I)'s cooperation in the ambitious legislative agenda that it had framed? The speculation did not proceed very far before it was scotched by a number of fairly decisive assertions

The Government had no authority under the law to intervene in a criminal prosecution, said Ram Jethmalani, Minister for Law, shortly after the brief session of Parliament had ended. He followed this up with a witheringly pejorative reference to Sonia Gandhi's level of knowledge of the law.

A definitive statement of the official view came on November 5, when the Delhi High Court took up a petition by a private advocacy group – the Rajiv Gandhi Ekta Samiti – pleading for the deletion of the former Prime Minister's name from the charge-sheet. Appearing for the Government, Additional Solicitor-General S.R. Jaisinghani pleaded for the dismissal of the petition on the grounds that it lacked merit. His plea was seconded by senior counsel N. Natarajan, who appeared on behalf of the CBI. Clearly unconvinced of the *locus standi* of the petitioners, the High Court deferred hearings till November 18, in order to provide them an opportunity to establish how Rajiv Gandhi's indictment impinged on their rights.

BRIEFLY put, the charge-sheet makes out a case of undue favours being done to the Swedish arms manufacturer in return for pecuniary advantages of a precisely quantified magnitude. These illicit remittances were received in Swiss bank accounts opened in the names of A.E. Services Ltd and Svenska Inc., which were front organisations for Quattrocchi and Chadha. This was a clear breach of a contractual undertaking given by the arms vendor to the Indian Government to eliminate all middlemen and avoid commission payments.

In itself, this may constitute a case for prosecution under the law of contracts. It does not yet amount to a case of criminal conspiracy. That essential linkage is provided by Section 5(1)(d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, which is cited by the CBI in its charge-sheet. The Section reads as follows: "A public servant is said to commit the offence of criminal misconduct if he, by corrupt or illegal means or otherwise abusing his position as public servant, obtains for himself or for any other person any valuable thing or pecuniary advantage..." It is not necessary, in other words, to prove that a public servant has directly benefited from a transaction. To hold him or her liable for prosecution, it is sufficient to know that he or she has contributed to the illicit enrichment of "any other person".

At the present level of knowledge, Rajiv Gandhi's role in the Bofors scandal did not involve a direct pecuniary gain for himself. This point was made amply clear through an intervention by Joginder Singh, former Director of the CBI, who oversaw the crucial phase of investigations that has led directly to the ongoing prosecution. It is not essential for a viable case, in his estimation, to prove that Rajiv Gandhi directly received any of the monies paid out by Bofors. There is, rather, ample scope to indict him for his various acts of "omission and commission".

The charge-sheet makes out a case that Rajiv Gandhi went out of his way to ensure that Bofors was awarded the contract for the howitzer deal before March 31, 1986, which was the cut-off point beyond which A.E. Services' contractual entitlements to a part of the Bofors commissions would

Setting out the legal rationale

Arun Jaitley, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, has been the principal spokesman for the Government on the Bofors issue in the Lok Sabha. Though prudently emphasising that the matter does not fall within his ministerial charge, he was willing to offer some comments on it as a lawyer. Following are excerpts from an interview he gave **Sukumar Muralidharan** on November 8:

▶ *Could you elaborate on the rationale behind the inclusion of Rajiv Gandhi's name in the charge-sheet?*

In India, we have now developed a system where you have independence of investigating agencies. By this I mean, it is the police officer and the investigating agency who have functions under the Criminal Procedure Code to perform. It is no part of the obligation of the political government of the day to interfere in the investigative process. The administration of the police and the CBI can be functions of the State and Central governments respectively. But the investigative functions of those agencies have to be completely independent. In fact, there is a famous line in a British judgment which says that no Minister of the Crown can ever tell an officer of the law whom to charge-sheet or whom not to charge-sheet. In India, we have followed this principle. Our Supreme Court has reiterated it in the hawala and the fodder scam cases.



▶ *You had given some explanations on the logic underlying the inclusion of Rajiv Gandhi's name.*

I am not arguing for the CBI, but as a former lawyer I can understand the legal rationale. First, under Section 173, the pro forma under which a charge-sheet is filed is prescribed by the CrPC. Column 2 speaks of accused who are not being put up for trial. It is past practice that the CBI continuously follows, that when a particular person may have been involved in an offence, but is either absconding or has died, his name is not put up for trial. Whatever practice or precedent has been applied to any deceased accused in the past has been followed in this case. It would be a very bad precedent to change that practice merely because a person is politically influential.

I gave the illustrations of Beant Singh and Dhanu. In the St. Kitts case, A.P. Nanday has been named in column 2. Now I am very sad to say that an argument has been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition that we are comparing her late husband to Beant Singh and Dhanu. This is wrong. Nobody is comparing the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi to those people.

▶ *You made a point that it is necessary to include the name in order to sustain the charge-sheet. Could you explain?*

This case can go in three stages. It can be a case of bribery, or of abuse of position by a public servant to benefit a third party, or it can be a case of destroying or covering up evidence. In a conspiracy case, the principle of evidence is very clear under Sections 8 and 10 of the Evidence Act. Each accused person or each conspirator is bound by the acts of the others. Each is answerable for the actions of the others, because they are all done in pursuance of the common intention.

In a corruption case, the central figure is the public servant. The conspiracy revolves around him. Assuming that the allegation is that a public servant has abused his position to grant pecuniary advantage to a third person, can you only prosecute the third person without naming the public servant? If there is no public servant, the Prevention of Corruption Act itself would fall. And the central figure in this case is the man who took all the decisions, the man to whom Quattrocchi was close.

▶ *There could be a certain reservation in the public mind because there is no evidence yet that Rajiv Gandhi was a recipient of the illicit payoffs. Secondly, he is no more and if it is necessary to name him to sustain the charge-sheet, there could be some sympathy for the view that the charges have abated.*

These are three different points. The first is, what is the direct evidence that the money was passed on to Rajiv Gandhi? It is a matter of individual culpability. The matter is before the court and it is not fair for me or anybody to comment on it.

But let me clarify on a matter of law. Under the PCA, bribery is not the only act of corruption. Section 13(1)(d) of the Act says that if a public servant abuses his position to cause pecuniary advantage to a third person, then he is independently liable. Money may or may not have reached him.

Finally, since Rajivji was a former Prime Minister and the leader of a very important party, should he at all be named in the charge-sheet? Well, in law, there is only room for evidence, there is none for sentiment. In another branch of law, can a person say that I am a very good social worker, so the bank should not file a case for recovery of dues against me? And here, because Shri Rajiv Gandhi is dead, he has not been charge-sheeted, he will not be put up for trial, no evidence against him will be led, no charges against him will be framed. He is named in column 2 because the legal requirement of the case is that evidence relating to his conduct will be led against the other accused. In a conspiracy case, you cannot break the links in the chain of events.

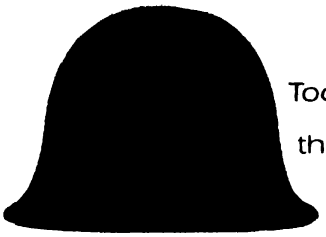
▶ *What about the argument that in the Baroda dynamite case, the government did intervene to have a name deleted from the charge-sheet?*

This is again based on two incorrect surmises. Under Section 321 of the CrPC, the public prosecutor alone can move an application for withdrawal of a case. The government can only advise the public prosecutor, who will not be bound by this advice and would have to apply his mind independently. In this case, there is no prosecution against Shri Rajiv Gandhi. So Section 321 does not come in at all.

Secondly, one of the considerations for withdrawal is that it is in the public interest to do so. If after 13 years of investigations and breaking through the secrecy of the Swiss banking system, you have made a breakthrough in a case which shook the conscience of Indian society, the public prosecutor cannot possibly stand up and say that I want to withdraw prosecution. I think that would be the grossest misuse of the provision. ■

THE UNTOLD STORY...

OF AN UNKNOWN PEACE-KEEPER



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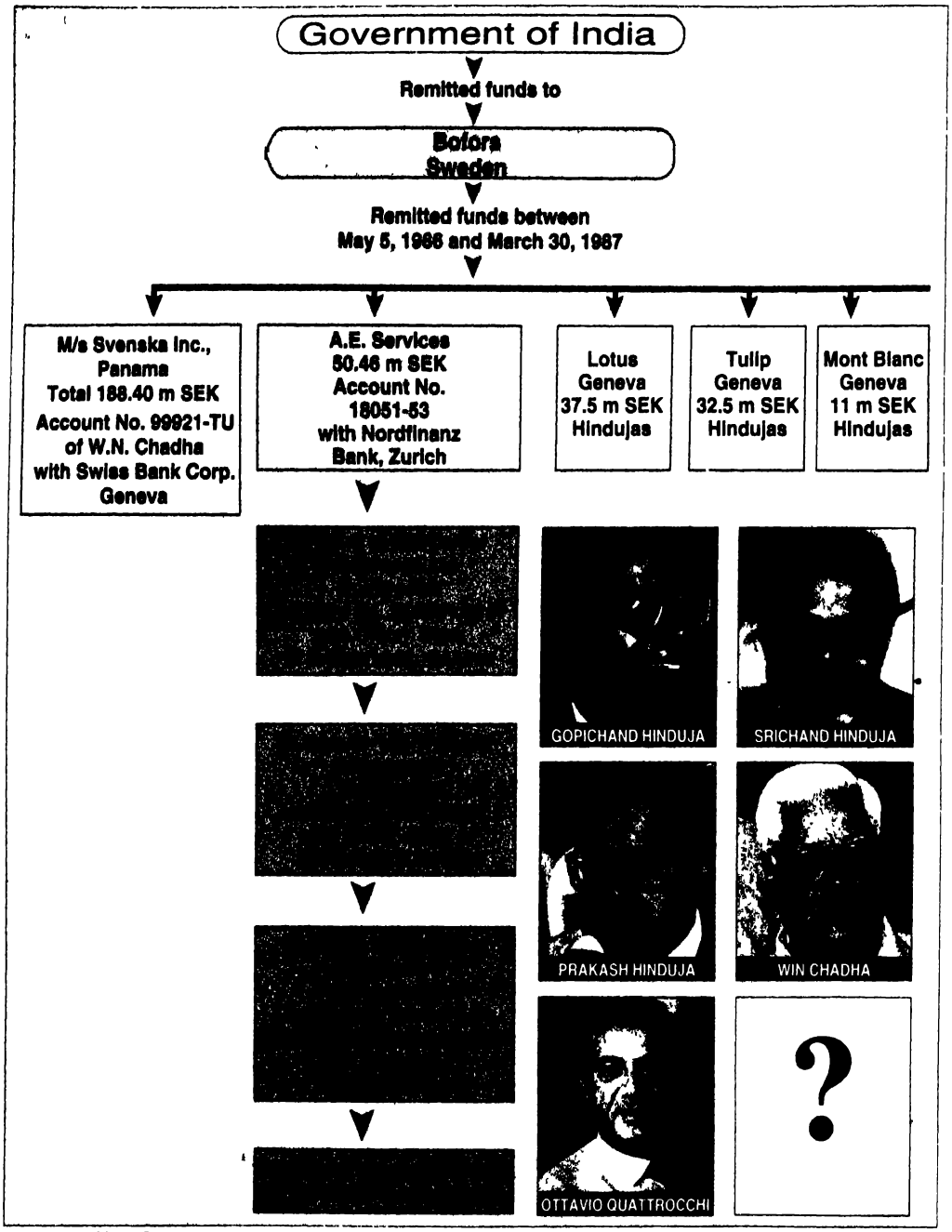
Ordnance Factory Board

Ministry of Defence, AYUDH BHAWAN
10A, Shaheed Khudiram Bose Road, Calcutta 700 001

The force behind our armed forces

ITA 4014 99

Flow of funds



m - million; SEK - Swedish kronor

Source: CBI charge-sheet

cease. In order to do this, he applied an arbitrary guillotine on the competing bid by Sofma of France. Bids from both the principal contenders were being continually received from January 1986. On March 11, Bofors submitted what would be its final offer. Without any further deliberation, the negotiating committee in the Ministry of Defence decided on March 12 to issue a Letter of Intent to the Swedish vendor for the purchase of the guns. The matter went through five tiers of official approval and three Ministers on a single day, before it was approved by Rajiv Gandhi in his capacity as Minister for Defence on March 14.

IF this shows an undue interest in awarding the contract to Bofors, Rajiv Gandhi's conduct after the Swedish Public Radio blew the lid on the scandal in April 1987 betrays an obsessive concern with suppressing the truth. India's Ambassador to Sweden, B.M. Oza, had advised the government to disregard Bofors' disclaimers and instead wait for a final pronouncement from the Swedish official investigation. This eminently sensible proposal was overruled by Rajiv Gandhi, who instead directly conveyed his inclination to accept Bofors' denial to his Swedish counterpart and sought to dissuade him from pursuing the official investigation.

As Defence Secretary, Bhatnagar too partook of the attempt to obscure the truth, suppressing the considered professional evaluation of the Chief of the Army Staff, General K. Sundarji, that the threat of cancelling the howitzer contract would rapidly bring Bofors around to naming the beneficiaries of its commissions, while not impinging too seriously on the country's defence preparedness. Gen. Sundarji's suggestion, which was endorsed by the Minister of State for Defence, Arun Singh, elicited a hostile – indeed, almost hysterical – reaction from Rajiv Gandhi.

To add to all this, the CBI is learnt to have gathered a mass of evidence on the kind of contacts that existed between Quattrocchi and the Rajiv Gandhi family. These include evidence on the movements of two cars belonging to the Italian businessman, which points to the ease of access he enjoyed to the prime ministerial household. Five photographs, one of them a "group photograph", have also been cited as evidence of this proximity. Then again, 10 of the 83 witnesses listed by the prosecution are employees – both past and present - of Snamprogetti, the Italian fertilizer-related conglomerate that Quattrocchi represented for close to a quarter century in India.

Since the first information report (FIR) in the Bofors case was filed in January 1990, the prosecution effort has withstood judi-

cial tests of extreme severity. These began with the maladroit effort by an individual of uncertain credentials to obtain the quashing of the FIR during the Chandra Shekhar Government's tenure. With the enforcement authorities wavering in their resolve, the Delhi High Court then gave a ruling which could have seriously debilitated the investigative effort. It took the intervention of the Supreme Court to restore a sense of propriety to the handling of the matter.



Martin Ardbo, former chief executive of A.B. Bofors.

Still more severe tests were inflicted during the P V. Narasimha Rao Government's tenure. If the Bofors investigation has progressed now to the stage of trial, this is a testament to its inherent robustness and to the sense of purpose with which it has proceeded To invoke mawkish sentimentality to subvert the process of law at this stage would be a rude affront to the basic principle of democratic accountability.

THE immediate prospects are that the trial will encounter continuing intransigence by the accused With the exception of S.K. Bhatnagar, all the other accused are in exile. Neither Quattrocchi nor Chadha is likely to return voluntarily to cooperate with the prosecution. As for Ardbo, he has expressed his disinclination to involve himself any further in the case. In this matter he has won the support of the Swedish Justice Ministry, which has ruled out the possibility of any citizen of that country being extradited for trial elsewhere. There is a possibility held out by the Ministry, though, of Ardbo subjecting himself to judicial cross-examination in Sweden.

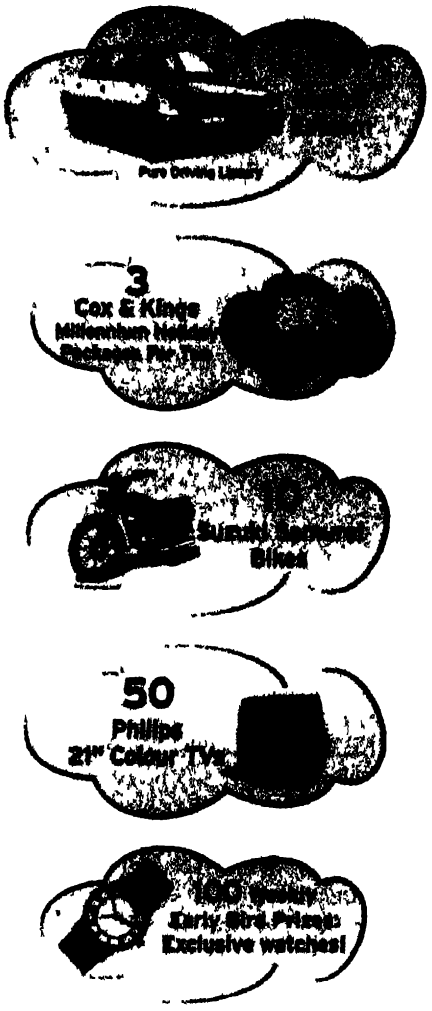
When the trial reopens on December 13, it is likely that the Judge will have only one of the accused – Bhatnagar – before him. The Judge will then have to decide whether to provide another opportunity to the absentees or declare them absconders. need to be explored with Malaysia in the case of Quattrocchi and the United Arab Emirates in the case of Chadha. An extradition treaty was recently signed between India and the UAE, while Malaysia is obliged to extend cooperation under a Commonwealth agreement on mutual assistance in criminal matters.

MEANWHILE, two more fronts are also expected to open up in the near future. The first could see the charge-sheeting of Madhavsinh Solanki, former Union Minister for External Affairs. Consent for prosecution under the Prevention of Corruption Act has been received from the appropriate quarters. Formal charge-sheeting is now expected to be only a matter of time.

The second front, though, could be the more consequential one. The Swiss Federal Councillor is considering a final appeal against the transfer of documents pertaining to another set of bank accounts where funds from the Bofors payoffs were parked. It is widely known that the appellants in this case are the Hinduja brothers – Gopichand, Srichand and Prakash – enormously influential financiers of Indian descent settled in London. They have lost their case at three levels of the Swiss judicial hierarchy and taken recourse to a rarely used clause of law to appeal to a quasi-ministerial functionary in the federal government. The CBI expects a decision in its favour and could proceed with preparing charge-sheets once these documents are received.

The political sensitivities that are likely to be bruised in *l'affaire* Bofors are many. As of now, it is only the Congress(I) that is feeling the heat. But the Hindujas are known to have been extremely catholic in scattering patronage. For the Bharatiya Janata Party, will proceeding on this front involve shredding up some of the IOUs it may have accumulated during its relentless push for power? ■

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KNOW YOUR BOFORS

The facts, the issues, and what lies ahead.

N. RAM

THE long-drawn-out Bofors drama has reached a legally and politically interesting stage. The Central Bureau of Investigation has concluded its investigation in the main and filed charge-sheets against five of the accused in the bribery case registered in 1990. They are S.K. Bhatnagar, former Defence Secretary; Ottavio Quattrocchi, wheeler-dealer and "close family friend" of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi; W.N. ('Win') Chadha, Bofors' longstanding agent in India; Martin Ardbo, former president of A.B. Bofors; and A.B. Bofors (which now goes by the name of Celsius). In striking contrast to the official stance during the prolonged cover-up of the Bofors scandal, Column 2 of the charge-sheet includes the "late Rajiv Gandhi" himself as an accused who cannot be sent up for trial for obvious reasons. If charges have not yet been laid against the three Hinduja brothers, G.P., Prakash and Srichand, who find mention in the document as co-conspirators and recipients of Bofors payoffs, the indications are that a charge-sheet will be filed against them once the final set of bank documents – sought by the CBI from Switzerland and blocked by the brothers through dogged legal manoeuvres – are in hand.

With Judge Ajit Bharihoke of the Special Court for CBI cases taking cognizance of the charge-sheet, recording the opinion that "there is sufficient prima facie material on record to proceed" against the five accused parties, and directing issue of a non-bailable warrant against Quattrocchi and summons against the other four, the Bofors drama has entered a stage that could prove politically damaging for the Congress(I) and its president, Sonia Gandhi. In October-November 1999, she put her party in an unenviable position by requiring it to defend the indefensible, thus making it hostage to Bofors once again. This attitude is very much in line with the famous official response of the Rajiv Gandhi government, in April 1987, to the original bribery charges that surfaced in the Swedish media: "false, baseless and mischievous."

With Sonia leading from the front and proclaiming in Parliament that her party "shall not tolerate the framing of an innocent man who is not in a position to defend himself", loyal camp-followers have been reduced to twisting the documented facts ludicrously and denying the crux of the criminal case in a confused, shrill, almost hysterical way. One camp-follower has even put out a new line that Rajiv Gandhi, who was squeaky clean on Bofors, might have been the victim of a 'sting' set up by Quattrocchi and Arun Nehru, and that Bofors itself, which paid no bribes but only 'winding-up' charges, might have been among those who were "cheated".[1]

IN the face of such attitudes, the crux of the Bofors criminal case, as investigated by the CBI, deserves emphasis. It is laid out in legalese, but clearly enough, in the CBI's charge-sheet: "... between 1982 and 1987, certain public servants entered into a criminal conspiracy with W.N. Chadha, Martin Ardbo, G.P. Hinduja and others in India and abroad, and in pursuance thereof, committed offences of criminal conspiracy, bribery, criminal misconduct by public servants, cheating, criminal breach of trust, forgery for the purpose of cheating and using as genuine a forged document in respect of the contract dated March 24, 1986 entered into between Government of India and M/s. AB Bofors." Further, the charge-sheet alleges, "the accused S.K. Bhatnagar, W.N. Chadha... Ottavio Quattrocchi, Martin Ardbo, M/s. Bofors and the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi entered into/were parties to a criminal conspiracy with some persons at New Delhi (India), Sweden, Switzerland and other places during the period 1985-87 and thereafter, with an object to award a contract by Government of India in favour of M/s Bofors" for the purchase of Bofors 155 mm howitzers "by abuse of official position by the abovesaid public servants and for causing wrongful gain to private persons/others and corresponding loss to the Government of India in the said gun deal." Take away the vital part played in the Bofors case by "public servants", as defined under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1947, and the bribery charges have no leg to stand on.

Yet, the documented facts have bribery written all over them. A massive order of illegitimate and unacknowledged payments, termed "commissions" and calculated on a percentage basis, was made by the Swedish arms manufacturing company into secret Swiss bank accounts after the Indian howitzer contract was won on March 24, 1986. The internal Bofors documents, seized by the Swedish police, gained by *The Hindu*'s investigation in 1988-89, and verified in the CBI investigation, have made it absolutely clear that the payoffs made by Bofors were directly contingent on winning the contract.

The payments were specifically for 410 field howitzers and accessories the Rajiv Gandhi government purchased from Bofors as part of an SEK 8.41 billion or Rs. 1,437.72 crores advanced 155 mm gun system. Had Bofors lost the contract to its French rival, Sofma, or to any other bidder, there would have been no question of

1. See the article, "More sting than scam," by Mani Shankar Aiyar in *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, November 2, 1999, page 8. The ludicrousness of the falsehoods presented in this article extends to asserting that "the relevant extracts" from the Ardbo diary (the explosive references to "Q", "Gandhi trust", "Nero", "N", and "R") "were scooped by this newspaper." The record shows that the first excerpts from the Ardbo diary and handwritten notes were published (as part of a detailed analytical expose by Chitra Subramaniam and N. Ram) over three pages of *The Hindu* of November 25, 1988; and that further explosive excerpts, including the famous July 2, 1987 reference to the "Gandhi Truste(e) lawyer", were published simultaneously in several leading Indian newspapers, including *The Hindu*, *Indian Express* and *The Statesman*, on October 31, 1989 under the same bylines. I happened to make these "relevant extracts" available to a representative section of the Indian press, and subsequently, after a criminal case was filed in early 1990 on Bofors, handed over photocopies of the Ardbo diary pages and handwritten notes to the CBI, as required by law.

paying these "commissions" to the contracted parties.

THE $50 million payoffs were in flagrant contradiction with assurances repeatedly given by Bofors to the Government of India to the effect that it had no agents or representatives in India for the howitzer deal.

Between May and July 1984, the Negotiating Committee set up, for the howitzer acquisition, by the Ministry of Defence was officially informed by the four shortlisted suppliers, Sofma, Bofors, the International Military Services Ltd of the United Kingdom and Voest Alpine of Austria, about their agents in India. Bofors identified W.N. Chadha as its agent. Following a discussion of the matter in the Negotiating Committee, its chairman, Defence Secretary Bhatnagar, met representatives of the four shortlisted howitzer manufacturers on May 3, 1985. He informed them that "the present Government did not approve of the appointment of Indian agents acting for foreign suppliers"; that in case they had made provision for any commission for their Indian agents, they should make a suitable reduction in their offers; and that they would be "disqualified" if it came to the notice of the Government of India that they had appointed Indian agents. Ardbo was specifically given this message. In response, he confirmed to Bhatnagar that Chadha was acting as Bofors' agent in India, and promised that he would consider the advice of the Defence Secretary on the Indian Government's policy and take "necessary action". Ardbo, however, did not disclose the name of any other agent. On July 22, 1985, a telex message arrived from the Military Attache at the Indian High Commission in London mentioning Chadha as a Bofors representative in India, but Bhatnagar failed to ask Bofors for a clarification on this.

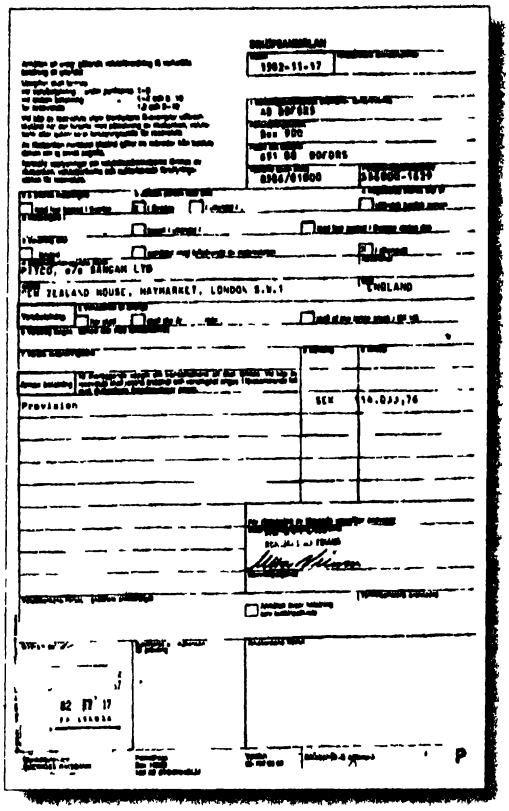
So squeaky clean did the Indian Government want to appear in the matter of defence deals that in October 1985 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (according to a 1987 official communication from Bofors) "emphasised" in a New York meeting with Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme that "Bofors should not utilise middlemen for the purpose of winning the contract".

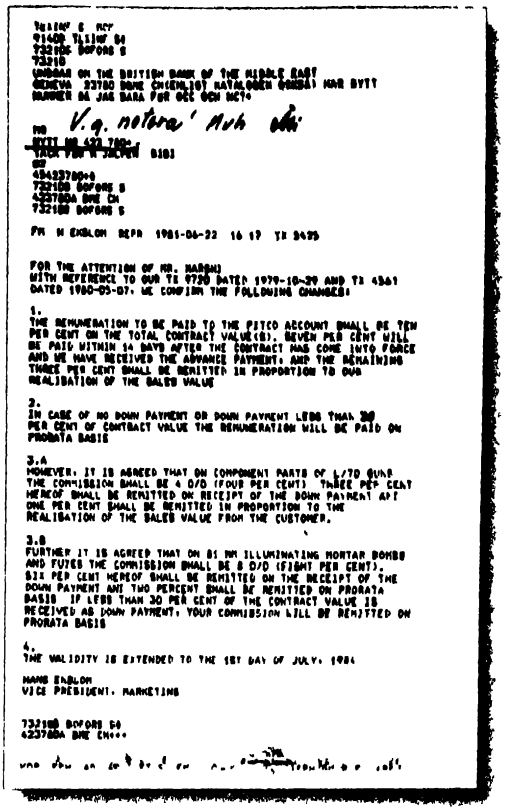
The percentage-based "commissions" were subsequently declared by Bofors, when the storm over bribes broke out in Sweden and India, to be "winding up costs", that is, out-of-court settlements of contractual obligations. And this version was touchingly accepted by the Rajiv Gandhi government, even after the documentary evidence gained by *The Hindu* (from unimpeachable sources in Sweden) that demolished the "winding up" story continued to pile up.

WHO were the principal recipients of the Bofors payoffs? What is interesting is that the answer to this question furnished in 1988-89 by the journalistic investigation has been vindicated fully. The payment documents, read along with the relevant Ardbo diary entries and notes, have established the following. Win Chadha, the acknowledged Bofors "agent", and the Hindujas, who have always denied that they had anything to do with the Bofors-India howitzer deal, had to be paid as owners of older 'commission entitlements' (the Svenska-Chadha entitlement and the Pitco-Moresco-Hinduja entitlement) while the mysterious shell company, A.E. Services Ltd, was a new entrant that could not possibly have performed any service other than a politically corrupt one.

The 1987 diary and "daily notes" kept by Ardbo, the Bofors chief executive, offer dark hints about the involvement of Rajiv Gandhi ("R" of Ardbo's handwritten record), Olof Palme ("P"), Arun Nehru ("Nero" and "N"), the Hindujas (referred to variously as "Hanssons", "G.P.H.", "H", and "S.P.,G.P.", Ottavio Quattrocchi ("Q"), Bob Wilson ("Bob") and others involved in the affair.

Subsequently, it came to light in the Swiss legal and official process that the





(Above left) A bank document involving A.B. Bofors, Pitco, Sangam Ltd, Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken and Sveriges Riksbank, the Swedish Central Bank. It is an application for making a foreign exchange remittance, payable as "provision" (commission), to Pitco c/o Sangam Ltd, London, by Bofors. The document is dated November 17, 1982. (Above right) A telex message (TX 5425) of 1981 from Hans Ekblom, Vice-President, Marketing, A.B. Bofors, for the attention of "Mr. Marshi". It deals with "ten per cent of the total contract value(s) as the 'remuneration' to be paid to the Pitco account." The references are to Bofors' attempt to sell various items of military hardware to India.

seven appellants whose cases were dismissed by Switzerland's highest court, the Federal Court, in July 1993 were Gopichand Hinduja, Srichand Hinduja, Prakash Hinduja, Jubilee Finance Corporation, W.N. Chadha, Svenska Inc., and Quattrocchi. This revelation set the stage for the arrival of some 500 pages of Swiss bank documents and related papers containing explosive information on the recipients and the deep end of the payoffs.

The bank documents relating to the three Hinduja brothers as recipients of Bofors payoffs are awaited. But so far as Chadha is concerned, the CBI investigation has nailed him as the person behind the Panama-based Svenska Inc., which received a payment of SEK 188.40 ($29.44 million) for the Bofors-India howitzer deal. The charge-sheet mentions that although Chadha denied "any connection with or even knowledge of Svenska Inc." before the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the Income Tax authorities, the investigation had established that Chadha had "full Power of Attorney with the fullest rights and power to substitute any one's else name in place of its own, to open and operate an account on behalf of M/s Svenska Inc." Furthermore, the investigation found that the Bofors payoffs were credited to Chadha's Account No. 99921-TU with the Swiss Bank Corporation, Geneva. Chadha, it turned out, had given full powers of Attorney for this account to his wife, Kanta W. Chadha, and his son, Hersh W. Chadha.

But the real investigative breakthrough relates to Quattrocchi, the 'Q' of the Ardbo diary, as the mover behind Bofors' payment to the shell company, A.E. Services Ltd. The Swiss bank documents, and the CBI's resourceful investigation of the neck-deep involvement of this "close family friend" of Rajiv Gandhi, have taken our knowledge of the powerful interest behind A.E. Services Ltd much beyond what the media investigation was able to discover in 1988-1990. In a sworn affidavit dated December 10, 1993, Myles Stott of A.E. Services Ltd disclosed that "the initial approach to me came from Ottavio Quattrocchi" and that "as a result of this approach, I requested R.A. W(ilson) to contact Ardbo". He added that "consequently, a contract was drawn up between A.E. Services and Bofors dated November 15, 1985". Stott also revealed that he received key transactional instructions from one S.I. Mubarak ("SIM"). "In August 1986 I was requested to open an account with Nordfinanz (NFZ) Bank in Zurich in the name of A.E. Services Ltd. On September 8, 1986, NFZ account was credited with a transfer made by Bofors of $7.3 million... SIM was informed of this receipt and instructed me to make various disbursements of which the largest sum... was to be made to Colbar Investments, a Panamanian company."

THE documents in the CBI's possession establish Quattrocchi's deep-end involvement in the Bofors corruption scandal. On September 3, 1986, Bofors remitted a sum of SEK 50.46 million ($7.34 million) to Account No. 18051-53 with Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich. In September 1986, amounts totalling $7.25 million were transferred out of this account into Account No. 254.561.60 W of M/s Colbar Investments Limited Inc., Panama with the Union Bank of Switzerland, Geneva. On July 25, 1988, an amount of $7.94 million was transferred out of the Colbar account to Account No. 488.320.60 X of M/s Wetelsen Overseas SA with the Union Bank of Switzerland, Geneva. On May 21, 1990, an amount of $9.20 million was transferred out of the Wetelsen account to Account No. 123983 of International Investments Development Co. with Ansbacher (CI) Limited, Guernsey, Channel Islands. Within ten days of its receipt in Guernsey, the amount of $9.20 million was channelled into various accounts in Switzerland and Austria.

Quattrocchi has maintained that he had "nothing to do with Bofors", that he did not receive any payment from Bofors, that he did not introduce Bofors to A.E. Services, and that he did not have "any connection with A.E. Services" ("Quattrocchi breaks his silence", cover story interview in *Outlook*, March 22, 1999). More surprisingly, on August 13, 1999, Sonia Gandhi felt confident enough to speak up for Quattrocchi at her first press conference: "The CBI has found him suspect. But we have not seen till today the papers that he has done something."

A devastating factual answer came within months in the CBI's charge-sheet. The criminal investigation has established beyond any dispute that Quattrocchi made "the initial approach" to Stott and that, in consequence, Bob Wilson contacted Ardbo, a contract, dated November 15, 1985, was drawn up between A.E. Services Ltd and Bofors, an account was opened for the shell company in Nordfinanz Bank, Bofors paid a hefty bribe into this account, and this money was subsequently channelled, in a chain of secret transactions in new places, to a very deep end. The CBI's investigation has also been able to establish that the Colbar and Wetelsen accounts into which the Bofors bribe was transferred were controlled by Ottavio and Maria Quattrocchi.

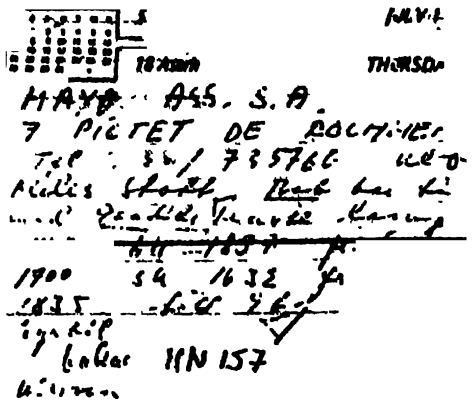
ANALYTICALLY, the Bofors-India kickback affair can be understood in terms of five modes of action. The first is the decision-making on the choice of howitzer. The second comprises the arrangements for the payoffs. The third is the cover-up and crisis management. The fourth is the journalistic investigation and expose. The fifth is the CBI's criminal investigation, assisted by the Swiss Federal Police and the Swiss courts, and prosecution before Judge Bharihoke's Special Court for CBI cases.

The first two modes of action – the process of decision-making and the related arrangements for secret payoffs into the Swiss bank accounts – constitute a set and belong squarely to the past. The three other modes of action – the cover-up and crisis management, the journalistic investigation, and the CBI's criminal investigation and prosecution – form the other set. They are still in progress, although the end of the road may not be too far away.

What is the hard information we have on the decision-making on the howitzer? The record available to the official investigation shows that from 1980 the Government of India was looking out for a state-of-the-art 155 mm howitzer system to meet defence operational requirements that were said to be urgent. The competition was short-listed in December 1982 to M/s Sofma of France, M/s A.B. Bofors of Sweden, M/s International Military Services of the United Kingdom, and M/s Voest Alpine of Austria. In November 1985, the Government of India's choice, based on advice from the Army Headquarters and a recommendation by the Negotiating Committee, narrowed down to Sofma and Bofors.

The official record also shows that between October 1982 and February 1986, the Indian Army did no fewer than seven evaluations of the relative merits of the howitzer systems offered by the bidders. In the first six, the Sofma 155 mm TR howitzer was clearly preferred to the Bofors gun. Financial considerations also gave the French manufacturer what looked like an unbeatable lead. However, it is now clear, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and a small coterie that knew his thinking had made up their minds from the start to award the contract to the Swedish arms manufacturer and to no one else. Since they knew no way to make Army Headquarters

budge from its preference for the French gun, they patiently waited it out, notwithstanding the supposed urgency of the Army's strategic requirements. When General A.S. Vaidya's retirement neared and even before General K. Sundarji formally took over as Army chief, they moved swiftly to clinch the decision for Bofors. With Army Headquarters reversing in February 1986 a succession of earlier professional judgments that had gone against Bofors, the stages of final decision-making were telescoped and rushed through, resulting in the formalisation of the choice of Bofors on March 24, 1986. The CBI charge-sheet reveals, among other things, that after the Negotiating Committee recommended, on March 12, the issuance of a Letter of Intent to Bofors, the file was approved by five officials and three Ministers on March 13 and finally approved by Rajiv Gandhi on March 14.



In an entry for July 2, 1987, Martin Ardbo, the managing director of Bofors, records that the two directors of "AE Services" have met the "Gandhi Trust(e) lawyer" in Geneva. This diary entry was simultaneously reproduced in several newspapers, including *The Hindu*, *Indian Express* and *The Statesman*, on October 31, 1989.

The decision-making mode must now be related to the payments mode. The documents published by *The Hindu* established beyond the shadow of a doubt that secret payoffs totalling $50 million were made by Bofors to three or more recipient arrangements and that these payments, far from representing any "winding up costs", were percentage payments tied to specified supplies against the total order and to realisation of the payments by the Government of India. The media expose of the payoffs and some of the recipients appears to have had the beneficial effect of cutting off the payments. This by itself is significant. If the payments had been legitimate or legal, Bofors surely would not have had any difficulty in completing them as per the contracted 'entitlements'. However, Bofors' saving on the payoffs did not result in any lowering of the price of the howitzers for India.

BUT that is not all we now know about the payments mode. The CBI's investigation has nailed down the recipients of the bulk of the Bofors payments, and once the final set of bank documents reaches the CBI the Hinduja involvement as recipients of the Bofors payoffs will also be nailed down. We also know a good deal about the *modus operandi* employed, in an environment of secrecy, to protect the end-recipients. The very fact that the Swiss authorities and courts have, after looking into the requested bank documents, allowed the bulk of them to reach official Indian hands means that they are reasonably satisfied that bribes to Indian public servants are involved.

Cover-up of corruption in high places may be a natural response where the rule of law is not guaranteed in relation to the high and mighty; but what is understandable does not become legitimate under cover of realpolitik. This is what the Rajiv Gandhi dispensation and the Congress(I) learnt to their cost.

The line of dismissing the documented media allegations as "false, baseless and mischievous"; the repeated assertion that Bofors made no payments to "middlemen", to "agents", to "Indians", to Rajiv Gandhi or to anyone associated with his family; the soft approach, suggesting collusion, to the Hindujas, Chadha, Quattrocchi *et al*; getting the "Gandhi Truste(e) lawyer" to talk to Bob Wilson of A.E. Services Ltd at a time the Rajiv Gandhi dispensation had supposedly no knowledge of the existence of Bob Wilson or A.E. Services Ltd; Defence Secretary Bhatnagar's criminally culpable failure to act in the interest of the Indian Government and to avoid causing it wrongful loss and his attempt to shield Bofors from any sanction or pressure after the fact of illegal payoffs became known; fierce resistance from Rajiv Gandhi to any suggestion that the threat to cancel the contract should be used against Bofors to gain the full truth about the payments – all these are integral parts of the cover-up and crisis management mode.

CONSIDER the implications of the following pieces of the action detailed in the charge-sheet.

In April 1987, as soon as the Swedish media broadcast allegations about Bofors paying bribes to Indians, the Indian Ambassador to Sweden, B.M. Oza, pursued a no-nonsense line of pressing the Swedish government to investigate seriously into the allegations (rather than accepting Bofors denials at face value). But he learnt soon enough that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi did not want the truth to be revealed. The CBI's investigation has revealed that after receiving Bofors' letter of denial, dated April 24, 1987, as well as the views of Ambassador Oza, Rajiv Gandhi spoke to Swedish Prime Minister Carlsson and told him that in view of Bofors' letter of denial, there was no need for any further investigation of the allegations. This high-level message was, in fact, "just the contrary" of "what the Government of India had requested through official channels" and, not surprisingly, Ambassador Oza was "kept in the dark" about this development.

When, in consequence of Rajiv Gandhi's request to Carlsson, the Swedish government reversed its stand on an official investigation and announced that there would be no investigation, Ambassador Oza stubbornly persisted with his original demand – until Prime Minister Carlsson informed him about what Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi actually wanted. The upshot was that Rajiv Gandhi was obliged to reverse his stand and send a letter, dated April 28, 1987, to Carlsson stating that "though facts furnished by Bofors tend to confirm the position that there were no middlemen, clarifications are necessary to set the controversy at rest" and that "in this context, the enquiry promised by the Swedish Government is of great importance". The consequence of Ambassador Oza's refusal to let the truth be buried was the enquiry by the Swedish National Audit Bureau that was to cause so much distress and trouble to Rajiv Gandhi and the recipients of the Bofors payoffs.

In June-July 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi asked the Ministry of Defence for an evaluation of the cost to, and effect on, national security of the cancellation of the Bofors contract. Asked for his views on the subject, General Sundarji wrote a note, dated June 13, 1987, stating that obtaining complete information about the moneys paid by Bofors in connection with the contract was very essential and that, if Bofors did not part with the required information, "we should go to the

extent of threatening to cancel our contracts." He recommended that the Army could take a calculated risk: "In the interest of vindicating National Honour we apply full pressure on Bofors to part with the information needed for legal action against the culprits and accept the risk that this might in the worst case lead to a cancellation of the contract." Bhatnagar received General Sundarji's recommendation on June 13, 1987 and kept it to himself. A week later, he personally returned the note to the Army Chief, requesting him to change his recommendation regarding the cancellation of the contract. Sundarji refused to do so and reiterated his views in a note dated July 15, 1987. This document was also withheld from the man who was directly handling the matter, Minister of State in the Defence Ministry, Arun Singh.

Minister of State Arun Singh wrote a reasoned minute dated June 10, 1987, which was approved and endorsed by Defence Minister K.C. Pant. The minute argued that "we as GOI must pursue this matter to a logical conclusion." It specifically recommended that the Indian Ambassador in Sweden should be instructed to "inform both the Swedish Govt., and the company that unless they give us the information we want, we will have no alternative but to cancel the contract for the FH 77B 155 mm Howitzers."

Arun Singh's minute concluded: "I am fully cognisant of the fact that this cancellation will have some negative impact on our defence preparedness but you may like to reconfirm with COAS (Chief of Army Staff) whether we can live with that. In my view we must be prepared to go to this extent of cancellation because our very credibility as a Govt. is at stake and what is worse, the credibility of the entire process of defence acquisitions is also at stake. I would be most grateful if this note and the draft letters could be forwarded by you to the Prime Minister after you have seen them."

And what was Rajiv Gandhi's response to this reasoned suggestion endorsed by Defence Minister Pant? In a minute ostensibly dated June 15, 1987 (which appears to have been recorded later and antedated to cover up the Prime Minister's embarrassment over Arun Singh's resignation over the Bofors affair on July 18, 1987), he lashed out against his ex-friend:

"It is unfortunate that MOS/AS has put his [illegible]ige above the security of the nat[illegible]n before even evaluating all aspects. I appr[illegible]ate his feelings as he had been dealing with Def. almost completely on his own with my full support but that is not adequate reason to be ready to compromise the security of the nation. Has he evaluated the actual position *vis-a-vis* security? Has he evaluated the financial loss of a cancellation? Has he evaluated the degree of breach of contract by Bofors if any? Has he evaluated the consequences for all future defence purchases if we cancel a contract unilaterally? Has he evaluated how rival manufacturers will behave in the future? Has he evaluated how GOI prestige will plummet if we unilaterally cancel a contract that has not been violated? To the best of my belief the Swedish Audit report upholds GOI position and does not contradict it. What we need to do is to get to the roots and find out what precisely has been happening and who all are involved. Kneejerk reactions and stomach cramps will not serve any purpose. RRM has run the Ministry fairly well but there is no need to panic, specially if one's conscience is clear."

This minute is signed by Rajiv Gandhi. Can anyone reading this reaction of fury, along with the documented facts and circumstances of the Bofors case, arrive at a conclusion that this Prime Minister's conscience was clear?

But this is not all. Following an Arun Singh-guided effort in the Ministry of Defence to press Bofors to reveal the truth on pain of losing the contract, the Swedish side decided that Anders Carlberg, chairman of the Nobel group of industries, and two others would come to India on July 6, 1987 to reveal the truth confidentially to the Government of India. Meanwhile, Attorney-General Parasaran, whose advice had been sought, opined that Bofors had clearly breached the contract; this expert legal advice reached the Ministry of Defence on July 4, 1987. And what did Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi do? He intervened officially to stop the Bofors team from coming to India with its dangerous information.

The crux of the case pressed in the CBI's charge-sheet is that public servants headed by Rajiv Gandhi, aided and abetted by various private individuals, were involved in a criminal conspiracy to cause "wrongful gain" to Bofors, Quattrocchi and Chadha and "corresponding loss" to the Government of India.

The criminal conspiracy involved several other offences. Covering up corruption is an extension of corruption and also amounts to obstructing justice. The chief players in the cover-up and crisis management that failed were Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, two Congress(I) governments, the Swedish Social-Democrat government, Bofors, Defence Secretary Bhatnagar, the Hindujas, Quattrocchi and Chadha.

The cover-up of the truth behind Bofors continued long after the death of Rajiv Gandhi. This unstated Congress(I) policy was reflected, in the post-Rajiv period, in the motivated internal decision to transfer K. Madhavan, the upright and independent CBI officer, from the case (October 1991); the transfer of Joint Director M.D. Sharma (February 1992); and various obstructive tactics and collusive proceedings that culminated in External Affairs Minister Madhavsinh Solanki's hard-to-believe act of malfeasance and political stupidity in Switzerland.

The main players in the investigation and expose of the Bofors corruption scandal have been Dagens Eko (the news service of Swedish Public Radio), sections of the Indian press, the Swedish police, the CBI when it has been allowed to do its job by its political masters, and the Swiss authorities. The leading contribution made by journalistic investigation to this case must be understood as a response to the challenge, an extraordinary attempt at cover-up and obstruction of justice. Had there been no cover-up of this kind, making a mockery of the rule of law and also professions of public morality in India as well as in Sweden, the role of the media in the investigation would have been far less important. *L'affaire* Bofors is an example of an issue where the relatively independent press, under the press of circumstances, performs better than most other institutions in society. The CBI, under independent professional leadership, has demonstrated in the recent past that it can do as well as any criminal investigation agency anywhere in the world.

BOFORS is independent India's most important corruption scandal. It might have had its ups and downs, its ebb and flow, in the public mind. But unlike previous corruption scandals, it has refused to go away as a national issue because the political, moral and systemic issues it raises are both deep-seated and dramatic. The distinction of Bofors has been to serve over more than a decade as a continuous symbol and metaphor for political corruption at the top. It has served to raise public consciousness against corruption in a way previous scandals put together failed to do. It has also helped us gain a larger and more reliable perspective about how various institutions perform in relation to corruption. It is important for the health of the Indian political system to ensure that the lawful attempt to uncover the full truth and make an example of the corrupt succeeds. ■

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The Svenska-Win Chadha track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

	Document date (Date of publication of document in *The Hindu*)	Nature of document	What the document reveals
1	21-12-78/24-10-78 (22-6-88)	Representation Agreement between AB Bofors, Sweden, and Anatronic General Corporation, India, signed by Hans Ekblom for Bofors and W N Chadha, President, Anatronic	Bofors appoints Anatronic as its sole representative in India to promote the sales of ordnance to the government authorities It specifies activities for the representative including obtaining information on the developments with respect to defence and defence procurements, and maintaining contact with defence industries It also requires Anatronic "to keep Bofors informed about the defence organisation in order to ascertain what persons currently have influential positions, and to try to judge who will have influence in the near future " It provides for, among other payments, commission of 2 per cent of the invoiced ex-works value on orders for ordnance Valid until 30-9-81
2	21-12-78/14-12-78 (22-6-88)	Agreement between AB Bofors, Sweden, and Svenska Inc , Panama, signed by Hans Ekblom for Bofors	Bofors appoints Svenska as Bofors' Consultant and Advisor for India, Nepal and Sri Lanka to promote the sale of Bofors ordnance The consultant is entitled to, among other payments, a commission of 4 per cent of the invoiced ex-works value on orders for ordnance In contrast to the Bofors-Anatronic agreement, no activities are specified for Svenska Valid until 30-9-81
3	11-3-81 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	Extends the validity of (2) until 30-9-84
4	11-3-81 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Anatronic (Win Chadha)	Extends the validity of (1) until 30-9-84
5	13-1-82 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	*Inter alia* this document raises the commission to 6 per cent
6	30-11-82 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	Validity of (2) extended until 30-9-87 in respect of Bofors FH 77B weapon system Commission 6 per cent
7	3-2-83/30-11-82 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Anatronic (Win Chadha)	Validity of (1) extended until 30-9-87 in respect of Bofors FH 77B weapon system No change in commission specified earlier
8	30-11-82 (25-11-88)	Separate Agreement between AB Bofors and Svenska Inc	This is for the special promotion of sales of the FH 77B weapon system in India No change in commission
9	6-3-84 (25-11-88)	Agreement appointing Svenska as Bofors' Consultant and Advisor for India, Nepal and Sri Lanka	This is for the promotion of Bofors ordnance and ordnance stores in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka either directly or through Bofors' sole representative in the Territory Provides for a commission of 5 per cent of the invoiced ex-works value of the contract
10	15-3-84 (25-11-88)	Separate Agreement between AB Bofors and Svenska Inc	This is for the special promotion of sales of the FH 77B weapon system in India Payment of commission made "subject to Svenska or the Bofors' sole representative in the Territory giving us satisfactory confirmation that the order is a result of your efforts " Commission 6 per cent

The Svenska-Win Chadha track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

	Document date (Date of publication of document in *The Hindu*)	Nature of document	What the document reveals
11	10-5-84/29-5-84 (28-6-88)	Agreement between Bofors and Svenska signed by Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	Bofors appoints Svenska as Consultant and Advisor for India, Nepal and Sri Lanka to promote the sale of Bofors ordnance The FH 77B weapon system is not explicitly mentioned It specifies, among other payments, a commission of 5 per cent of the ex-works value of orders for ordnance
12	22-8-84 (25-11-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	Commission in (11) raised by 2 percentage points for orders of mortar flare bombs
13	19-9-84 (28-6-88)	Letter on the Bofors letterhead signed by representatives of Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc	Raises the commission stipulated in (11 and 12) by 0 75 percentage points
14	10-5-84/30-11-84 (25-11-88)	Representation Agreement between Bofors and Anatronic	Bofors appoints Anatronic as its sole representative in India to promote the sale of Bofors ordnance
15	2-1-86/13-1-86 (22-6-88)	Agreement between Bofors and Svenska signed by Bofors (Hans Ekblom) and Svenska Inc. Note: Antedated document; described in the CBI's FIR as "forged and dishonestly and fraudulently made "	Bofors appoints Svenska to promote the sale of Bofors ordnance and ordnance stores to the government authorities Commission due to the Consultant for the supply contract for Bofors 155mm field howitzer system *signed on March 24,1986*, specified as 2.24 per cent of the total ex-works value when the advance payment is received by Bofors and 0 96 per cent of the ex-works value to be paid pro-rata when payment for deliveries has been received by Bofors. The internal inconsistency with respect to dates shows that the document its fabricated.
16	13-1-86 (22-6-88)	Agreement between Bofors and Anatronic signed by Hans Ekblom and Win Chadha	Appoints Anatronic as Administrative Consultant "to be responsible for supply of administrative services to Bofors liaison office " Remuneration specified as SEK 100,000 per month from January 1, 1986
17	27-2-86 (23-6-88)	Credit note for Swedish kronor (SEK) 135,654 from Bofors to Svenska Inc , Panama	Specifies that this commission is paid on material supplied to the Indian High Commission, London Specifies that this is a 6 per cent commission on SEK 2,259,400
18	24-3-86 (22-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 422,909 40 from Bofors to Svenska Inc., Panama	Specifies that this commission is on material supplied to the Government of India Specifies that this is a 6 per cent commission on SEK 7,048,490
19	5-5-86 (23-6-88)	Statement from Bofors books	Specifies a commission payment of SEK 188,398,806 to Svenska account in Swiss Bank Corporation, Geneva
20	5-5-86 (23-6-88)	SEB debit advice document	Specifies payment of SEK 113,039,283 64 (US $16,070,412 80) by Bofors to Svenska account in Societe de Banque Suisse
21	21-1-87 (23-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 283,751 40 from Bofors to Svenska Inc account in Swiss Bank Corporation, Geneva	Specifies that this is a 6 per cent commission on SEK 4,729,190.
22	12-2-87 (23-6-88)	SEB document	Bofors' instruction for payment CHF (Swiss francs) 415,428 to Svenska account in Swiss Bank Corporation, Geneva.

The Svenska-Win Chadha track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

	Document date (Date of publication of document in *The Hindu*)	Nature of document	What the document reveals
23	25-2-87 (23-6-88)	Credit note for the payment of SEK 639,908 75 to Svenska Inc account in Swiss Bank Corporation, Geneva.	Specifies that this is a 0 96 per cent commission on material supplied to Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Defence
24	11-3-87 (23-6-88)	Credit note for the payment of SEK 469,864 66 to Svenska Inc	Specifies that this is a 0.96 per cent commission on material supplied to Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Defence.
25	24-3-87 (23-6-88)	Credit note for the payment of SEK 686,095 76 to Svenska Inc	Specifies that this is a 0 96 per cent commission on material supplied to Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Defence
26	30-3-87 (23-6-88)	Credit note for the payment of SEK 264,456 18 to Svenska Inc	Specifies that this is a 0 96 per cent commission on material supplied to Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Defence
27	5-5-87 (22-6-88)	Letter from President of Svenska Inc to AB Bofors marked "Personal" and "Attention: Mr. Thomas Eldh"	Refers to (15) and says that in response to the "request of the Indian Government to Bofors not to use any middlemen", it was mutually agreed that the 2.24 per cent remuneration paid in May 1986 was to be treated as "the termination charges for the termination of the agreement relating to the FH 77B system" It also specifies that the second part of the remuneration (0 96 per cent) was "intended to be for the consultancy services during the life of the contract "

The Pitco-Moresco-'Moineao'-Hinduja track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

1	19-10-79 (22-4-88)	Communication from the AB Bofors Ordnance Division to the British Bank of the Middle East, Geneva, marked for the attention of "Mr. Marshi".	It records that Bofors has "agreed irrevocably to remit to the Pitco account with your bank" 8 per cent of the total value of a contract "to be signed within 12 months" between AB Bofors and the Government of India for the procurement of FH77 howitzers and other items.
2	22-8-81 (22-4-88)	Telex message (TX5425) from Hans Eldblom, Vice President, Marketing, AB Bofors, for the attention of "Mr. E. Marshi", the British Bank of the Middle East, Geneva.	Records changes in remuneration to be paid to "the Pitco account"; remuneration "shall be 10 per cent on the total contract value(s)" Refers specifically to L-70 guns and 81 mm illuminating mortar bombs and fuses.
3	4-3-82 (22-4-88)	Application for making a foreign exchange remittance payable by Bofors as "provision" ("commission") to Pitco c/o G.P. Hinduja, Sangam Ltd., London.	The bank document involves AB Bofors, Pitco, Sangam, G.P Hinduja, SEB and SR. Pre-howitzer payment.
4	17-11-82 (22-4-88)	Application for making a foreign exchange remittance payable by Bofors as "provision" to Pitco, c/o Sangam Ltd., London.	The document involves AB Bofors, Pitco, Sangam, SEB and SR. Pre-howitzer payment.
5	Jan, 1984 (25-6-88)	Internal document of SR. A computer printout of a monthly statement of transactions involving foreign exchange.	On January 10, 1984, a commission payment (coded "62", that is, a commission) of Swedish Kronor (SEK) 174,522 was made to Pitco, c/o Sangam Ltd. Pre-howitzer payment.

The Pitco-Moresco-'Moineao'-Hinduja track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

	Document date (Date of publication of document in *The Hindu*)	Nature of document	What the document reveals
6	29-6-84 (22-4-88)	Communication from Hans Ekblom to "M/s. Moresco", c/o Continental Illinois Bank, Geneva, and marked for the attention of "Mr. Marshi".	It makes a reference to Bofors' attempt to sell the FH 77B to India, and to the 22-6-81 telex message (which in turn refers to the Pitco account). The "remuneration" is reduced from 10 per cent to 8 per cent of the contract value.
7	27-12-85 (27-4-88)	"Settlement agreement", signed at Karlskoga, between Bofors and "Moineao S.A.", described as "a Strategic Consultant Company". Note: Antedated document; fabricated agreement.	It "cancels" an "earlier agreement between the parties". Under the "settlement agreement", Bofors agreed to pay a "cancellation fee" of SEK 80 million.
8	20-5-86 (23-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 11,774,925 from Bofors to Credit Suisse, Geneva.	"Commission" paid into the coded account 'Mont Blanc'.
9	21-5-86 (23-6-88)	The corresponding debit advice in SEB's records.	
10	1-7-86 (23-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 8,410,661 from Bofors to Manufacturers Hannover Trust Company New York, Geneva.	"Commission" paid into the coded account 'Tulip'.*
11	2-7-86 (23-6-88)	SEB remittance document to Manufacturers Hannover Trust Company New York, Geneva.	Payment (coded "62") from Bofors to 'Tulip' with a request that the sender's name not be mentioned.
12	18-2-86 (23-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 1,092,697.28 from Bofors to Suisse Bank Corporation, Geneva.	Quarterly commission paid into the coded account 'Lotus'.*
13	18-12-86 (22-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 854,943.37 from Bofors to Suisse Bank Corporation, Geneva.	Quarterly commission paid into 'Lotus'.*
14	18-12-86 (23-6-88)	Credit note for SEK 1,092,697.28 from Bofors to Manufacturers Hannover Trust Company New York, Geneva.	Quarterly commission paid into 'Tulip'.*
15	18-12-86 (23-6-88)	Similar credit note for SEK 578,832.06	Quarterly commission paid into 'Tulip'.*
16	22-12-86 (23-6-88)	Foreign exchange remittance instruction from SEB to Suisse Bank Corporation, Geneva, for SEK 2,550,879.96.	Paid into 'Lotus'.
17	No date (23-6-88)	Bofors internal note, listing the percentages in respect of 'Tulip' (40 per cent), 'Lotus' (25 per cent) and 'Mont Blanc' (35 per cent).	It lists the proportion in which payments were made into 'Tulip', 'Lotus' and 'Mont Blanc'.

SEB: Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken, in which Bofors maintained an account; SR: Sveriges Riksbank, the Swedish central bank.
* These documents specified that the sender's name not be mentioned.

The A.E. Services track: What *The Hindu* documents establish

	Document date (Date of publication of document in *The Hindu*)	Nature of document	What the document reveals
1	15-11-85 (22-6-88)	Agreement between AB Bofors and A.E. Services signed by Martin Ardbo, President, AB Bofors, and R.A. Wilson, Director, A.E. Services. Note: The CBI's FIR confirmed that Bofors had "falsely claimed" that this agreement of 15-11-85 was cancelled "effectively on 5th March 1986".	The agreement appoints A.E. Services as consultant in connection with services related to the "possible award" to the company of a contract to provide 155 mm howitzers to the Ministry of Defence, GOI. Specifies that in the event that the client awards the contract and the contract becomes effective – "but only then and not otherwise" – A.E. Services would be paid 3 per cent of the total contract value. Specifies that if the contract was not awarded to the company by the Government of India before April 1, 1986, the Agreement would cease to have effect.
2	8-8-86 (22-6-88)	Covering letter from A.E. Services (dictated by Myles Stott, signed in his absence) to Martin Ardbo.	The covering letter encloses "a completed copy of the Agreement of 15th November 1985, which cancels and replaces the original agreement which was incomplete." The letterhead described A.E. Services Ltd as "PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND CONSULTING SERVICES FOR ENTERPRISES OUTSIDE THE U.K." This letter is evidence that (1) was still in force on 8-8-86 and was not cancelled "effectively on 5th March 1986", as claimed by Bofors.
3	27-8-86 (22-6-88)	Telex message from A.E. Services, marked "Attention: Martin Ardbo".	Specifies that a payment of Swedish kronor (SEK) 50,463,966 be made into the Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich.
4	2-9-86 (22-6-88)	Payment document from AB Bofors to A.E. Services.	Specifies that a commission payment of SEK 50,463,966 be made into A.E. Services' account in Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich.
5	3-9-86 (23-6-88)	Payment document coded "62" from AB Bofors to A.E. Services.	Specifies that a commission payment of SEK 50,463,966 be made from SEB into A.E. Services' account in Nordfinanz Bank, Zurich.

Table compiled by Ashok Krishnaswamy, V. Venkatesan, N. Ram and V. K. Ramachandran.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

THE Quattrocchi connection in the Bofors scandal, which became obvious after the Swiss Government released the names of the appellants in 1993, figured in a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) letter to the Swiss authorities as early as 1990, but only by chance. In January 1990, soon after the first information report (FIR) was filed, K. Madhavan, then Joint Director in the CBI, Arun Jaitley, the then Additional Solicitor-General (now Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting), and Bhure Lal, then a Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), were in Berne, carrying a letter from the CBI Director addressed to Pierre Schmid, the Vice-Director of the Swiss Department of Justice. This letter had sought to freeze certain accounts into which Bofors had deposited the commissions. The names of the accounts had been unearthed by *The Hindu*'s investigation. The name of Ottavio Quattrocchi did not figure in the CBI's list of suspected recipients yet.

On the night of January 25, while they were still in Switzerland, the Indian officials learnt of yet another account into which money had been deposited. Thereupon they drew up another list of possible recipients of money from this account along with a supplementary letter requesting a freeze on that account too. Quattrocchi's name first figured in this list, along with a few other names.

According to the charge-sheet now filed by the CBI, Quattrocchi was in India for almost 28 years – between 1964 and 1993 with a two-year break in between. During much of this period, he had unrestricted access to the prime ministerial residence at Race Course Road and the PMO in South Block. If Congress(I) spokesperson Kapil Sibal had cared to take a look at the security agencies' logbooks in the Prime Minister's residence and office, he would not have made the statement that Rajiv Gandhi had no connection with the Quattrocchis.

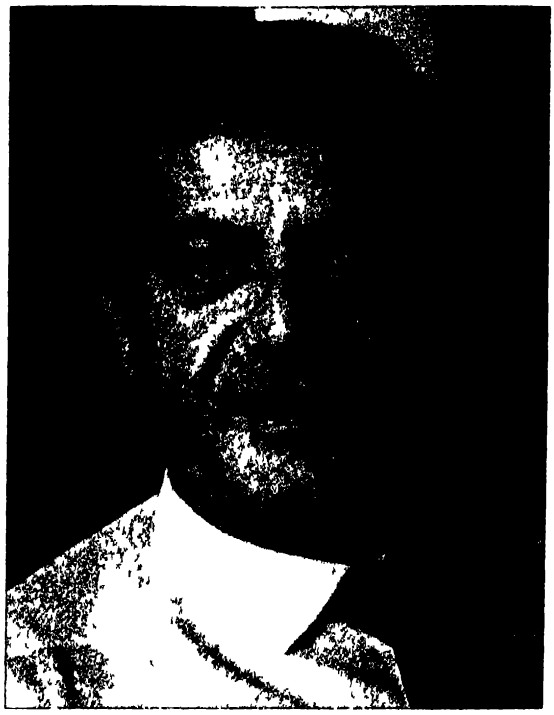
Quattrocchi's clout in the rarefied levels of government was legendary. Some of those who were in senior positions in the bureaucracy during Rajiv Gandhi's premiership say that he dropped names unabashedly, walked into Ministers' and Secretaries' offices without prior appointment, and at times even waited outside the venue of Cabinet meetings just in case his presence was needed to clarify a point or make a presentation. Senior bureaucrats who served during the 1980s remember sighting him in the company of Ministers and top bureaucrats. Quattrocchi was generous to those who promoted the interests of his company and vindictive towards those who did not, they say. According to them, officials who resisted the persuasive charms of the Italian businessman often found themselves unceremoniously transferred out or forced to go on leave, sometimes even resign,

The 'Q' connection

With the Indian authorities issuing a non-bailable warrant for his arrest, Ottavio Quattrocchi may well have his back to the wall.

while those who obliged him were favoured with plum postings. Quattrocchi and his wife Maria threw lavish parties in New Delhi, which were attended by the powerful and the influential.

A retired bureaucrat told *Frontline* that queries he had raised on a certain project for which Snamprogetti (the company that Quattrocchi represented in India) had bid were answered point by point by Quattrocchi the next day when he dropped in on the former. "How Quattrocchi got to know what points I had raised in my confidential note to the Minister is something that still mystifies me," he said. Informed sources also say that it was not unusual for Quattrocchi to have access to confidential information sent to the PMO. A retired bureaucrat told *Frontline* that not only did Quattrocchi drop in at his office periodically to lobby for his projects, but soon after his visit there would be calls from two senior Congress(I) functionaries (whom the sources named) inquiring about the fate of those projects.



Ottavio Quattrocchi.

However, Quattrocchi's clout in the PMO appears to have predated Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership although it did peak during his tenure. Snamprogetti licensed the technology for fertilizer plants worldwide, supplied certain proprietary equipment and executed engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracts on a turnkey basis. The first Indian fertilizer projects executed by Snamprogetti during Quattrocchi's tenure were the Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative's (IFFCO) Phulpur plant with a urea capacity of 1,550 tonnes a day (mtd), four plants of KRIBHCO at Hazira, each with a capacity of 1,100 mtd, and the Trombay V and the Thal Vaishet plants of Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers Limited.

All these were awarded to Snamprogetti during Indira Gandhi's prime ministership and were commissioned between 1975 and 1986. Interestingly, Haldor-Topsoe, a Danish firm, was originally selected to set up the Hazira plant, but the contract went to Snamprogetti eventually. The World Bank, which financed the project, withdrew its support to the project because of certain irregularities in the award of the contract, but the Government went ahead and found other sources of financing the project rather than drop Snamprogetti.

Snamprogetti hit the jackpot when all the 10 plants (including two expansion projects) to be fed by natural gas from the HBJ (Hajira-Bijaipur-Jagdishpur) pipeline came its way during the mid-1980s. While only a few of them were public sector plants and the rest were put up by the private sector, all of them depended on gas to be supplied by the public sector Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) from Bombay High through the HBJ pipeline. It is anybody's guess how much leverage the Government would have enjoyed in the choice of technology. Fertilizer industry sources say that at that time a conscious decision was taken to maintain uniformity in technology deployed in all the gas-based urea plants supplied by the HBJ pipeline and therefore Snamprogetti became the chosen technology licensor and EPC contractor for all the projects. However, the sources added that Snamprogetti's technology was among the best available at that time, although they were not sure that their prices were among the lowest.

There was one prized project that Snamprogetti failed to win despite hectic lobbying. This was the Rs.680-crore HBJ pipeline project that was to ferry gas from Bombay High over 1,700 km, traversing the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Three parties had been shortlisted for the project after competitive bidding - the French firm Spiecabag, Snamprogetti, and a Japanese firm. The French firm had quoted a sum of Rs.150 crores lower than Snamprogetti and was the front-runner. Quattrocchi lobbied furiously for Snamprogetti to be given the contract and went even to the extent of suggesting that the French and Japanese firms be disqualified on technical grounds. But G.V. Ramakrishna, the then Petroleum Secretary, stood his ground and decided to award the contract to the French. Quattrocchi then got a committee (headed by Kaul) set up to review the award. But the Kaul Committee upheld Ramakrishna's award. That Ramakrishna managed to get the French firm to reduce the quoted price by another Rs.34 crores is a little-known fact.

Quattrocchi appears to have had the Midas touch even in Malaysia where he currently heads Snamprogetti's Asia-Pacific Operations in Kuala Lumpur. In 1997-98 alone he is reported to have clinched 17 major petroleum and oil projects for Snamprogetti. However, in Italy some of the individuals and organisations Quattrocchi had been associated with are learnt to be facing corruption charges, rendering it dicey for him to try to return home. With the Indian authorities issuing a non-bailable warrant for his arrest, and with Interpol having issued an alert earlier, Quattrocchi may well have his back to the wall. ■

KILLER CYCLONE

A 'super cyclone' leaves death and destruction in its trail over large parts of coastal Orissa.

SUHRID SHANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
in Orissa

NEVER before had Orissa experienced such a violent churning. The "super cyclonic storm" tore through the coastal districts on the morning of October 29 with a wind velocity of between 260 and 300 km an hour, and within hours the region was under several feet of water.

Within 48 hours, it was death and devastation all over the districts of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Jajpur, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Balasore, Puri, Bhubaneswar and Khurda. The casualties included thousands of human lives and tens of thousands of head of cattle. All forms of communications were disrupted, and Orissa remained largely cut off from the rest of the country.

The storm, which slammed the Paradeep coast at 3 a.m. after ferociously swirling over the Bay of Bengal, was the second one to hit the State in a span of two weeks. Ganjam district was battered by a storm with a wind speed of 180 km an hour on October 17.

Paradeep Port Trust officials and the Jagatsinghpur district administration had sounded a red alert on October 28, warning of an impending cyclone of great intensity, which at that time lay centred 180 km southeast of Paradeep. Warnings were issued also to the administrations of the districts of Ganjam, Gajapati, Nayagarh, Puri, Khurda, Cuttack, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak and Balasore. The State government had instructed the administrations to evacuate people and stock relief materials. The Army's 120 Infantry Battalion had also been put on alert.

Despite all these, the government had no idea of the enormity of the crisis on hand. The authorities were aware that a cyclone had struck Paradeep but did not immediately know that tidal waves, rising up to 12 metres, had submerged several areas in Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts. The storm lasted 34 hours.

The earlier devastation caused to Ganjam district appeared negligible in comparison to the blow the "super cyclone" dealt. According to unofficial reports, at least 5,000 people have been killed in Paradeep alone. Whereas the Divisional Commissioner's office estimated the property loss in Ganjam at Rs.1,000 crores. Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang put the damage caused by the "super cyclone" at Rs.1,000,000 crores. In Ganjam, the cyclone and the rain that accompanied it paralysed the Gopalpur port, affected two million people in 18 blocks and damaged 1,500 villages. The "super cyclone" destroyed 25,000 houses in Gajapati, Khurda, Puri, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Bhadrak and Balasore districts.

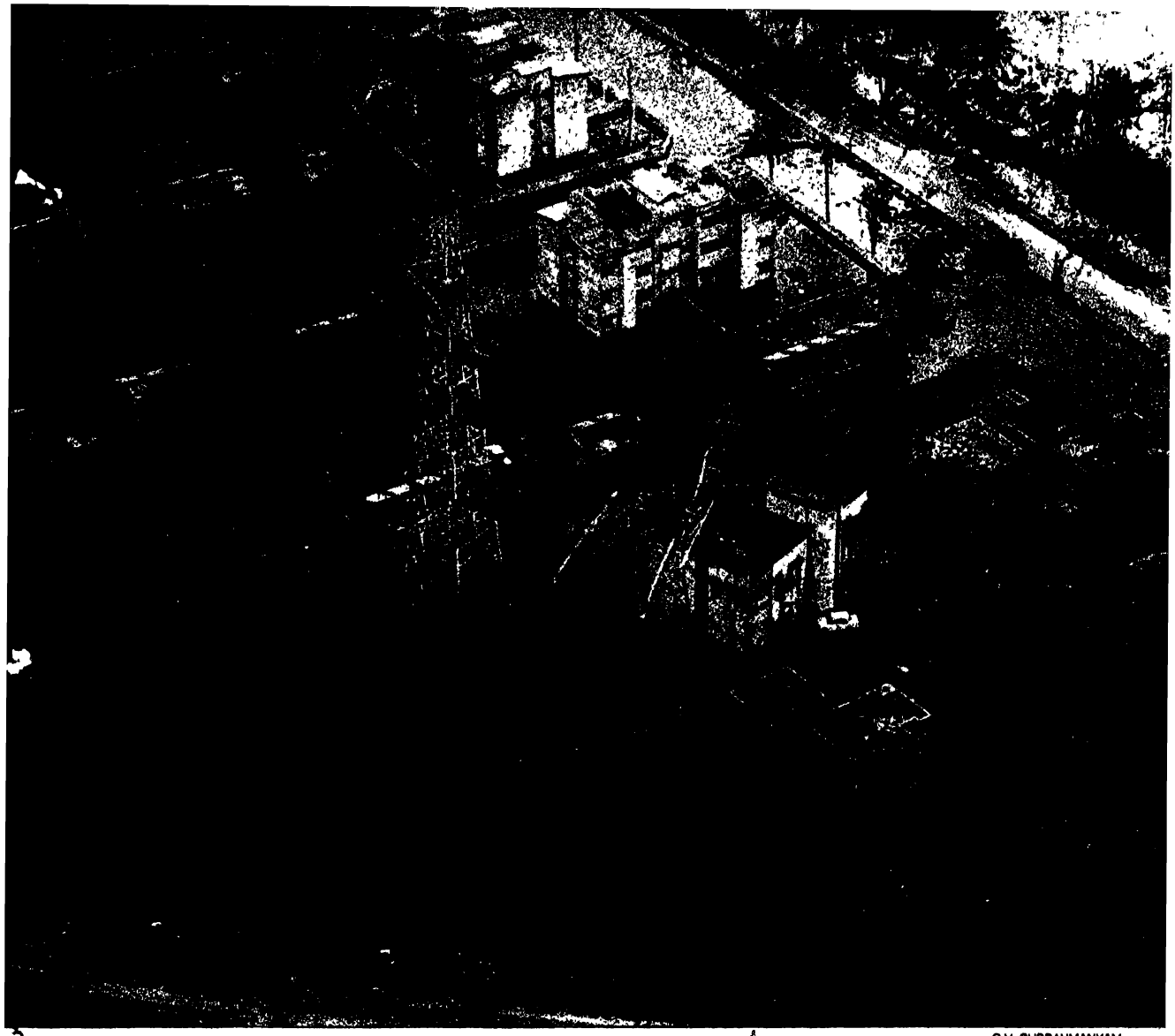
GIRIDHAR GAMANG and Revenue Minister Jagannath Patnaik undertook an aerial survey of the affected areas. Patnaik, who personally oversaw the relief operations in some areas, told *Frontline*: "Such large-scale devastation has never been witnessed before in the whole of India. The cyclone has affected over two crore people and destroyed 30 lakh *kutcha* houses, rendering millions of people homeless. Roofs made of asbestos, tin sheets and tiles have been blown off. All agricultural land has gone under water, and saline water has entered the fields in many areas. In the marine belt, the prawn and fishing industry has collapsed."

Gamang told *Frontline*: "The loss of cattle has been enormous. I saw the devastation from the helicopter." The State government on November 5, submitted a report to the Centre seeking a preliminary assistance of Rs.2,500 crores for rebuilding the socio-economic and administrative infrastructure. The total cost of this is projected at Rs.10,000 crores.

TENS of thousands of people camped on highways (two National Highways had breached, affecting road traffic) and rail bridges. Railway tracks in several places had been uprooted or washed away. Uprooted trees blocked all land approaches to the affected areas. Road links to Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Jajpur and Bhadrak districts were cut off. Only wireless communication was possible to Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur. Jagatsinghpur suffered extensive damage as sea water overwhelmed vast areas. The spectre of epidemics loomed over the district, as five lakh people lived in the marooned villages amidst decomposed bodies and carcasses.

In Paradeep, villagers and also Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) jawans

Paradeep township and (right) the port, which bore the brunt of the cyclone that slammed the coast on October 29 with a wind velocity of 260 to 300 km per hour. (Far right) Railway tracks twisted out of shape by the impact of the cyclone and the torrential rain that accompanied it. Many passengers were stranded after rail links were cut off.

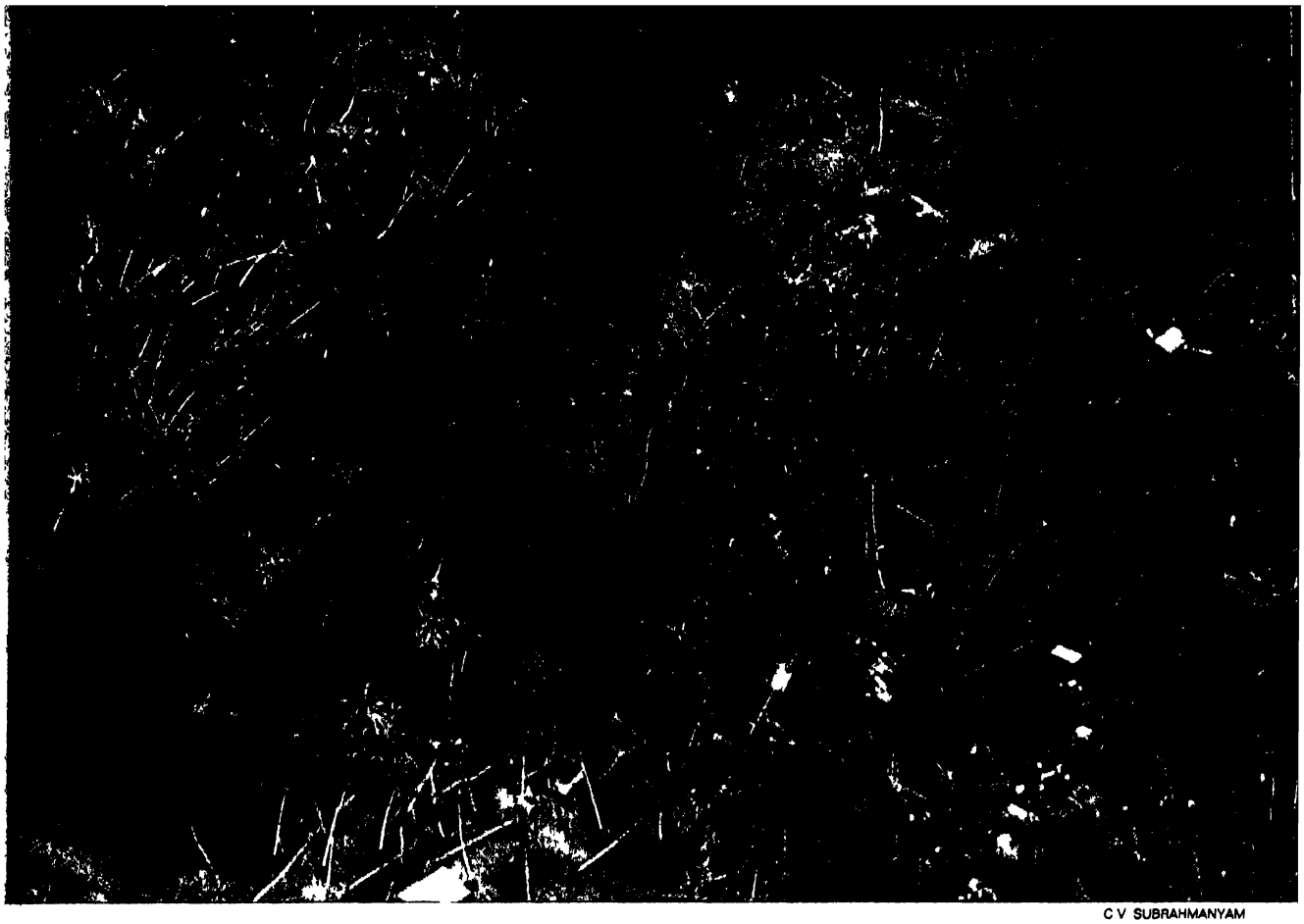


C.V SUBRAHMANYAM



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH





C V SUBRAHMANYAM

An aerial view of a village which was destroyed completely near Berhampur.

posted in Paradeep Phosphate Ltd claimed that the human toll in the region would be not less than 8,000. (Unofficial reports have put the toll in Paradeep at 15,000. The official figure, however, stands at 1,381.)

Several tugs and trawlers sank off the Paradeep port. Tiny villages along the coast have been turned into lakes, blotting out all signs of human inhabitation. The entire Paradeep region was under water. Debris of houses were found floating in the water. Bodies were found trapped under the debris. As the waters began to recede, the stench of putrefied bodies and carcasses pervaded the air. The Paradeep creek reeked with bloated bodies. Earthmovers and dumpers scooped them up, while Port Trust workers cremated them. The survivors, meanwhile, looked around frantically for food.

The PPL itself is facing a crisis. R.C. Mo[illegible], Plant Manager, told *Frontline* that at le[illegible] Rs.100 crores would be required to co[illegible] the cost of damage caused to property and machinery. Power supply to the affected areas was disconnected. R.K. Das, PPL's Regional Director, said: "The Air Force provided two generators that served only 10 per cent of the premises. We need an 11-kv generator of 1.2 to 2 MW capacity to control the pressure in the ammonia tank in normal conditions. In view of the atmospheric condition, we release small amounts of ammonia into the air."



A body being loaded on to a dumper near Paradeep.

Das said that the situation at PPL was grim. "Our hospital is filled with outsiders who have sought shelter. I am fighting an epidemic here. As it is we have to feed 2,700 people (PPL workers and their families) and on top of that 5,000 outsiders have entered the premises. They snatch whatever food is brought for us. If food is brought via road, villagers rob the vehicles."

Along the 150-km stretch between Paradeep and Bhubaneswar, hundreds of people waited for an occasional vehicle coming that way with food. Uprooted trees and electricity and telegraph poles lined the entire stretch.

The silver city of Cuttack, which was under knee-deep water, suffered because of its basin-like topography. The city could not discharge the run-off rain water as the two rivers that flanked it had reached the danger level. It was plunged into darkness, with the electricity supply disrupted. Large areas of Cuttack district remained inaccessible even seven days after the storm crossed the coast, with blocks such as Niali-Kantapara, Govindpur, Baranga, Banki, Yigiria, Athgarh, Mahanga, Salepur and Nischintkoli still flooded. The toll in the district is expected to be around 300. An epidemic broke out in Govindpur.

Cuttack was luckier than Kendrapara district. From 500 metres above ground level, it appeared like a cluster of islands.

■ DISASTER

Reaching relief

The Army, the Air Force and the Navy take the lead role in the relief work in the cyclone-hit areas as the State Government agencies lag far behind.

SUHRID SHANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

IT was clear from the nature of the precautionary measures taken by the Orissa Government following the cyclone warnings issued by meteorologists that the administration did not expect anything close to a calamity of the magnitude that was witnessed on October 29 Normally, a deep depression that forms near the Orissa coast in the Bay of Bengal portending a storm, drifts north, towards the direction of Bangladesh However, this time the eye of the storm stayed focussed on Orissa, and the storm hit the State s coast in the form of a super cyclone

According to official reports, by the night of October 28, some 20,000 people were evacuated from Paradeep Kujang, Erasama, Balikuda and Nagaon blocks of Jagatsinghpur district Residents of the villages did not heed the weather forecast as they did not expect anything more than heavy rain and some sharp gusts In fact several villagers had to be evacuated forcibly some of them even "escaped" from the relief centres The district administration had been asked to stock adequate relief materials to deal with the post-cyclone situation Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang had sought the Army's help to undertake relief work

The cyclone struck at 3 a m the following day and within 36 hours, changed completely the face of 10 of the most important districts in the State The worst-hit were the districts of Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara

The Army the Air Force and the Navy were among the first agencies to swing into action Several aircraft of the Air Force and the Navy and also Indian Airlines were pressed into service The Army s relief and rescue operations called Operation Sahayata, was launched under the supervision of Force Commander Major-General A S Klair The Army started clearing the roads and evacuating marooned people By November 4, 16 000 stranded people were moved to safety and 670 km of road length were

What were land routes until October 29 are now navigated by boats Hungry people scampered on sighting an Air Force chopper, hoping to receive some relief

The picture was no better in the Chandheli region in Bhadrak district access to the survivors was only by boats With their rooftops torn off, the victims lived amidst floating carcasses, exposed to disease While food was air-dropped, drinking water was unavailable

The situation in Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur districts worsened as a result of flash floods in the Baitarani, the Brahmani, the Subernarekha and several other rivers In Bhadrak district, the Kansa Bansa and Salandi rivers washed away more than 50 villages Bijayshree Routray, who represents Basudevpur in the State Assembly, told *Frontline* 'Thousands of people and over 30,000 head of cattle have been killed"

Balasore district was cut off owing to the breaching of National Highway Number 5 and the railway line However, the missile launching pad at Chandipore on-sea was not affected

More than 2 5 lakh families in Jagatsinghpur district were rendered homeless and 1 5 lakh head of cattle affected With relief not reaching all parts of the district, it is reported that the starving people are eating cattle fodder In Erasma, at least 30 people are reported to have died of starvation In Jajpur district, 15 5 lakh families were affected In Puri, the number of deaths was officially estimated at 151 More than 5,000 tourists were reported to be stranded in the district

In Keonjhar district, 40 villages were marooned More than 10,000 people sought shelter in relief camps Bridges over the Singhei and Kusei rivers in the district collapsed The State highway between Keonjhar and Cuttack was cut off, with the Kusei changing course near Anandpur

Bhubaneswar, considered one of the greenest cities in the country, was a shambles It appeared the city was in the middle of a war zone – trees were uprooted, buildings damaged, lamp posts broken, houses smashed, hoardings torn off, fences broken, cars wrecked and parks destroyed

Seven days after the cyclone hit the State, rail communication had not been restored completely and inundated roads not cleared for traffic Indeed, Orissa appears to have a long haul ahead. ■



Army personnel engaged in rescue work in Balasore district.



Movement of relief vehicles from West Bengal into Orissa was hampered as a large section of National Highway 5 had breached. (Below) Villagers en route to Cuttack cross a damaged highway in Soro near Balasore on November 3.



cleared. With 5,000 Army personnel engaged in relief work, remote regions of the State were made accessible. Army jawans moved into flooded areas in boats and helped in making an assessment of the damage and delivering relief. Up to eight infantry columns, eight engineers' columns and a medical unit were engaged in the operation. Relief camps were opened at Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur to provide food, shelter and medical attention to the cyclone victims. The Army was the only supplier of drinking water to the affected areas. Although the Air Force air-dropped food packages, it could not drop water. "The containers would break if we dropped them from such heights," said Squadron Leader Joe Emanuelle. The Navy cleared the passages to the berths in the Paradeep Port. That enabled relief teams to enter Paradeep, which bore the brunt of the cyclone.

The Air Force provided immediate relief by dropping food packets in areas that were not accessible to the Army. The Air Force rescue team under the command of Group Captain H.P.S. Natt comprised 15 pilots, 28 airmen and 14 other crew members. It set up base at the Biju Patnaik airport in Bhubaneswar and, with eight choppers, carried relief material from dawn to dusk. "On an average, 71,000 kg of dried cooked food are dropped in the affected areas. But every day we try to increase the quantity," Natt told *Frontline*. He said that the Air Force was assisted by Army personnel and volunteers from the National Cadet Corps (NCC), and the National Service Scheme (NSS). Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also extended help.

The police team sent by the Andhra Pradesh Government was largely responsible for clearing the roads in Khurda district and in Bhubaneswar.



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

Passengers of a train, stopped in its tracks, rush to pick up relief supplies dropped by an Army helicopter at Pithakalia in Balasore district.

Giridhar Gamang told *Frontline*: "The situation is grim. In most areas communication links could not be restored and that hampered relief work. We have demanded an immediate relief of Rs.500 crores from the Centre. Drinking water and electricity supplies are being restored in phases in Bhubaneswar. But what we need desperately is aid and assistance from the Central Government and other State governments and the fullest cooperation and support of the people. The moment has come for the Centre and other States to provide as much grant as possible for the millions of cyclone victims. I have contacted the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, (Congress(I) president) Sonia Gandhi and the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and other States, requesting them to help us."

Gamang, however, feels that because prior warnings had been put out and the administration had geared itself up to face the threat, the casualty figures this time would be lower than those of the last major cyclone that hit Orissa in 1971. The toll in 1971 in terms of human lives was between 7,000 and 8,000. Unofficial figures this time estimate the toll in Paradeep alone to be around 5,000.

Revenue Minister Jagannath Patnaik, who is in charge of relief, told *Frontline*: "Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have helped us out in a very big way by sending dry food and other assistance. As the drinking water crisis is acute, UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) has given us two crore halogen tablets. Water is supplied also by the Army. To contain epidemics, we are providing antibiotics. But we require more of them. More than a hundred teams of doctors, belonging to the State, the Army and the A.P. Government, and other health staff are working in the affected areas." He said that the financial grant provided by the Centre was inadequate. (On November 5, the Centre announced an additional grant of Rs. 100 crores.)

Some of the other government that extended aid to Orissa are: West Bengal (relief material worth Rs.10 crores); Bihar (Rs.10 crores and Rs.1 crore worth of relief materials); Tamil Nadu (Rs.50 lakhs); Madhya Pradesh (Rs.50 lakhs); and Delhi (Rs.30 lakhs).

A CENTRAL team comprising Ministers George Fernandes, Naveen Patnaik, Joel Oram and Devendra Pradhan visited the affected areas. Oram, who is charge of Tribal Affairs, told



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

The trail of misery

SUHRID SHANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY

CYCLONES are a part of life in Orissa, but the people of the State's coastal districts were not prepared for a tragedy of the magnitude caused by the "super cyclone" of October 29.

"We have never experienced anything of this kind before. We thought it would be just another cyclone that would blow away our rooftops or damage the walls. But this turned out to be a killer," Naren Bahera, a fisherman whose entire village was washed away, lamented. Naren and his family survived, as he took heed of the warnings put out by the meteorological authorities 48 hours in advance. Along with his wife and two children, Naren took shelter in the hospital of Paradeep Phosphate Ltd (PPL) in Paradeep.

Now, he and his family face starvation. "The *chira* (dry cooked food) airdropped by the Navy helicopters twice, is insufficient for so many of us. There is a scramble for food, and in the last six days I have been able to lay my hands on food only once, that too a small quantity of it. I shared the food with the members of my family. As for drinking water, we hardly have any," he said.

Even if Naren and his family survive this battle against hunger and disease, the future hardly has anything to offer him. He lost all his belongings, including his boat. "I have lost my means of livelihood and I now cannot afford to buy myself a new boat," he said. He has no news of his younger brother, a construction worker in Bhubaneswar. "He should be safe in the city. The only way before Naren is to find some work in the city. "If that does not happen, we will be reduced to begging for food in the streets," he said.

ALONG the National Highway near Cuttack, Mili Jena has pitched a tiny makeshift tent, made of a torn piece of cloth, supported on two sticks. With an infant in her arms, she waves down passing vehicles and begs for food. Her village was destroyed completely. She and some other residents managed to reach areas that were not inundated and finally chose to pitch their tents adjacent to the highway. Since her husband died a year ago, her brothers, who live in the city, were providing for her needs. "Now that my village is gone, they will not be able to send any money, and I will not be able to feed my child," she wept. But she hopes that her brothers will eventually find her.

Laxmi and her aged mother joined a group of people outside the house of Union Minister Naveen Patnaik in Bhubaneswar to voice their grievances. The slum in which she resided had been wiped out. "We have no place to go, no money. We have lost everything. There is no food, no water... We are as badly affected as those marooned people for whom food is being airlifted. We want the Minister to understand our plight too. We have had no food for the past five days. There is no drinking water, and we are dying," she cried.

There is similar, or perhaps worse, agony elsewhere, in areas not reached by the Army rescue teams. The "super cyclone" has indeed been a great leveller. ■

Frontline that he was unhappy with the way the State government handled the crisis. "The State government is not doing its best The party (Congress) is divided, the Cabinet is divided. Even in a time like this there is groupism They did not stock sufficient quantity of foodstuffs," he said

Naveen Patnaik the Union Minister for Mines and Minerals, said: "I am appalled to see that the government is completely paralysed I do not want to make this a political issue When I visited Kendrapara, I saw carcasses all over the place and people starving without food and drinking water for five days. They had no roof over their heads Several people had no decent clothing. It is a terrible situation. If I can reach there by road, I do not see why the State government cannot." He condemned the State government's inability to control the law and order situation. "There is rampant looting on the highways," he said.

Jagannath Patnaik, however, denied that there was a law and order crisis. He said that anti-social elements had initially looted relief trucks and other vehicles. "We stationed patrols on the highways and no such incident has taken place since then," he said

However, informed sources maintained that food riots broke out in the affected areas Many residents facing food shortage looted trucks carrying emergency food supplies

"They are forcibly taking away any edible stuff that they can lay their hands on," an official source said He further said that the government was unable to handle the law and order situation. Two days after the cyclone crossed the coast, Bhubaneswar became a dangerous place by night as desperate victims started breaking into shops. With normalcy returning to the city, the number of such incidents decreased.

Government agencies and the district administration faced severe criticism in the affected areas. "Where are the district authorities and government representatives? They fled like rats to safer places when the cyclone hit. They have not even visited the place since," said an irate victim in Paradeep.

In spite of the claims made by the State government that it was doing its utmost to restore normalcy, the general feeling is that it is not possible to hope for normalcy to return in the near future under an administration that is just not there.

■ DISASTER

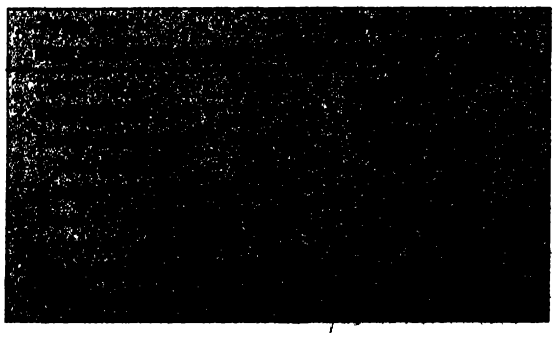
Scientific failures

The scientific systems whose responsibility it was to predict the contours of the cyclone did a far from perfect job. To be able to do a better job next time around, an integrated approach to cyclone studies is needed.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

THE cyclone which crossed the Orissa coast at Paradeep caused unprecedented devastation on October 29 owing to a combination of factors, the most important of them being the nature of the cyclone itself. It was a very-high-intensity cyclone (T-7 in what is called the Dvorak Scale of T-1 to T-8 in meteorological parlance) and is very rare in the northern Indian Ocean region. The cyclone that hit Andhra Pradesh in 1977 was the only other recent case which had associated winds of speeds of over 250 kmph and huge storm surges churning sea water to heights of up to 10 metres.

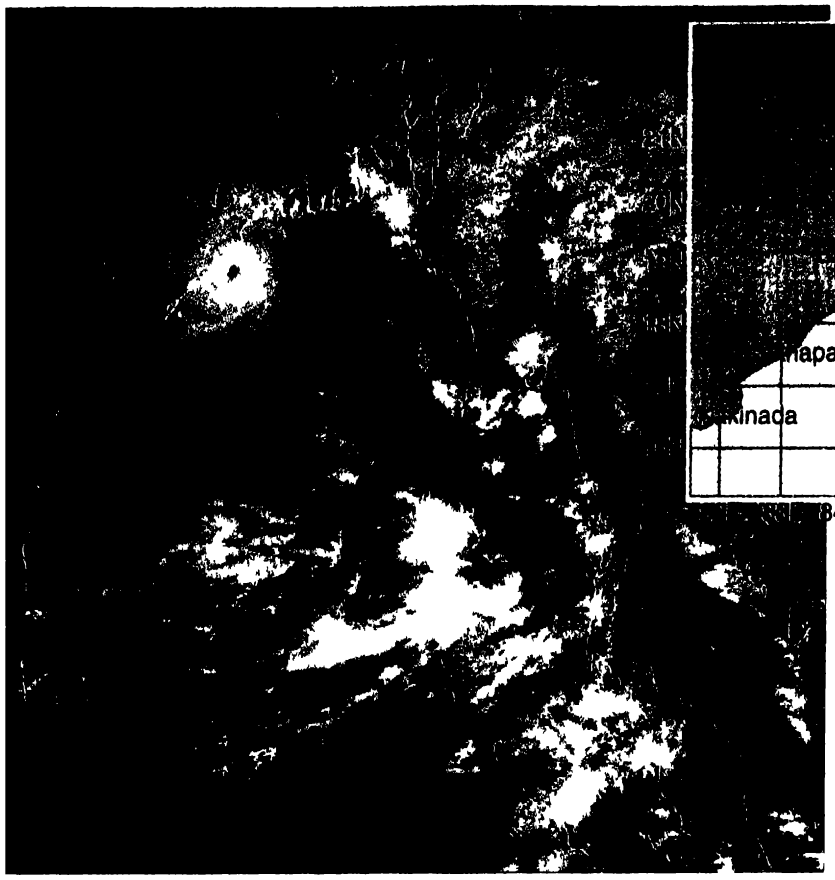
A unique and crucial feature of the cyclone system that hit Orissa was that it remained anchored over land for more than 48 hours and its intensity continued to remain fairly high, with associated winds (of over 100 kmph) in its vortex. Indeed, the well-formed cyclone eye (the central calm region, which in this case was 49 km across) and the eye wall are clearly visible in satellite images received until October 31. This is, in fact, an unusual feature because normally, as they move over land, cyclonic systems weaken and die out in the absence of energy inflow through moisture-laden surface winds. As the cyclone system was anchored near the coast, surface winds continued to feed moisture into it, resulting in heavy rainfall all across the sweep of the cyclonic circulation extending hundreds of kilometres.



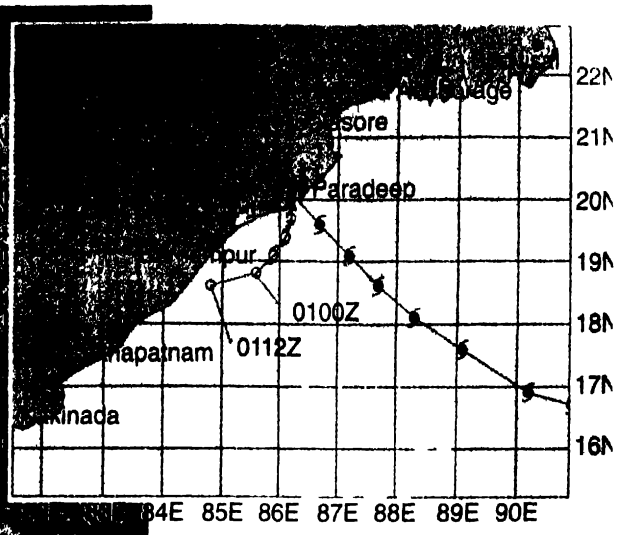
The real meteorological cause of the cyclone remaining stationary for long over land, as if a large-scale atmospheric system was blocking its northwestward motion, is not yet known and will become a subject of a major scientific investigation. In fact, the cyclone track looped back sharply from the anchored spot on October 31 (another rare phenomenon) and a considerably weakened cyclone was seen moving in the south-southeastern direction. This behaviour is indicative of an important characteristic of cyclones. Even though, with the advent of satellite imagery, the genesis of a cyclone can be seen and tracked well in advance, the exact behaviour of the cyclone, including its intensity build-up and landfall, is a product of its interaction with the environmental meteorological forcings. This makes predictions of the track, landfall and life of a cyclone quite difficult. In fact, when the system is weak, the prevalent atmospheric factors around the cyclone influence its behaviour and movement. But once the system gets intensified, it becomes more energetic than the surrounding systems and the cyclone begins to influence the environment strongly.

The history and evolution of the cyclone was as follows:

On October 25 afternoon a "depression" had formed, centred about 550 km east of Port Blair in the Andamans. It moved northwestwards and concentrated into a "deep depression" by midnight. It intensified into a "cyclonic storm" on October 26 morning when it was about 350 km from Port Blair. At this point, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of a potential threat to the north Andhra-



INSAT-1D image of the "super cyclonic storm" (T-7) as it crosses the Orissa coast at Paradeep on October 29.



The track of the cyclone, from October 27, when it intensified into a "severe cyclonic storm" (T-3.5), until November 1, when it weakened into a "deep depression" and finally a "depression" and moved southwards along the Andhra Pradesh coast. The loop back of the cyclone occurred on October 31 near Cuttack. This is based on Meteosat imagery.

Orissa-West Bengal coast arising from a "severe cyclonic storm" The system moved northwestward and intensified into a severe cyclonic storm on October 27 morning when it was about 750 km from Paradeep Predicting that it was likely to intensify further, the IMD issued a "cyclone alert" to Cyclone Warning Centres at Visakhapatnam, Bhubaneswar and Calcutta Although the IMD predicted heavy winds and rainfall for October 28 itself, the cyclone remained fixed for six hours at about 600 km from Paradeep and intensified into a "very severe cyclonic storm" (Table on Page 28 gives the IMD's classification of low-pressure systems)

On October 28, the cyclone continued its northwestward movement and intensified into a "super cyclonic storm" – a new term, hitherto not used in meteorological parlance – as the wind speed increased to over 260 kmph as it approached the Orissa coast The IMD had predicted landfall between Puri and Balasore in the early hours of October 29 Although the cyclone hung over the sea near the coast a little longer than expected, it crossed Paradeep on October 29 between 10 a.m. and 12 noon. After crossing the coast the system hardly moved and it weakened gradually over the next two days Somewhat unexpectedly, it curved back and finally moved south wards over the sea along the Andhra Pradesh coast As the system remained stationary, the IMD predicted both on October 30 and 31 its movement in the northeastern direction over land, which did not occur

ALL this might suggest – as indeed the IMD has been claiming – that the forecast of the track and the final landfall location, and the corresponding warnings issued by the IMD, were accurate and that it was only the government's disaster management machinery that failed the people of Orissa While in the main this seems to be true, the scientific machinery and the predictions were far from perfect and these need to be highlighted Whether or not these did contribute to the improper communication to the officials in Orissa, and the consequent ill-preparedness to mitigate the disaster, is not clear though news reports from Orissa suggested that even meteorological officials in Bhubaneswar did not have proper information.

For instance television reports on the night of October 28 and early morning on October 29 quoting an IMD official in Bhubaneswar said The latest reports say that the cyclone centred just 180 km south east of Paradeep has changed its path slightly and is heading for the West Bengal coast The cyclone is likely to strike between Puri in north Orissa and Sagar in West Bengal ' This apparently caused a great deal of confusion in the minds of the people of Orissa and also led to some complacency in the contingency planning, at least in and around Bhubaneswar Indeed, this report also led to a rapid large-scale evacuation from areas around Sagar in West Bengal The IMD headquarters, however, denies that such a warning or announcement was ever issued But it is on record that the Bhubaneswar meteorological office did state this to the press, apparently based on a communication from Delhi

Inexplicably in this age of information super highways, while all the major meteorological centres of the world were putting out real-time information on the Orissa cyclone, including downloadable satellite images from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) and Meteosat satellites, there was nothing on the IMD Web page (www weather delhi nic in or www imd ernet in) about the calamitous

A project-in-waiting

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

IT was the breakdown of communication networks that turned the cyclone disaster in Orissa into a catastrophe. Flood waters washed away not only access roads but all terrestrial communication channels that linked the districts to the outside world. This hampered relief and rescue work. This would not have happened had the POLNET project, conceived 10 years ago, taken off and been commissioned as scheduled in 1998.

POLNET, developed by scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation, was designed to provide a unified police satellite communications network to integrate the entire country for quick exchange of data. Although the project was to facilitate exchange of information on the movement of criminals, crime fact-sheets and access to Interpol's crime profiles of foreign terrorist organisations and individuals, the network would have provided the much-needed connectivity during the cyclone.

Conceived originally by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the project was cleared by the Central government in 1996. Funds were also earmarked. It was to be partly funded by the Union Home Ministry, the Central paramilitary forces and State governments. The Tenth Finance Commission even earmarked funds for 21 States included in the project. However, the project is stuck in the Home Ministry. At a meeting held in September this year, Union Home Secretary K.K. Pandey is learnt to have raised doubts about the need to implement the project despite the fact that the absence of a POLNET-type network was felt during the Andhra Pradesh cyclone disaster of 1996.

The analogue technology used in communications systems at present is primitive, and remote areas in the country do not have communication links even with district headquarters. POLNET was to connect every police station in the country and replace the present network run by the Directorate of Police Coordination Wireless (DPCW). It was also meant to connect every police station in the country with the Interpol headquarters at Lyons, France, through the transponders of the INSAT-2B and 2C satellites. It was designed to connect 600-odd districts in India through 823 hubs, and transmit data at a speed thousand times faster than the present radio communications systems used by the police. It was to be a very efficient alternative to the telephone and other networks. Currently communication among various districts is through a telegraphic data processor. It might take four days even for an urgent message to reach its destination. Besides, DCPW messages often suffer distortion during transmission and are vulnerable to eavesdropping. POLNET, on the other hand, was to have a locking system which would have prevented such lapses.

The delays have pushed up the cost of the project. The total cost worked out by the C.P. Joshi Committee in 1988 was Rs.182.78 crores, but in 1998 it had already gone up to Rs. 288 crores. This is not to mention the cost of precious lives lost owing to the lack of communications and the consequent hampering of effective disaster-management. ■

event, not even INSAT images which the IMD receives every half hour. Indeed, there is a link indicated for the cyclone and a click on that only takes you to a United States Navy site. Web sites such as this (www.npmos.navy.mil) or of the NOAA (www.osei.noaa.gov) or of the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (ECMWF) showed the track of the cyclone in almost real time; the ECMWF and the U.S. Navy even predicted the track and landfall of cyclone fairly accurately. Incidentally, Pakistan's meteorological department, which does not have a satellite, runs a fairly good Web site using images, analyses and predictions of other centres.

Given this and the apparent confusion in some wings of the IMD about the landfall even less than 24 hours in advance, the question arises as to how accurately the track of a cyclone can be predicted and how far ahead. Given the complexity of cyclone dynamics and a cyclone's highly non-linear interaction with the environment (within a matter of 24 hours a cyclonic system can grow into a very severe cyclonic storm), even state-of-the-art techniques of investigating severe cyclones with powerful computers cannot predict their motion very accurately. But less than 24 hours before landfall, the error in prediction comes down to 50 km, about the size of the cyclone eye itself. So what could have been the reason for the reported announcement of a change in course of the cyclone on October 28?

The circulation in a cyclone usually extends to about 1,000 km horizontally and to about 15 km vertically. Therefore, while the cyclone movement is influenced by the upper atmosphere winds, the feeding of energy and moisture to sustain the cyclone is done by sea surface winds. The initial path is dictated by the dominant currents in the upper atmosphere, known as steering currents, and the presence of easterlies from the Pacific during these months causes the northwestward movement of cyclones over the Bay of Bengal until they become energetic and begin to influence the environment severely.

The methods operationally available to the meteorologist for forecasting the movement are. a) "climate persistence" technique, that is, assuming a continuation of the track already established from previous observations; b) "climatology", that is, normal tracks followed by cyclones in corresponding seasons or previous years; and c) numerical models, using environmental data, including wind speeds and cloud motion vectors of the upper atmosphere from satellite data. In this particular case, as can be seen from the final track, the cyclone followed a path that was just an extrapolation of the evolving track over land. In that sense, from the perspective of prediction, it was a simple and "well-behaved" cyclone.

But if a climatological judgment based on the statistics of past data as well as other meteorological parameters like new strong wind or pressure systems over land had been employed, it could have led to an empirical conclusion that the cyclone was likely to move towards West Bengal. For it is reliably learnt that there were two anticyclones over land, when the cyclone was about to cross the Orissa coast, that would, in general, tend to oppose the cyclone's northwestern motion and weaken it.

As regards numerical models, the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) makes

use of the grid model called T-80 (which has a coarse resolution of 150 km as compared to models used by the ECMWF and other centres) and meteorological parameters derived from satellite data. Data on wind vectors, cloud motion vectors, temperature and so on derived from satellite images are important inputs to any numerical model analysis of a cyclone, which is necessary if one has to include all the interactions of the cyclone with the environment in the model calculations.

Sufficient manpower and resources must be directed towards an integrated approach to cyclone studies on a mission mode that would work towards a large-scale model which can be used for operational forecasts.

Interestingly, the upper atmosphere winds as derived by the IMD from INSAT data showed north-easterlies over West Bengal as it normally would have been if the north-east monsoon had become active. If this was indeed the case, then it would have weakened the cyclone system since this would be opposing the cyclonic vortex winds. And indeed, the NCMRWF's analysis had indicated a dissipating cyclone even before it hit the coast. Wind vectors derived from other satellites such as Meteosat of NOAA showed dominant south-easterlies, rather than north-easterlies, which would tend to steer the cyclone in the north-western direction. However, the NCMRWF did not use Meteosat data because apparently Meteosat raw digital data are not received by the IMD.

SO, why did INSAT data show north-easterlies in the upper atmosphere which Meteosat did not? According to NCMRWF scientists, this is perhaps because INSAT-2E, which was launched in April this year, has not been providing any meteorological data for more than two months. (The satellite image accompanying this article has been sourced from INSAT-1D). This hitherto undisclosed information was confirmed by reliable sources in the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Apparently, the entire Very High Resolution Radiometer (VHRR) has become non-functional because of the failure of the servo motor mechanism in the "scan mirror" assembly. As a result, no data in the visible, IR or water vapour channel region are available from the VHRR, the key instrument of the meteorological payload of INSAT-2E.

Since Dr. K. Kasturirangan, ISRO Chairman, and Dr. S. Rangarajan, Director of the Master Control Facility (MCF), Hassan, are out of the country, no official comments were available. Dr.S.N. Srivastava, IMD Deputy Director-General, and Dr.H.V. Gupta, Director, Satellite Meteorology, declined to confirm or deny the failure of the instrument. Both used the euphemistic phrase that INSAT-2E meteorological payload is still in the "test mode" and is not yet operational. This would be strange for a satellite launched in April 1999.

However, according to ISRO sources, the CCD (charge-coupled device) camera is working perfectly and images from it are available to the IMD. In fact, CCD images are of a better resolution (of 1 km) as compared to the VHRR's 2 km and are particularly suited for tropical cyclone analysis. Unfortunately, some seven months after the satellite launch, the software for analysing CCD images and deriving wind vector data is still not in place at the IMD. So the data used for deriving meteorological parameters are from INSAT-1D, which is nine years old and well beyond its normal life-time. It is on an inclined orbit and any wind vectors derived from it could lead to errors. In fact, if INSAT-2E data were available, it would have included moisture data around the cyclone as well, which would have been extremely useful in forecasting the intensity of the cyclone because it is the moisture-carrying low-level currents that feed energy to and sustain cyclones.

As part of the cyclone warning system along the coast, the IMD has a network of cyclone detection radars (CDRs), which have a range of 400 km (essentially determined by the curvature of the earth). These high-power radars are basically capable of detecting the cyclone eye, the eye wall cloud and the spiral bands of clouds at a distance which an average cyclone would cover in a day. This network also includes an experimental Japanese radar at Visakhapatnam, which can also measure precipitation in the cyclone. Doppler radars (DRs), on the other hand, could provide details of the cyclone's wind field in addition to the usual data from CDRs. Their ability to monitor continuously the wind maxima associated with the wall cloud and the radial extent of the hurricane strength wind field can be of great value to the forecaster.

But, unfortunately, even though the decision to set up three DRs was taken nearly seven years ago, and money sanctioned immediately thereafter, not even one has been set up. One is being built by ISRO in association with Bharat Electronics Limied (BEL) and is undergoing tests The other two were to be imported in order to save time, but a German supplier was identified only recently. Meanwhile, the indigenous effort seems to have already come good. Once tested, BEL should be entrusted with producing these in greater numbers to be installed all along the coast, say experts.

All these may not have had any direct bearing on the warnings issued by the IMD. It was perhaps one of those chance events that the cyclone track was a simple one. That in spite of this the administrative machinery simply collapsed in the face of it is another matter. But future ones could be those more complex recurving ones, which would defy such simple extrapolations. The important question of why the cyclone remained anchored over land and then recurved could throw light on new and unexpected dynamic forcings on cyclone. It is possible that the two anticyclones observed over land shortly before the cyclone struck were responsible for this, and the cyclone being very intense just stayed put and could not be diverted.

From the point of view of an operational prediction of cyclone intensity and movement, the lessons of the Orissa cyclone for the scientific community are clear. Sufficient manpower and resources must be directed towards an integrated approach to cyclone studies on a mission mode that would work towards a large-scale model which can be used for operational forecasts. Today, even though the NCMRWF, with its CRAY Supercomputer, is situated on the same campus as the IMD, there is no regular interaction between the two organisations.

The NCMRWF does not get the IMD wind vector data directly from the IMD; it has to wait for them to be put on the World Meteorological Organisation's global data network. ■



KAMAL NARANG

BJP leaders Atal Behari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and Kushabhau Thakre at the National Executive meeting in New Delhi; (facing page) party delegates at the meeting.

POLITICS

The BJP's dilemma

In a post-election self-congratulatory mode, the BJP's National Executive seeks to gloss over pointers to the party's political fault lines.

V.VENKATESAN
in New Delhi

THE Bharatiya Janata Party, which heads the multi-party ruling coalition at the Centre, has always claimed that collective leadership and decision-making is its hallmark. The party's apex decision-making body, the National Executive (N.E.), meets at least once in three months to discuss and decide on major tasks. However, the 147-member Executive has over the years become just a debating forum, with key decisions concerning the party and the governments it runs being taken elsewhere – by a group of senior leaders. Yet, the N.E. serves as an instrument that facilitates periodical interaction among the party's leaders across the country and provides feedback from the States to the central leadership on the BJP's and BJP-led governments' functioning, among other things.

With the BJP finding itself in government for the second successive year after the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, relations between the party and the government have acquired a new dimension. The party, which had for long been in an opposition mode, is now under compulsion to back the government and target its political adversaries. The Vajpayee government enjoys a comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha, though it is mostly owing to the numerical strength of the BJP's innumerable allies in power. The BJP is anxious to preserve its dominant status in the coalition.

The N.E. meeting in New Delhi on November 3 and 4, called to discuss the results of the Lok Sabha elections, began on a self-congratulatory note. Party president Kushabhau Thakre, in his speech, stressed that the party had grown between 1996 and 1999. "What has emerged in this election is a bipolar polity. The dominant pole is the BJP; the other pole is the Congress(I)", he said. He accused the Left parties of being the "palanquin-bearers" of the Congress(I) and claimed that they had eventually been reduced to "a mere footnote in history". "We have to expand our base further and reach out to more sections of the people. This has to be our relentless effort," he said.

The N.E. took note of the fact that the BJP now had Members of Parliament from 18 States and one Union Territory (Andaman and Nicobar Islands). The party has representation from the Andamans to Jammu and Kashmir, and from Kamrup to Kutch, its spokesperson M. Venkaiah Naidu said. It won 25 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and 21 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the recent elections. It has 15 women MPs.

The N.E. members felt that the party's base had expanded geographically and socially and its political appeal had widened. The recent elections also ensured representation for the party for the first time in the West Bengal Assembly.

As for the multi-party alliance it struck, the BJP found that the regional alliances were useful to expand its base in some States. In Andhra Pradesh, the party, with the help of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), won seven of the eight Lok Sabha seats and 50 per cent of the Assembly seats it contested. "The alliance was beneficial to both the TDP and the BJP," Venkaiah Naidu said.

However, in Karnataka and Bihar, its alliance with the Janata Dal (U) proved a liability. Party members from these States blamed the tie-up with the Janata Dal(U)



for its setbacks. The leadership was all sympathy for the Karnataka leaders, who had from the beginning opposed the entry of the Janata Dal(U) into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). They felt that the BJP was badly affected by the anti-incumbency mood in the State, which was under Janata Dal rule when the elections were held. (Janata Dal Chief Minister J.H. Patel and his supporters fought the elections as part of the NDA.)

The results of the Lok Sabha elections held in four constituencies (Bhagalpur, Purnea, Rajmahal, and Khagaria) in Bihar in the fourth phase, and one in Assam (Dhubri) on October 28 disappointed the BJP. In Bihar the party lost by huge margins three seats it had won in 1998, while its ally, the Janata Dal (U), managed to retain the Khagaria seat. Venkaiah Naidu reasoned that people who voted in the fourth phase were aware that the Vajpayee government was comfortably placed at the Centre and therefore they did not feel the need to vote for the BJP.

Members from Bihar argued that the results of the fourth phase showed that the Janata Dal(U) did not campaign for candidates. The senior leaders of that party, most of them Ministers in the Vajpayee government, were busy with the Parliament session, a BJP vice-president pointed out. Venkiah Naidu admitted that there was lack of coordination between the alliance partners. Caste equations and sympathy for certain candidates also contributed to the debacle, the BJP spokesman claimed. The N.E. attributed the results in the fourth phase to "local factors" as national issues did not dominate the campaign, he said. Although the BJP had won on its own strength these seats in 1998, it was at pains to emphasise that the results could have been different had Janata Dal(U) leaders campaigned.

The N.E. also discussed Uttar Pradesh amidst reports that Chief Minister Kalyan Singh may be replaced (see following story). Members, including Union Home Minister L.K. Advani, said that organisational problems, the anti-incumbency feeling among the electorate, and tactical voting by the minority community contributed to the party's debacle there. Had the party retained its strength in U.P., it could have got more than 200 seats in the Lok Sabha, members felt.

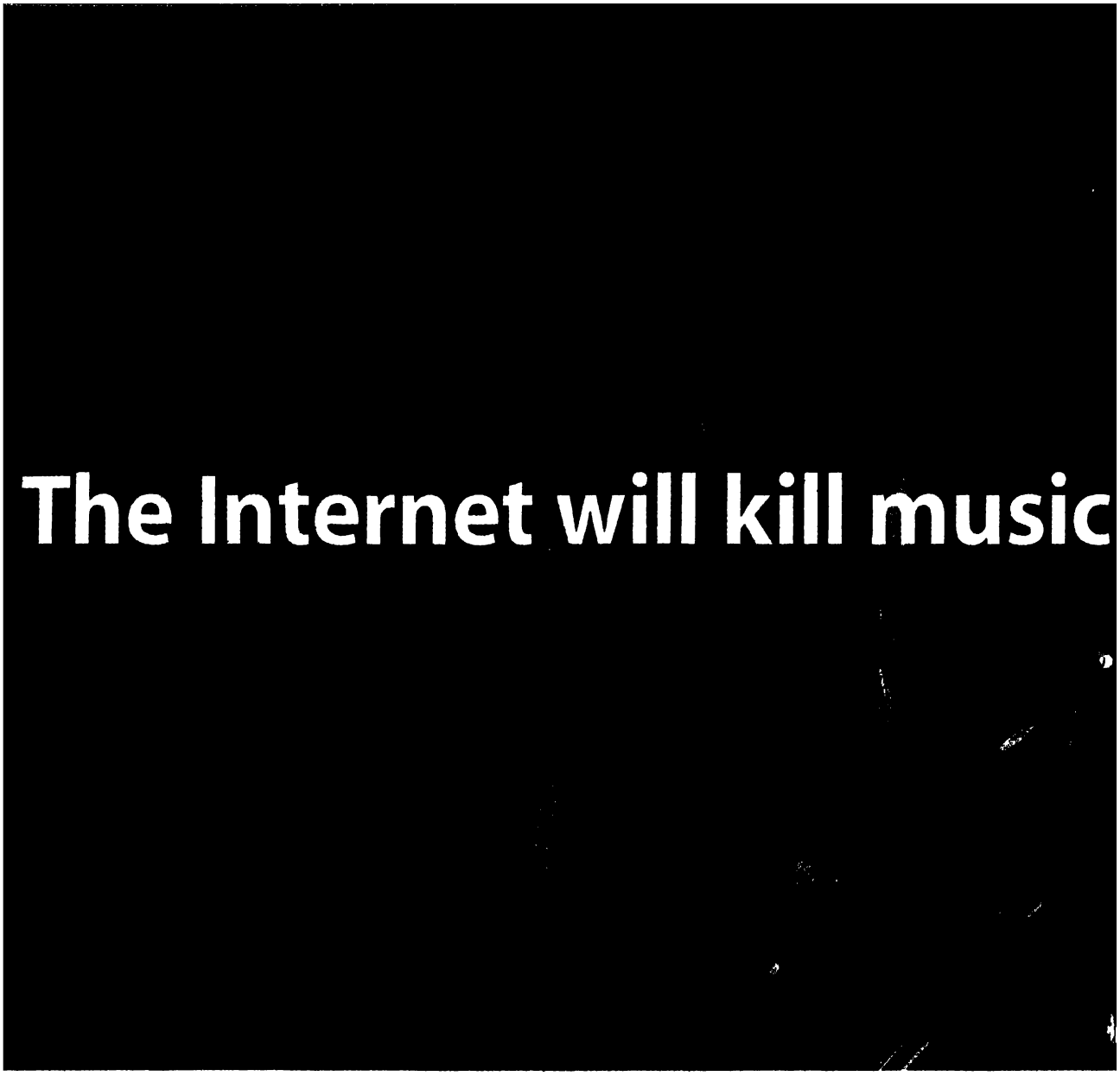
Kalyan Singh found himself isolated at the meeting as Advani insisted on taking certain "corrective steps" to improve the party's prospects in the Assembly elections, which are due in one year. Although he did not identify these steps, his supporters hinted that Kalyan Singh's removal had almost been decided, although the leaders were divided on its timing. Party vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy appealed to the U.P. leaders to find a solution to the organisational crisis in the State, or abide by whatever the central leadership decided. The central leaders' dilemma is obvious: they fear that a hasty removal of Kalyan Singh could harm the party in the long run by alienating it from the backward class people.

For the moment, however, the leadership wants to tell the cadres that the U.P. setback should not dampen their spirits. "*Suraj* (good governance) is our goal," said Venkaiah Naidu. He added: "This government will last. The uncertainty over the stability of the government is over." He said that the real test for the party organisation was the conduct of its MLAs, MPs, and Ministers. "Their behaviour should be different from what was witnessed during past regimes," Venkaiah Naidu said, summing up the deliberations.

The political resolution, passed at the N.E. , makes no reference to the Bofors issue but urges the government to pass the Lok Pal Bill so as to launch a frontal war against corruption in public life. Seen in the context of Advani's promise to the Congress(I), made in the Lok Sabha, that the government would consider its request to delete Rajiv Gandhi's name from the Bofors charge-sheet, the absence of any reference to the Bofors issue in the N.E. is intriguing.

The BJP, to quote Advani, has overcome its "untouchability" by adding to its allies since 1996, when its government collapsed within 13 days of its formation. The contradictions within the NDA since it came to power show that the BJP's achievement in winning friends may not be all that real.

The party is gearing to face its National Council session, to be held in Chennai towards the end of December. With Kushabhau Thakre declining a second term, the search for the next president is likely to begin next year. ■



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In a dither over U.P.

The Uttar Pradesh imbroglio continues as the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership is deeply divided on the question of replacing Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

CONFUSION reigns supreme in the Bharatiya Janata Party when it comes to handling its affairs in Uttar Pradesh. The political game that started in the party immediately after its stunning reverses in the State in the Lok Sabha elections continues. In an exercise to evolve a new strategy for the party in the State, a series of formal and informal discussions have taken place among leaders such as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Home Minister L.K. Advani, party president Kushabhau Thakre, Chief Minister Kalyan Singh and State party president Rajnath Singh. The National Executive of the party, which met in New Delhi on November 3 and 4, devoted a considerable amount time to discuss the issue. No plan of action, however, emerged.

The differences among the leaders over replacing Kalyan Singh have stalled a solution to the crisis. While Vajpayee and Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi are firmly of the view that Kalyan Singh, who belongs to the Other Backward Classes group, must be replaced as Chief Minister with a representative of the forward castes, Advani and his supporters such as party general secretary K.N. Govindacharya want Kalyan Singh to continue in the post. Kushabhau Thakre is vacillating, though with a pronounced tilt to the opinion of the Advani group.

The Vajpayee group accuses the Chief Minister of having sabotaged the BJP's chances in the Lok Sabha elections by forging a secret alliance with another backward caste leader, Samajwadi Party (S.P.) chief Mulayam Singh Yadav. Kalyan Singh, however, argues that the Other Backward Classes, such as the Kurmi and Lodh Rajput caste groups, are the mainstay of the BJP's support base in the State and that large sections of people belonging to these castes owe their political alliance to Kalyan Singh. Removing him from the Chief Minister's post at this juncture would alienate these sections from the party, according to Govindacharya.



V SUDERSHAN

Chief Minister Kalyan Singh.

The other group does not agree with this perception. The pro-changers, who include State Urban Development Minister Lalji Tandon, argue that the party had planned to replace Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister even before the Lok Sabha elections and there was no reason now to go back on the proposal. "If anything," says a leader close to Lalji Tandon, "the reverses in the elections have strengthened the case for removing the Chief Minister."

The Vajpayee-backed group has made a number of proposals with the express intent of allowing Kalyan Singh an honourable exit. These include the shifting of Rajnath Singh to some position at the Centre and Lalji Tandon to some State as Governor, along with the replacement of Kalyan Singh. The plan is to replace Kalyan Singh with Public Works Minister Kalraj Mishra and give Kalyan Singh a Cabinet berth at the Centre. Another sop held out before Kalyan Singh is the elevation of one of his close associates and a backward caste leader, Om Prakash Singh, as Deputy Chief Minister.

Kalyan Singh has rejected all these proposals. By all indications, he is not ready to negotiate any proposal that involves moving him out of the top position in the State. His supporters aver that the balance of power is clearly in his favour. According to them, Kalyan Singh's strength comes from three factors. First, the strong backing he has in the BJP Legislature Party as well as among the MLAs of alliance partners such as the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC) and the Janatantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP). The Chief Minister reportedly has the support of over 65 MLAs of the BJP and 28 MLAs of the alliance partners. No other leader has a similar level of support in the ruling alliance. Kalyan Singh acquired this support through a deft political move in the last week of October, by which he virtually split the UPLC down the middle and sidelined Naresh Agarwal, its president, who was moving closer to the anti-Kalyan Singh group of the BJP.

The Tripathi group of the UPLC has threatened that it will pull down the government if Kalyan Singh is removed. With about 11 MLAs, the Tripathi group is capable of carrying out this threat as the Ministry has only a majority of eight in a House of 424 members. Apart from this UPLC group, 17 members belonging to the JBSP and its breakaway faction, the Kisan Mazdoor Bahujan Party (KMBP), too have announced their support to Kalyan Singh.

The second factor in Kalyan Singh's favour is obviously the support of the Advani group at the Centre. Before the Lok Sabha polls, this group too had moved away from Kalyan Singh, perceiving him as a liability for the party. However, after the polls it was quick to realise that Kalyan Singh alone could stop the drain of backward caste votes from the BJP.

Thirdly, Kalyan Singh seems to be

benefiting from the impending elections to the Bihar Assembly. Even those central leaders who advocate his removal are wary as to what would be the impact of such an action on the Bihar polls, especially the because the backward castes account for a large number of votes in that State. Many of these leaders hold the view that replacing Kalyan Singh with an upper-caste Chief Minister would send a negative message to the backward castes in Bihar.

The Chief Minister, meanwhile, continues with his brazen use of power against his detractors. In a follow-up to his October 17 press statement that rumours about a proposed course of action in Uttar Pradesh by the central leadership were not good for the party, he initiated a mass transfer of officers between October 24 and 31. As many as 103 Indian Administrative Services (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) officers were transferred on October 24, and two days later 53 officers were transferred. A statement from BJP general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu that no change of leadership in the State was being contemplated boosted Kalyan Singh's morale; he even organised a dinner, as if to celebrate the statement. Clearly, Kalyan Singh is in no mood to give up.

The Chief Minister's detractors, however, have one advantage – Vajpayee's insistence that Kalyan Singh be removed. Apparently Vajpayee favours Kalraj Mishra as the replacement for Kalyan Singh and has told his protege in the State, Lalji Tandon, to accept Mishra as a "good compromise candidate". Mishra reportedly enjoys the support of approximately 100 MLAs of the coalition.

There are also other names in circulation. Prominent among them are those of the national secretary of the party, Sangha Priya Gautam, Union Minister Santhosh Gangwar and Assembly Speaker Kesri Nath Tripathi. The first two are projected with the reasoning that they would satisfy the backward caste-Dalit section: Gautam belongs to the Dalit community and Gangwar to a backward caste. Tripathi's name is projected on the grounds that he is more experienced than Mishra and has greater popular appeal.

As these games continue, governance has been suffering. There are growing complaints that all work has come to a standstill in the Ministries. Obviously, the process of polarisation in the BJP has to reach a clear and concrete stage if things are to change in the State. Indications are that the process will reach a critical stage by the second week of November. ■

Revolt in the RJD

Rashtriya Janata Dal president Laloo Prasad Yadav and his wife and Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi face a rebellion in the party in the wake of the RJD's debacle in the Lok Sabha elections.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI
in Patna

RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL president Laloo Prasad Yadav is in trouble on his home turf. In the wake of the party's debacle in the Lok Sabha elections, the RJD leadership faces a revolt from within its ranks in Bihar. Some senior party leaders and legislators have demanded Laloo Prasad's resignation and the removal of Rabri Devi, his wife, as Chief Minister.

Firing the first salvo immediately after the results were announced, State Revenue Minister Ramai Ram blamed the party's poor showing on the induction of Samata Party deserters into the party at Laloo Prasad's behest. Subsequently a large number of RJD workers echoed similar sentiments. Senior legislator Maheshwar Prasad Yadav held Laloo Prasad responsible for the electoral debacle and demanded that he and Rabri Devi relinquish their posts to pave the way for persons with a clean image to take charge. "In order to give the party a new lease of life," he suggested that honest leaders, such as Deo Narayan Yadav, Jabir Hussain and Raghubans Yadav, be made party president or Chief Minister. Accusing Laloo Prasad of promoting nepotism, the rebel MLA said: "The RJD has a mass base and cannot be run on the whims and fancies of one person." He said that the RJD chief acted like a dictator and patronised corrupt elements. Instead of removing the scam-tainted MLA, R.K. Rana, from the party, Laloo Prasad fielded Rana's wife from Khagaria.



ANU PUSHKARNA

RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav. Even as he is fighting with his back to the wall, he has declared his intent to battle the BJP and its allies.

Maheswar Prasad said: "The RJD president who lost to Sharad Yadav in Madhepura and Chief Minister Rabri Devi, who could not muster any support for party nominees, have no moral right to continue in office." He told *Frontline* that he would not leave the party but would continue to raise his voice, with the help of like-minded party leaders and legislators, against the misdeeds of the duo.

Claiming the support of nearly two-thirds of party MLAs, he said that the party would break if the Chief Minister was not replaced. He claimed that several MLAs and Ministers shared his opinion and were in touch with him. He added: "We lost the elections only because of Laloo Prasad and Rabri Devi and their coterie. It is time Laloo Prasad's despotic and dynastic rule was ended. He made an unfit Rabri Devi Chief Minister only because he wanted to retain power."

Laloo Prasad's high-profile brother-in-law Sadhu Yadav, a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC), has also joined the revolt. He described the Cabinet as one of "brokers and sycophants" who led the party to a crushing defeat. There is perhaps an element of personal indignation in his outburst as he has been repeatedly denied the ticket for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. But the issues that he raised worry large sections of the RJD as Assembly elections are due next March. Blaming even his sister Rabri Devi for the rot, Sadhu Yadav demanded that Ministers Mohammed Ilyas Hussain (Road Construction), Jaiprakash Narayan Yadav (Education), Rabindra Charan

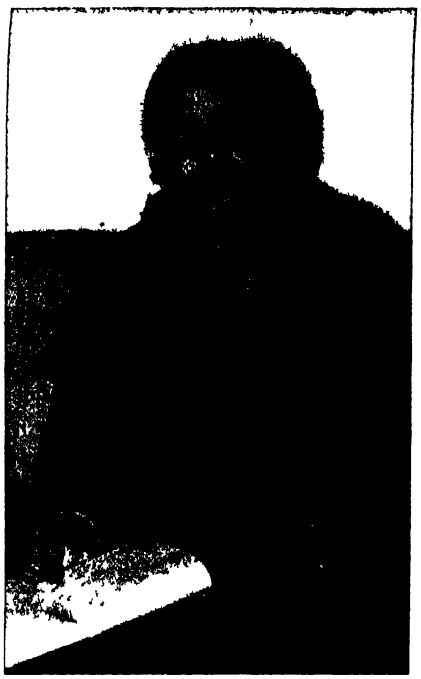
Yadav (Energy), Mahavir Prasad (Health) and Munshi Lal Rai (Public Health) be sacked. "There are no roads, no water, no power, no schools and no health facilities in Bihar," Sadhu Yadav said.

As the RJD lost 40 of the 54 Lok Sabha seats (its candidates trailed their rival in 230 of the 325 Assembly segments), the perception within the party is that this is the beginning of the end. The RJD lost even the Khagaria Lok Sabha seat, the election to which was deferred because of floods and held on October 28 along with Rajmahal, Bhagalpur and Purnea. Renu Kumari of the Janata Dal(U) defeated Nayana Rana of the RJD in Khagaria by more than 30,000 votes. (The Congress(I), the CPI(M) and an Independent got a seat each.) Laloo Prasad's detractors view this defeat as a foretaste of things to come.

With Laloo Prasad's core constituency of Yadavs and Muslims beginning to abandon him and his conviction in the disproportionate assets case seen as a possibility, his fate appears to be sealed. In south Bihar, the electorate has rejected him in successive elections, and in the north, which was his stronghold, his support is eroding fast.

HOWEVER, Laloo Prasad, who was down and out in the immediate aftermath of the poll debacle, was quick to recover. He told *Frontline* that the results of the October 28 round of elections revealed the people's indignation against the fortnight-old "communal" dispensation at the Centre. Rejecting the argument that infighting in the RJD was a major issue, he said that he would not prevent any RJD member from crossing over to the BJP or the JD(U). He described the party's setback as temporary and said that the RJD would stick to its declared intent of fighting the communal BJP and its allies. The RJD, he said, was preparing constituency-wise reports on the elections in order to take corrective measures for the Assembly round.

Laloo Prasad is apparently worried about the fodder scam case, which is likely to come up for hearing this month in the Special Court in Patna following the filing of the charge-sheet by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The charge-sheet against Laloo Prasad in the Rs.950-crore case might once again land him in jail. Meanwhile, according to informed sources, the CBI is going to charge Rabri Devi with "aiding" Laloo Prasad in amassing wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income. The sources said that Investigators had "sufficient evidence" to charge the Chief Minister under Section 109 of the Indian Penal Code for "aiding and abetting a criminal offence". Rabri Devi has failed to prove that she owns the dairy farm mentioned in Laloo Prasad's income-tax returns as the source of his income. The Chief Minister is a co-accused in the case in which her husband is the main accused.



RAJEEV BHATT

Chief Minister Rabri Devi. The filing of a charge-sheet against her by the CBI is likely to strengthen the demand for her removal.

The CBI, the Income Tax Department and the Enforcement Directorate (E.D.) have reportedly so far been able to unearth, on documentary evidence, property worth about Rs.45 lakhs, said to belong to Laloo Prasad Yadav alone. And he has not been able to explain to the investigating agencies' satisfaction how he amassed this wealth, which includes movable and immovable properties.

So far the CBI has charge-sheeted Laloo Prasad in two fodder scam cases (RC-20A/1996 and RC-64A/1996). He was arrested following a court order and then granted bail. The CBI has also sought the Governor's sanction to charge-sheet Laloo Prasad in yet another fodder scam case (RC-38A/1996) along with former Bihar Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra and several others including Dr. S.B. Rana, the alleged kingpin of the scam. However, the CBI is yet to obtain the Governor's sanction for prosecution in the RC-38A/1996 case though it approached the Governor more than a month ago. Most of the cases, involving conspiracy, forgery, cheating and other charges, have withstood judicial scrutiny whenever they were challenged in the lower courts, the Patna High Court and the Supreme Court. For instance, Laloo Prasad and the other accused went to the Supreme Court several times in order to get the fodder scam case quashed. But their petitions were rejected. The final report of the disproportionate assets case (5A/1998) has been pending disposal at the CBI headquarters for two months and is likely to be cleared soon.

The charge-sheet against Rabri Devi is likely to strengthen the demand for her removal. Laloo Prasad's detractors within the RJD are waiting for that moment. The Opposition is coaxing RJD legislators and Ministers, who are willing to cross over to the JD(U), to start a full-scale rebellion against Laloo Prasad. Senior JD(U) leader and Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said that the Opposition would not try to pull down the RJD Government as it would fall on its own.

Laloo Prasad is fighting with his back to the wall. The induction of 11 Ministers from Bihar (five of Cabinet rank and six Ministers of State) in the National Democratic Alliance Government clearly is an indication of the "attack" that the BJP-JD(U) combine has planned against the RJD in the Assembly elections.

Laloo Prasad received another jolt when Samajwadi Party (S.P.) chief Mulayam Singh Yadav snapped his ties with the RJD. Mulayam Singh said that it was because of the RJD's alliance with the Congress(I) that it faced a debacle in the Lok Sabha polls. He said that the S.P. would field its own candidates in many seats in the Assembly elections in Bihar.

Meanwhile, the RJD has decided to abandon its alliance with the Congress(I) in the State to give itself room to contest most of the Assembly seats. Aware of its dwindling popularity and the mounting index of Opposition unity against it because of the BJP-JD(U) alliance, the RJD wants to contest as many seats as possible. The presence of the Congress(I) in the fray is likely to split the vote, particularly that of the upper castes, and RJD leaders believe that they stand to benefit from it. Indications are that the RJD will attempt to reinforce its alliance with the Left parties, particularly the Communist Party of India (CPI), ahead of the Assembly elections. The RJD and the CPI(M) had an alliance for the Lok Sabha elections, but the CPI contested separately because it was unhappy over the seat-sharing arrangement. The rift with the CPI, party leaders believe, hurt the RJD. ■

A growing toll

Amid spurious post-Kargil euphoria, the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir face a fresh terrorist offensive.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Srinagar

ON the morning of November 3, 15 Corps Commander Lieutenant-General Kishan Pal held a press conference to denounce media reports of an imminent escalation of violence in Jammu and Kashmir. The Army, he said, had reversed early insurgent successes after the Kargil War. Journalists, he continued, had wrongly claimed that several Army camps had been stormed by terrorists in recent weeks.

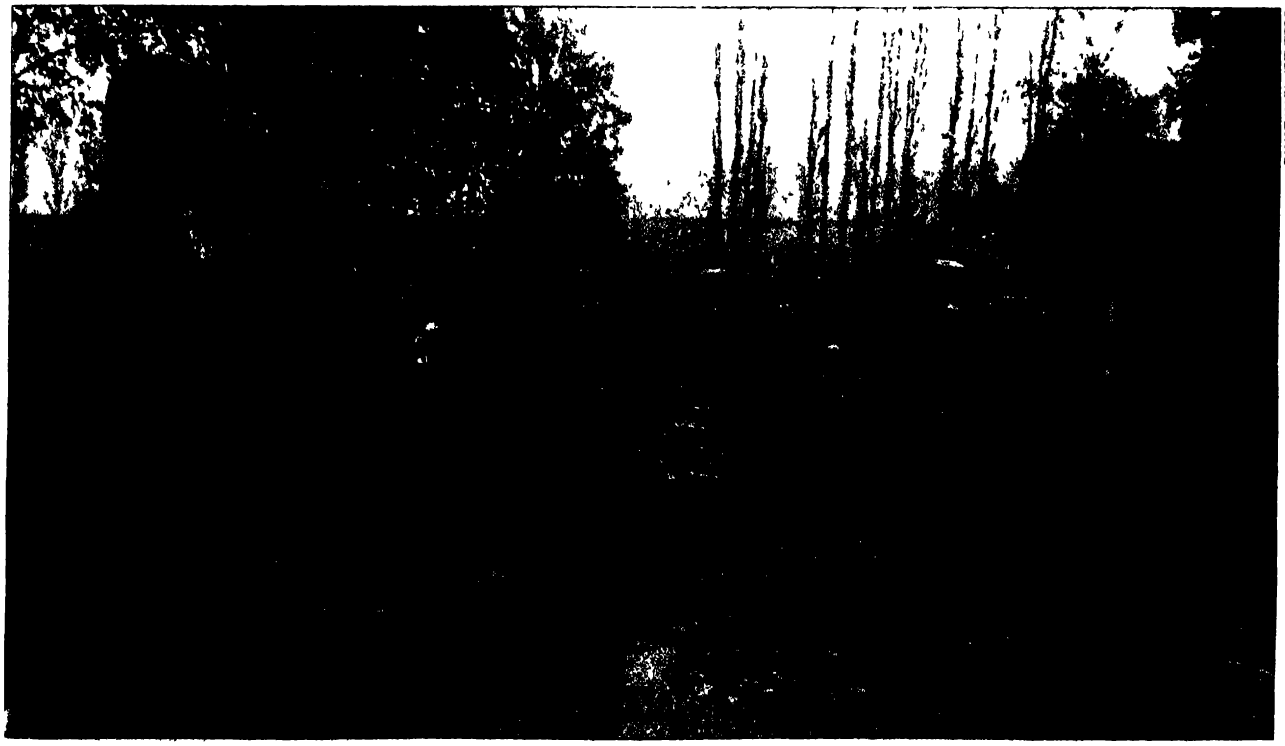
Hours later, eight Army personnel were shot dead by a Lashkar-e-Taiba suicide squad inside the Badami Bagh cantonment, a mere 10-minute walk from Kishan Pal's office.

The Lashkar-e-Taiba attack on the military operations headquarters in Kashmir, housed in a maximum security zone on the fringes of Srinagar, began at 5-45 p.m. At least three terrorists came in a hired minibus and parked the vehicle a few hundred yards from the cantonment's main entrance. One of them shot off a rifle-fired grenade which fell on a vacant plot of land. Guards responded to the explosion with confused and undirected fire, killing one Border Security Force jawan who happened to be passing by. In the melee, the hit-squad scaled the four-foot wall into Badami Bagh and hid themselves behind shrubs.

From the park, the terrorists moved forward to the Defence Ministry's public relations office, an unguarded facility. Sensing trouble, the 15 Corps' Public Relations Officer, Major P. Purushottam, locked three visiting photographers in his office toilet and went out to see what was happening. His decision saved the lives of the three photographers. The officer himself, along with seven members of his staff and a military intelligence official who happened to be in the area, were shot dead. All were unarmed. Purushottam, survived by his wife and infant daughter, was due to be posted out of Srinagar the following week.

The storming of the military operations headquarters in Srinagar is of more political than military significance. Such actions seem driven by the need to carry out high-profile actions to offset military losses.

Soldiers proceeded to cordon off the area, but exchanges of fire went on until 4-30 a.m. on November 4. The terrorists blew up a building used by the Cantonment Board, next to the public relations office. The firing ended after the terrorists were attacked with rockets. At the time of writing, the body of one terrorist – identified by Army officials as that of Lashkar-e-Taiba operations chief Abu Talha – had been recovered; another body was believed to be buried under rubble. Intelligence officials, however, told *Frontline* that the terrorist's features did not correspond with their infor-



FAYAZ KABLI/REUTERS

A building used by the Cantonment Board that was destroyed by terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba in Srinagar on November 3.

mant's descriptions of Abu Talha.

The storming of Badami Bagh could just be the first scene of Pakistan's executive head General Pervez Musharraf's script for the Kashmir theatre. While Musharraf has engaged in skirmishes with the Jamaat-e-Islami, which accuses him of harbouring a Mustafa Kemal Ataturk-style secular agenda, here are signs that the General is promoting other fundamentalist organisations, notably the Lashkar-e-Taiba and its parent religious body, the Markaz Dawa wal'Irshad. On October 26, the Pakistani newspaper *Nawa-e-Waqt* reported that the Lashkar was planning a series of major attacks in the State to coincide with its congregation at its Muridke on the outskirts of Lahore.

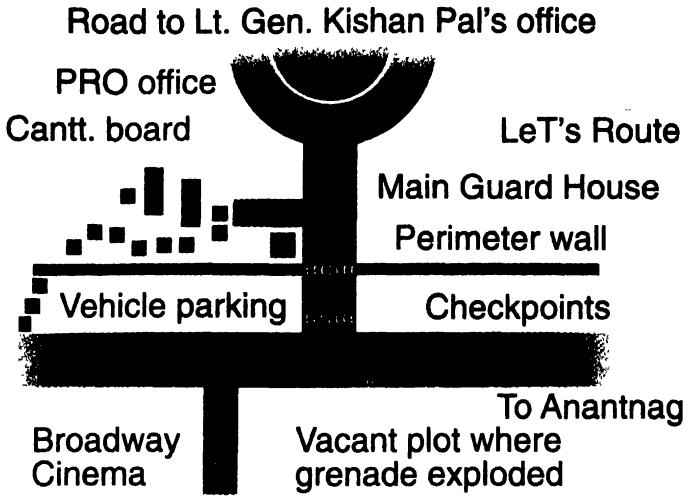
It is clear that Musharraf's hawkish rhetoric on Kashmir is not just polemic. Interestingly, the Markaz convention, from November 3 to 5, had been banned by the Nawaz Sharif regime. The Markaz's chief, revanchist preacher Hafiz Mohammad Sayeed, was interviewed on Muzaffarabad-based Radio Kashmir shortly after the coup in Pakistan. The broadcast reversed the Sharif regime's efforts to distance itself from the Lashkar-e-Taiba, partly under pressure from the United States. Hundreds of Lashkar activists had been jailed in a post-Kargil crackdown on chauvinist organisations critical of the deposed Prime Minister. More than 130 Lashkar members, Indian intelligence officials say, have now been released.

In some senses, the storming in itself is of more political than military significance. Such actions seem driven in part by the need to carry out high-profile actions to offset military losses. According to Director-General of Police Gurbachan Jagat, some 1,800 terrorists are believed to have made their way into the State this summer, taking advantage of gaps created by Kargil-period troop withdrawals. Between May and September alone, 550, or almost a third of the terrorists, were shot dead in encounters. The Badami Bagh storming was preceded by an October 28 attack on the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar. Days earlier, the State Police had announced the arrest of four terrorists involved in a similar attack on September 29.

Yet it is evident that spurious post-Kargil euphoria led military officials in the State to ignore signs of trouble and instead focus on the good news. In June, following troop withdrawals, security forces lost 33 personnel in the Kashmir region, the highest figures for any month since 1996. But the return of soldiers to counter-terrorist duties, officials pointed out, had led to rapid results. September saw 159 terrorists eliminated, the highest figures for a single month in three years. Between August and October 20, security forces eliminated over 347 terrorists, again a record figure for a three-month period.

Gross numbers were not the only evidence military officials used to suggest that the renewal of the Army's presence in the State had helped undo at least some of the Kargil damage. In June, at the height of the Kargil conflict, the ratio of terrorists killed for every security force jawan lost had dipped to the lowest level since 1990. In the Kashmir region, only 1.82 terrorists were killed for every Indian security force personnel who died in combat. The figures were even worse in Jammu, with 12 security force personnel lost and 14 terrorists killed, a ratio of 1:1.14. By September, the ratio in Kashmir had gone up to 1:4.05, and to 1:5.83 in Jammu.

As the storming of Badami Bagh illustrates, it would be



A sketch detailing the area in Badami Bagh where the terrorists struck.

Terrorism in the Kashmir region: An overview

	1999				1998				1997			
	Attacks on SF	SF killed	Militants killed	SF: Militants Killed	Attacks on SF	SF killed	Militants killed	SF: Militants Killed	Attacks on SF	SF killed	Militants killed	SF: Militants killed
January	87	17	41	2.41	66	7	40	5.71	119	5	66	13.20
February	60	23	57	2.48	41	2	33	16.50	72	9	75	8.33
March	66	15	44	3.38	58	4	40	10.00	113	16	101	7.21
April	57	9	48	5.33	65	19	46	2.42	78	6	73	12.16
May	69	17	53	3.12	42	3	18	6.00	99	16	107	6.69
June	87	33	60	1.82	85	17	71	4.18	110	14	105	7.50
July	84	18	46	2.56	90	19	109	5.74	113	19	119	6.26
August	135	45	91	2.02	125	21	109	5.19	135	20	109	5.45
September	175	22	69	3.86	96	13	44	3.38	96	13	69	5.31
October*	82	7	51	7.29	102	10	59	5.90	114	19	85	4.47
November					88	16	51	3.21	74	15	63	4.20
December					83	13	59	4.54	89	8	58	7.25
Total	886	264	680	2.94	943	182	889	4.27	1177	180	1054	5.86

*October 20, 1999; SF – All Security Force Personnel

Source: Jammu & Kashmir Police

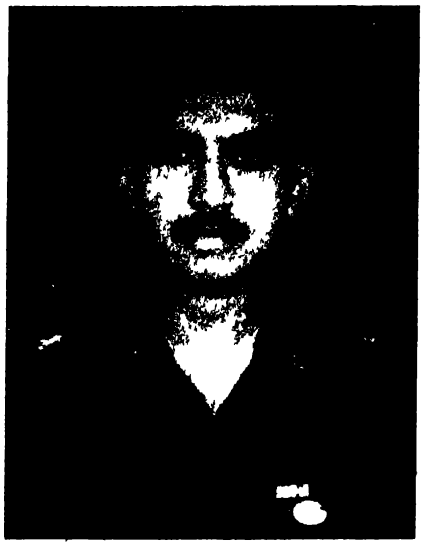
facile to suggest that a dramatic military turnaround is imminent. For one, heavy insurgent losses could be argued to be the consequence of the presence of numbers unprecedented in recent years. The losses of terrorist groups are mirrored by similar figures for India's security forces; 67 security force personnel died in Kashmir alone through August and September, the highest casualty figure for two months since 1997; 204 jawans have died in counter-terrorist duties this year in Kashmir, a figure already approximately a quarter higher than those for all of 1997 or 1998. And although 379 terrorists had been killed in Jammu this year and 580 in Kashmir, the ratios of the casualty figures of security force to those of terrorists, 1:3.51 and 1:2.84 respectively, are the most disturbing in recent years

HOW does one account for the evident escalation in the conflict after Kargil? For one, the Army appears to have been throwing significant resources at problem areas in both Kashmir and Jammu. In October, almost the entire 6 Division was used to saturate the Rajwar forests in Kupwara in an exercise code-named Operation Kaziranga. Kaziranga, sources told *Frontline*, was so large in scale that it almost provoked diplomatic panic after U.S. espionage satellites detected massive movements towards the Line of Control (LoC). The operation itself had few immediate results, for few terrorists were eliminated in its course. But the pressure in Kupwara led terrorists to scatter, and this snapped their communications.

Such operations, however, are not the first enterprises of their kind in post-1990 Jammu and Kashmir. If experience is any guide, they are no substitute for a cogent anti-terrorism policy. Official thought has, sadly, been remarkable for its lack of clarity. An early post-Kargil experiment in handing over the Army's internal security operations to Rashtriya Rifles Director-General Avtar Singh Gill was rapidly terminated for no evident reason (*Frontline*, September 10, 1999). With the creation of the 14 Corps to guard the stretch from Zoji La to the Siachen Glacier, Lieutenant-General Kishan Pal took renewed charge of anti-terrorist operations in September; the 15 Corps had earlier said it no longer wished to be engaged in the operations.

THE Farooq Abdullah Government has for its part ensured chaos in the State Police. Inspector-General of Police P.S. Gill, among the architects of the successful Special Operations Group (SOG) was moved out last month. Senior National Conference politicians had engineered Gill's removal (the Inspector-General was in charge of Kashmir in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections), claiming that the SOG's reputation for ruthlessness was giving the State Government a bad name. Gill, however, retained charge of the SOG operations. His abrupt removal has left many SOG officers convinced that the State Government wishes to have nothing to do with counter-insurgency operations.

Most disturbing of all, Abdullah seems determined to push ahead with controversial plans for autonomy to the



Major P. Purushottom, who was killed in the terrorist attack on the Defence Ministry's public relations office in Srinagar.

State's regions, built around sundering it internally along communal lines. An official committee, led by academic Riyaz Punjabi, has been set up to give form to the proposals of the Regional Autonomy Committee (RAC) (*Frontline*, October 22, 1999). The RAC's recommendations mirrored proposals put out by several U.S-based figures, notably a think-tank called the Kashmir Studies Group, arguing for a new partition of Jammu and Kashmir along communal lines. Should the RAC proposals take effect, an escalation of communal hostilities would be almost inevitable in the State.

SO far there has been little political reaction within the State to Musharraf's rise to power. Major events in Pakistan, notably the murder of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and the death of Zia-ul-Haq, provoked various forms of mass protest in the Kashmir Valley.

Religious leader and former All-Parties Hurriyat Conference chief Moulvi Umar Farooq restricted himself to a carefully-worded statement on the virtues of democracy, but stopped short of condemning the coup. Most ordinary people this correspondent spoke to appeared little moved by events across the LoC. "When your own house is on fire," said telephone-booth operator G.M. Butt, "you tend not to worry about what is happening next door."

That sentiment could, however, change in the not-too-distant future. For one, the arrest of the entire APHC leadership bar Moulvi Farooq has ensured that there is no focal points for anti-India protests.

Farooq Abdullah, in a tactically brilliant but perhaps strategically flawed move, had allowed the APHC to campaign vigorously for an election boycott. Low voter turnouts in urban areas aided a National Conference victory in the elections. With the objective secured, the APHC leaders were dispatched *en masse* to prisons outside the State, on charges of aiding terrorism. Their release from jail in the not-too-distant future, however, seems probable, and the real political fallout of Musharraf assuming power could then begin to become evident

As the winter snows blanket the high mountains and forests in November, violence will, as in past years, decline in its scale and dispersion. That, however, is no reason for complacency. Musharraf's need for domestic legitimacy and his right-wing ideological beliefs are certain to propel a renewed offensive in Jammu and Kashmir. The political objectives he sought to secure by occupying the Kargil heights this summer remain, and could form the centre-piece of a fresh campaign next summer. Despite the improved state of counter-terrorist operations since August, large concentrations of terrorists, armed with heavier weapons than at any point in the past, remain on their mountain perches overlooking the State.

Next summer, India's military victory in Kargil could well face many questions. Sadly, with the State's security apparatus in disarray and with a Union Government with more pressing matters on its mind, few are paying attention either to the lessons of Kargil, or the possibilities that lie ahead. ■

Blood and tears in Kannur

For two decades, political violence has been a way of life in Kerala's Kannur district.

R KRISHNAKUMAR
in Kannur

KANNUR in north Kerala has attained notoriety in the past two decades as a region of high-intensity political violence The district has seen the kind of hatred and fear that is associated with war-torn societies Once Kannur was the homeland of the 'Chekavars', martial arts heroes who were legends in their own lifetime because of their readiness to fight and die for local chieftains Today, as political parties compete for dominance, their cadres pounce on each other

Many villages and towns in Kannur district are strongholds of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been engaged with the CPI(M) in a violent battle for supremacy The RSS and the BJP hope to emerge as an alternative to the Congress(I), which also has a strong presence here

The year 1980 saw the largest number of political killings in the district The victims included 12 persons from the RSS-BJP, eight from the CPI(M), two from the Congress(I), one from the Muslim League and one person belonging to none of these groups (his killing took place as a result of mistaken identity) Since then, a rage of revenge has consumed Kannur Grief for a father or brother hacked to death or killed in a bomb attack, a son maimed for life, a sister or mother terrorised and stigmatised or houses and shops destroyed has been replaced only by more of such grief Murder for murder, a limb for a limb, or a house for a house

After a lull, violence escalated in 1997 and 1998, following the 1996 murder of BJP district secretary Pannyannur Chandran and two BJP activists at Valayam in neighbouring Kozhikode district Six persons were killed in retaliatory attacks

The situation took a turn for the worse before the Lok Sabha elections this year On August 25, Onam day, CPI(M) State Committee member P Jayarajan was attacked at his home in Kizhakke Kathirur near Thalassery by a group of 15 assailants, allegedly RSS workers It was a planned attack, typical of the violence in Kannur an explosion lures Jayarajan and his wife out of their house, a bomb is thrown at him to drive him back, and he is then hacked with daggers He was left for dead, but he survived

Despite the need for restraint during the final phase of the election campaign, the ruling CPI(M) and the RSS-BJP began retaliatory attacks in Kizhakke Kathirur, the volatile Panur area and, in several other parts of the district After the elections, revenge and retribution began in right earnest

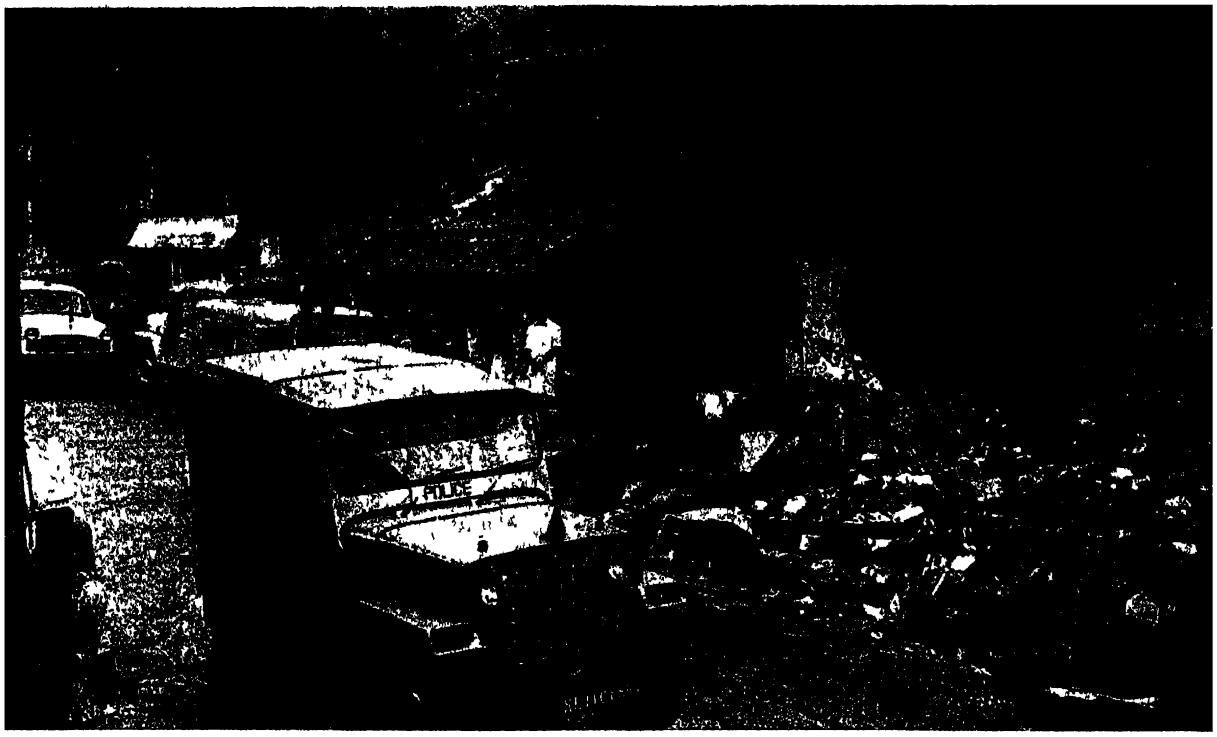
According to one estimate, in the last 20 years, nearly 120 persons, most of them activists or supporters of either the CPI(M) or the RSS, have been killed in political battles in Thalassery taluk alone Pattayakkunnu in Pattiyam panchayat, one of the most sensitive areas, is an example of how an entire society has been divided by politics A narrow road at the main junction at Pattayakkunnu manned by a sizable police picket, divides 'them" and "us' To the right is Konkachy, an RSS-BJP pocket and an island surrounded by CPI(M) bases Repeated attempts by the RSS to open *shakhas* elsewhere in the area have been foiled The efforts continue, nevertheless, making neighbours fearful and distrustful of each other



RANJITH VAMAN

Former Supreme Court Judge V.R. Krishna Iyer, second from left, on a peace mission in violence-torn Aythara in Kannur district in late October.

A day after the expiry of the prohibitory orders that were imposed in the area following the September 17 elections, according to witnesses, RSS-BJP and CPI(M) groups threw bombs at each other and at the police and at shops belonging to their rivals The local people are reluctant to speak about the incidents. If at all they speak, they do so in absolute privacy and on condition of anonymity. One of them said that the atmosphere in the village had become sti-



A building damaged in clashes at Kanhillery.

fling since workers of the former Socialist Party, which opposed the Communists and the Congress(I) had joined the RSS *en masse* and set up base at Konkachy. All houses in that area belong to RSS sympathisers. Otherwise, he said, "they will not live there peacefully for long." Similarly, in the surrounding CPI(M) strongholds, rival political leanings are not "tolerated". Gatherings of people not connected to the party are "discouraged, one way or another". A young man said that even a club they had formed for everyone, irrespective of political affiliation, had been bombed. "If you talk to a person who sympathises with another party, then you are viewed with suspicion," he said.

According to a shopkeeper, many men in Konkachy have long since gone into hiding. Another resident said: "Earlier they used to come for dinner under the cover of darkness. Now they are afraid. Women live in terror. They are threatened frequently."

A local BJP leader told *Frontline* that he had stopped playing an active role in party activities. He said: "A group of young men from outside have taken charge. They disregard saner elements in the party and are often at the forefront to seek revenge. It is only a handful that create all the trouble. The CPI(M) machinery in the area is also similarly fine-tuned to attack or seek revenge. The police stand as mute spectators and are often helpless before armed gangs."

The police and CPI(M) activists and sympathisers fear to tread anywhere near Ayithara on the outskirts of Koothuparamba municipality. This is an "RSS fortress", where the RSS office building, named after the organisation's founder K.B. Hedgewar, is strategically located on a wooded hill, which enables access to several panchayats. On October 12, a 150-strong mob surrounded Hedgewar Mandiram and hurled bombs, injuring two RSS workers. While one person suffered serious burns and his right arm was nearly severed, another was stabbed. The RSS local *saha karyavah*, who was rushing out of a *shakha* meeting, was killed on the spot. A bomb exploded after hitting his neck.

The front door of the building has a gaping hole from an explosion. The whitewashed walls of an anganwadi nearby bear stains of blood that was splattered on them. According to the police, an RSS activist was chased into the premises and hacked to death. Two houses, of CPI(M) sympathisers, were pulled down and gutted.

Koothuparamba area secretary of the CPI(M), M.O. Padmanabhan, told *Frontline* that houses near the *shakha* premises belonged to RSS sympathisers, barring a few. "Young men in these few houses have gone into hiding, women and the aged have been terrorised. RSS men start their daily drill from 5 a.m. in an adjoining school compound and then sit right in front of the toilet of a house nearby until almost noon. The women in the house have been undergoing this psychological torture for months." The attack on Hedgewar Mandiram is said to be in retaliation for this.

Three houses of CPI(M) activists near Hedgewar Mandiram were soon pulled down and set afire. C. Kunjikkannan, an ex-serviceman whose house was damaged, said that he and his daughters were alone in the house when the attack came at night. "Terrified, we climbed upstairs but soon realised that they had set fire to the house. So we tried to run out. I could run only halfway to the police picket. We had a providential escape. The house, which was only partially damaged then, was gutted completely by the next day," he said.

His daughter said that the attackers had been armed with iron rods and daggers. Some people were hit on the head but escaped death. A young woman said that her certificates right from secondary school to the post-graduate level, were burnt. "The assailants were all known to us for years and I kept asking them why they were doing this. They said I had better run for my life."

The happenings at Ayithara may be a "minor incident" by Kannur's standards, but it is typical of the situation in the district, where politics is worse than extreme communalism and political beliefs acquire the nature of superstitions. Unknown to the outside world, villages and small towns, especially in Thalassery taluk, are therefore breaking down under the weight of hatred, distrust and fear. An

impression has gained ground that the leaders of political parties are sidelined as personal rivalries become politicised and cadres take it upon themselves to settle scores. Moderate voices are brushed aside

In the two-decade history of the violence, there has been no report of people having left political parties because their cadres indulged in large-scale violence. On the other hand, there are several instances of a party losing support or its programmes facing indifference whenever it decided not to counter violence with violence. It is a problem the Congress(I) has experienced in the district often, especially in areas where the CPI(M)-RSS rivalry is predominant. (Recently the party decided to resort to violence to gain political mileage, but the experiment was short-lived and its leaders soon found themselves embroiled in a series of criminal cases.)



RANJITH VAMAN

At Aylthara, the destroyed home of a CPI(M) worker.

State general secretary of the Kerala Congress (Mani), P.T. Jose, said: "So long as one side is able to find more supporters by reacting through violence and another tries to annihilate all those who threaten its base, political parties, irrespective of their public statements, have a vested interest in continuing this violence. Peace efforts are welcome but can at best bring only temporary relief. The wounds of the past continue to fester. It is a vicious circle from which parties may find it difficult to break away."

The RSS, which has perfected the art of guerilla warfare in the CPI(M) strongholds, has claimed that it practised "restraint", especially when it suffered serious "setbacks" (for example, after an entire set of its leaders have been annihilated) and needed time to recoup. The organisation showed "restraint" for more than a year after the murder of Pannyannur Chandran and two other BJP workers at Valayam in 1996.

Its failure to retaliate led to an erosion in its support to such an extent that the BJP was unable to get a respectable crowd for its public meetings in the area.

It is this perception of possible loss of support that perpetuates the political violence in Kannur. Shocking as it may seem, there are indications that despite the persistent threat to civil society and peace, the tit-for-tat responses have gained admirers for the parties involved.

According to the CPI(M) MLA from Kode, T.K. Balan, the RSS' antipathy to the CPI(M) started during the communal riots in Thalassery in 1972 when the RSS attacked people of the minorities and CPI(M) cadres came to the latter's rescue. He said that the RSS-BJP's grouse against the CPI(M) was political in a way because they wanted to expand their influence in a communal way. In most areas, the CPI(M) stood between them and their objectives, he said.

The State secretary of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), M.V. Jayarajan, said that it was not in the CPI(M)'s interest to engage its cadres in violence when it had got more than 52 per cent of the votes in any election in the area. "There is no reason why we should try to use violence against the BJP-RSS, which has only small pockets of influence. But they indulge in armed training under the leadership of outsiders who are sent here with the agenda of weakening the CPI(M) politically and pursuing the larger aim of attacking the minorities."

District secretary of the BJP, P.P. Karunakaran, said: "Did we not restrain ourselves for nearly one and a half years, following the death of Pannyannur Chandran and the peace agreement reached at a conference convened by the Chief Minister? But the CPI(M) used that opportunity to crush us by not allowing us to pursue political activities. We are forced to react."

A new dimension has been added this year with a spate of bomb attacks and threats against the police, who, the BJP-RSS and the Congress(I) have been alleging, and biased in favour of the CPI(M). So far the violence had been directed against rival party workers. According to CPI(M) leaders, several police officers have recently received letters (allegedly in the name of the Bajrang Dal) threatening them with dire consequences if they took action against RSS-BJP activists and supporters.

As in the past, several independent peace initiatives have been launched after the recent round of killings. The latest came on October 27 under the leadership of former Supreme Court Judge V.R. Krishna Iyer. He told *Frontline*: "Both sides claim that their desire is peace. But their actions are quite to the contrary. A day after the peace initiative was launched, a man was attacked and another was beaten up with iron rods in retaliation." But he still expresses the hope that the peace efforts will show results. Krishna Iyer has obtained an assurance from the political parties that they will refrain from reacting to incidents violently and will wait for two months to give the police and the peace initiators a chance. District leaders of the CPI(M) and the RSS-BJP have agreed not to make the first move to violate the agreements reached at the peace talks.

T.K. Balan, who represented the CPI(M) at the peace talks in Thalassery, said: "One of the first requirements of lasting peace in Kannur is for the RSS to stop its armed training." C. Chandrasekharan, the RSS regional secretary for Kannur and Kasaragod said: "The CPI(M) should realise that peace does not mean submission or surrender."

Former Muslim League MLA from Peringalam, K.M. Soopy, who represented his party at a peace initiative, said: "Often the top leadership of both parties, even those at the district level, come to know of an incident only after it has occurred. They have no role in its planning or execution. After the event the leaders are forced to support the action of the cadres, irrespective of whether they approve of it or not. Significantly, in areas such as Pattayakkunnu, Konkachy, Thrippangottur or Kunnothuparambu, workers of the former Socialist Party, who had an old rivalry with the Communists, have joined the RSS-BJP *en masse*."

Krishna Iyer said: "Wars begin in the minds of men. People should change their attitudes if there is to be lasting peace in Kannur." ■

Issues and the verdict

An analysis of the beliefs, opinions and perceptions of the electorate that shaped the verdict of Elections '99.

YOGENDRA YADAV
with OLIVER HEATH
and ANINDYA SAHA

The third instalment of a series of analytical articles based on a post-election survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, and co-sponsored by *Frontline*. The earlier instalments were published in the preceding issues. The series will continue into the next issue.

IN the previous parts of the State-wise analyses of the verdict in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, investigators of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) looked at the mechanics of the verdict in terms of the relationship of votes to seats and voting behaviour to the voter's social background. But that does not complete an interpretation of the results, for voting is a conscious act. The results did not merely reflect the social background of voters and the mechanics of the vote-seat relationship. They constituted a verdict on the dominant political issues and disputes. But this aspect of the verdict is not self-evident. The election results tell us precisely who won and how many votes and seats were won, but they do not tell us which ideas won and why. We need to draw upon our survey to uncover the meanings embedded in the electoral verdict.

Here, we report some findings regarding the beliefs and opinions of the electorate.

A logical place to begin with is the area of foreign policy, particularly salient in this round of elections owing to, first, the Kargil War, and secondly, the Pokhran nuclear tests. At the end of November 1998, the Congress(I) swept the Assembly elections in two States and Delhi and until a few months after that opinion polls predicted a victory for the Congress(I) if a general election were to be held. But what happened? Did Kargil play a role similar to the one the Falklands war played in the British elections in 1983 (that war is widely assumed to have handed

Kargil: general support for the government's action

	Cong (I)	Cong. allies	BJP	BJP allies	All
Not heard about	39	4	16	16	35
Satisfied	22	4	31	23	42
Not satisfied	46	7	8	5	13
Don't know	35	5	18	11	11
Affected my vote	21	4	37	19	15

Kargil effect is not all one-way traffic

	BJP and allies	Cong (I) and allies	Left	BSP	Others
Kargil affected vote	56	25	3	2	14
Did not affect vote	36	39	8	3	14

A majority has not heard about the Pokhran tests

Not heard about	54
Heard: disapprove	10
Heard: approve	29
Heard: no opinion	7

There is a greater acceptance of coalitions than before

	1996	1998	1999
Nothing wrong	18	17	22
In special circumstances	12	15	18
No coalition	32	32	25
Don't know	37	36	36

Loyalty to region is on the rise

	Disagree	No opinion	Agree
Loyal to own region first; India second	42	28	56

Public's attitude towards foreign policy

[illegible]	17	39	44
[illegible]	24	34	42
[illegible]	12	28	60

More interest in State government than Central government

	Disagree	No opinion	
Interested in neither	40	28	
State government	23	20	
Central government	11	15	
Both	21	26	
Other	5	7	

Voter satisfaction with the last three Central governments

	1996	1998	1999
Not at all	24	29	25
Somewhat satisfied	39	30	27
Very satisfied	15	11	25
Don't know	22	30	23

Vajpayee tops in popularity

	1996	1998	1999
Vajpayee	9	27	39
Sonia Gandhi	--	18	28
Jyoti Basu	2	3	4
L.K. Advani	4	2	0
I.K. Gujral	0	4	0
P.V. Narasimha Rao	20	1	0
Other BJP+	1	0	1
Other Congress+	1	4	2
Other	18	11	10
Don't know	47	31	16

In retrospect, of the last three governments the BJP-led one is seen as the best

BJP+ government was best	35
INC government was best	22
UF government was best	8
No difference	13
Don't know	23

Vajpayee's popularity cuts across party allegiances

	Vajpayee	Sonia Gandhi	Other BJP+	Other Cong+	Other	Don't know
BJP+	78	3	3	0	3	12
Congress+	10	65	0	4	4	18
Other	21	13	1	0	47	17

A mixed response to the BJP's performance in office

Negative statements	Disagree	No opinion	Agree
Prices have increased	14	8	78
Injustice to Christians	20	58	23
National security deteriorated	27	41	32
Positive statements	**Disagree**	**No opinion**	**Agree**
Corruption is down	39	31	30
Greater Hindu-Muslim harmony	25	38	37
Better law and order	28	36	36

A large proportion consider Sonia Gandhi unsuitable

Not heard of her	12
Unsuitable (foreign origin)	15
Unsuitable (other reasons)	20
Is suitable to be PM	47

victory on a platter to Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party)? To gauge the actual effect of Kargil in determining the outcome of the elections may be beyond us. What we can do is to make a tentative estimate using data from the post-election survey conducted by the CSDS.

The first thing to note is that only 65 per cent of our sample said that they had heard of the war. Although this section represents a significant proportion of the electorate, it shows that the skirmish did not penetrate public consciousness as deeply as is assumed.

Overall, 42 per cent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the government's action in Kargil, whereas 13 per cent said that they were not. Unsurprisingly, the majority of those who were satisfied voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies, at 55 per cent, and the majority of those who were dissatisfied voted for the Congress(I) and its allies, at 54 per cent. But this by itself does not indicate whether the conflict played a role in determining which party the voters favoured. It could merely be re-describing party loyalties, as the causal direction between the two is unspecified. To find this out we asked our respondents whether the events in Kargil had had an effect on their voting decision. A significant proportion, 15 per cent, responded that they had.

The 15 per cent who said that Kargil influenced their vote: 71 per cent voted for the BJP-led alliance and 25 per cent for the Congress(I) and its allies. This contrasts sharply with the division of vote for the parties among citizens who said that either it did not affect their vote or they had not heard about Kargil – 36 per cent for the BJP and its allies and 39 per cent for the Congress(I) and its allies.

The Kargil factor displayed both positive and negative consequences for the BJP: it elicited a protest vote from some people and a vote of endorsement from others. Of the respondents who were unhappy with the government's action and said that it affected their vote, there was a stronger tendency towards the Congress(I), both in terms of the proportion of the vote that it retained from 1998 and in terms of voters who shifted to it from the BJP. On the other hand, out of the respondents who were satisfied with the government's action and who said that Kargil had influenced their vote, there was a strong swing towards the BJP. The party retained 86 per cent of its vote; 27 per cent of the Congress(I) voters of 1998 shifted to it. However, since on balance there were more people who were satisfied than dissatisfied with the government's action on Kargil, the BJP made a net gain out of the conflict.

On the second foreign policy issue, the Pokhran tests, the findings reveal that despite the massive media coverage, the majority of Indians have not heard about them. Of those who have, there is general approval of the government's policy. There is also a high degree of approval for increased spending on the Army, even if that means hardships for the public. There is clearly a shadow of Kargil here. But, interestingly enough, these opinions do not translate into support for an aggressive foreign policy *vis-a-vis* Pakistan: the idea that India must make greater efforts for friendly relations with Pakistan is supported by 42 per cent of the respondents. This represents a mere three percentage point drop since 1996, which, in the light of the occurrence of the Kargil War in the intervening period, is a remarkable statistic.

The question as to whether war is the only solution to the Indo-Pakistan dispute is answered in the negative by 39 per cent of the respondents and in the affirmative by 25 per cent. Overall it would appear that the electorate wants the nation's honour and its boundaries to be protected but is not prepared to endorse aggressive militarism *vis-a-vis* India's neighbours.

The experience of having had a succession of coalition governments over the last few years seems to have diminished the electorate's antagonism towards coalitions. There is now wider

acceptance of coalitions, with an increase in the number of those who say that there is nothing wrong with them and a decrease in the number of those who think that they should not occur under any circumstances. This is good news for the BJP-led alliance and bad news for the Congress(I). Congress(I) voters are the most opposed to coalitions; 29 per cent of them said that there should be no coalitions under any circumstances. About 30 to 32 per cent of voters of parties with a history of coalition culture, such as the Left parties and the BJP, favoured coalitions. Somewhat surprisingly, more BJP voters said that there should be no coalitions. Those who were the most undecided on coalitions were Congress(I) and BSP voters, 42 and 46 per cent respectively.

There has been a change in the identification of the voter with the region as distinct from the nation. The majority of the respondents, at 50 per cent, are prepared to go along with the suggestion that one should be loyal to one's own region first and then to the nation. They include 56 per cent of those who have voted for the BJP's allies and 48 per cent of those who voted for the BJP itself. This orientation does not quite square up with the BJP's ideology of nationalism but, interestingly enough, is fully compatible with its strategy of building alliances with regional parties. The voter's enhanced identification with his or her own region should not be taken as a sign of exclusivism or separatism; it rather appears to be a reasonable response to a regionalised party system where the effective locus of political choice has shifted to the State level.

In addition, voters are more interested in their State governments than in the Central Government. Between 1996 and 1999, while the percentage of interest in both the State and the Central government increased, the relative proportion between the two did not.

A look at the popular level of satisfaction with the BJP-led government, as the table indicates, shows a solid but by no means overwhelming pattern. However, opinions on this are sharply divided along partisan lines. Of the Congress(I) voters, 38 per cent are not at all satisfied; the corresponding figures for Left and BSP voters are 45 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. In sharp contrast, the figure for BJP voters is just 7 per cent.

A comparison with the ratings of the Congress(I) and United Front governments at the end of their regimes shows the BJP-led government in better light. When the voters were directly asked to compare the previous three governments and say which one of them was the best, the BJP-led government emerged the clear winner. That raises a question: what exactly did the people like about the BJP-led government?

This calls for a closer look at various spheres of the government's performance as perceived by the electorate. People do not seem to have a very positive opinion of the government on its record in controlling inflation. Overall, nearly 80 per cent of the voters felt that the prices had gone up. The partisan difference on this is as follows: 84 per cent of Congress(I) and 85 per cent of Left voters think the prices have gone up, but the corresponding figure for BJP voters is 67 per cent.

The government was also not seen to have a strong rating on the issue of corruption, with only 39 per cent of the electorate saying corruption had declined. Again, it was BJP voters who were more inclined to give a generous rating to the government's performance, with 43 per cent of them saying that the level of corruption had come down. The figure for Congress(I) voters was 22 per cent and that for the Left voters was 26 per cent.

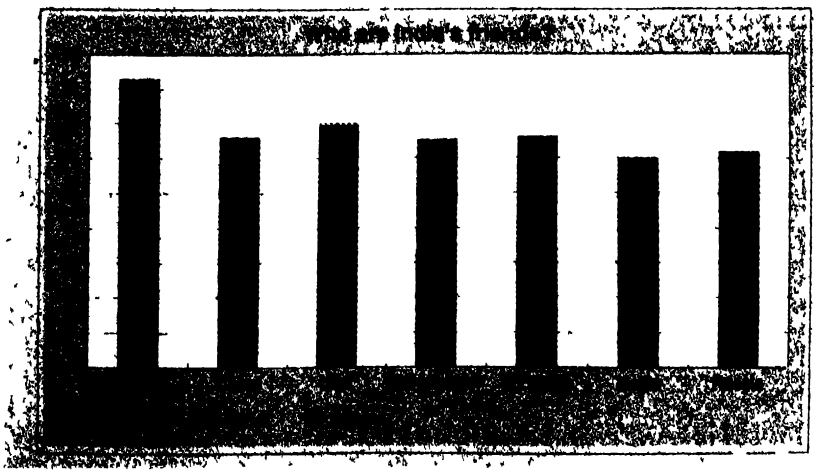
Did Hindu-Muslim relations improve under the Vajpayee-led government? Overall, 37 per cent of the electorate thought so. This figure was significantly higher, at 45 per cent, among BJP voters than it was among Congress(I) and Left voters, the figures for whom were 33 per cent and 31 per cent respectively. Another issue related to the treatment of minorities came up in response to the survey question on whether Christians had been treated unjustly by the previous government. While the majority held no opinion, marginally more people, at 23 per cent, felt that such injustice had occurred, compared to 20 per cent who felt that it had not. Among BJP voters, only 18 per cent agreed that there had been such injustice. Among the Congress(I) voters the figure was higher, at 26 per cent. A sharper reaction to this issue was manifested in the response of Left

Perceptions of the world

SINCE this round of Lok Sabha elections saw foreign policy become something of an issue, the CSDS survey tried to find out the attitudes of ordinary people about some countries that matter to India. Each respondent was asked whether he or she was familiar with the names of those countries. The respondents who answered 'yes' were then asked to state whether in their opinion that particular country was India's friend, enemy, or neither. Unsurprisingly, in the wake of the Kargil War, Pakistan emerged as the country the largest number of respondents had heard about. On this count, every other country ranged between 60 and 70 per cent.

Unsurprisingly again, Pakistan was identified as an enemy by the majority of the respondents. Generally Indians do not seem to perceive a serious threat from any country other than Pakistan. China was identified as an enemy by 13 per cent of the respondents, but then some 22 per cent thought of it as a friend. The rating of the United States is not particularly better than that of China.

Russia still emerges as the country considered most friendly to India. The memory of Indo-Soviet friendship perhaps still works for Boris Yeltsin's Russia. ■



Participatory upsurge of the oppressed

CSDS Team

WITH the country having witnessed five general elections in 10 years, it is not surprising that one hears about "voter fatigue". The media have often carried reports about an electorate that is disenchanted, disinterested and simply apathetic. However, the voter turnout figures for the September-October elections do not quite support such a reading. Despite there having been four mid-term elections, the overall voter turnout in this decade has been no different from that in earlier decades. In fact, an analysis of the facts about people who vote and those who do not has shown a participatory upsurge of the lower orders in this decade. The sections of society that were previously been kept outside political power – backward classes, Dalits, women, tribal people – are participating much more in the electoral process. Although the urban, educated elite is experiencing depoliticisation, the upsurge of the lower orders has kept the overall voting levels fairly high.

Since the turnout patterns have been discussed in the first part of this series ("The Turnout Factor", *Frontline*, November 5), here the focus is on attitudes and behaviour other than voting. About one-third of the respondents took some or a great deal of interest in the campaign in this round of elections, which is not very different from the level of voter interest in the 1971 or 1996 elections. It is a matter of concern that two-thirds of the electors took no interest at all in the elections; yet it may not be correct to say that this indifference is a new phenomenon. In any case, it does not imply that the ordinary citizen does not value his or her vote. The proportion of citizens who feel that their votes make a difference to the way in which the country is run rose from 48 per cent in 1971 to 59 per cent in 1996 and further up to 63 per cent in 1999.

Most Indians are not interested in the election campaign

	1971	1996	1999
Not at all	72	66	68
Somewhat	17	25	22
Great deal	11	11	10

Most Indians think that their vote makes a difference

	1971	1996	1999
No difference	16	21	18
Has an effect	48	59	63
Don't know	35	20	20

Participation in politics

	1971	1996	1998	1999
Attended meetings	12	16	25	22
Was canvassed	41	43	42	49
Took part in campaigning	10	9	13	21
Feel close to any party	37	31	NA	38
Member of political party	4	6	NA	8

A look at the various participatory activities confirms this picture. The proportion of voters who attended at least one election meeting was higher in 1999 than in 1996, though it is a little lower than the figure for the previous elections. The percentage of respondents who were visited by a canvasser also increased in the 1999 elections as compared to the previous two elections, perhaps because the campaign period this time was much longer. The number of those who actually took part in the election campaign on behalf of a candidate was much higher than ever before.

Notwithstanding widespread disenchantment with political parties, the percentage of voters who feel close to a political party remains as high as in 1971, and has actually registered an increase since 1996. It seems that the proliferation of smaller parties, which often have specific social groups as their support bases, has tended to draw greater numbers into developing enduring partisan identifications.

It must, however, be pointed out that in comparative terms the level of party identification in contemporary India is much lower than in Western democracies. Each election witnesses a very high level of exchange of votes across party lines, leaving a relatively small proportion of 'loyal voters'. Not much has changed in the 1990s in this respect.

Finally, if one looks at party membership, the most advanced form of political identification, the survey reveals a consistent increase in reported membership. The proportion of those who report to being a member of a political party in 1999 is more than double that recorded in 1971. This compares favourably with Western democracies. While the public, no doubt, has reservations about politicians and political parties, the Indian passion for politics is far from dead. ⌐

voters, of whom 41 per cent agreed with the suggestion BSP voters, by contrast, were relatively indifferent, with only 11 per cent of them agreeing.

Response by religion yielded an even sharper reaction to this question. As many as 68 per cent of the Christians among the respondents felt that injustices had been committed against them. This figure was substantially higher than that for both Hindus and Muslims, most of whom responded with 'Don't know'. Twenty per cent for Hindus and 30 per cent for Muslims who expressed an opinion tended to agree that such injustices against Christians had occurred.

The percentage of people who express an opinion on who should be the next Prime Minister has substantially increased over the course of the last three elections, with the number of 'Don't knows' dropping from 47 per cent in 1996 to 16 per cent in 1999. This indicates that in 1999 party leaders were more firmly rooted in the public consciousness than they had been in 1996 and 1998.

A.B. Vajpayee had more cross-party appeal than Sonia Gandhi and was named the preferred choice for Prime Minister by 10 per cent of the voters of the Congress(I) and its allies, compared to just 3 per cent of the voters of the BJP and its allies who named Sonia Gandhi.

Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin was responsible for much mud-slinging and the formation of a new political party. The proportion of the electorate who deemed her unsuitable to become Prime Minister because of her foreign origin was 15 per cent. In the light of the media attention surrounding this issue, it is perhaps surprising that the number is not very high. On the whole, the majority of those who felt that Sonia Gandhi was unsuitable for prime ministership cited pragmatic political reasons, such as inexperience or poor communication skills. But the significant fact remains that as much as 35 per cent of the electorate would not consider her for the job. ■

The case of Eric Soundranayagam

Was a Jaffna youth involved in the killing of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam captured in Chennai by the police and taken to Sri Lanka?

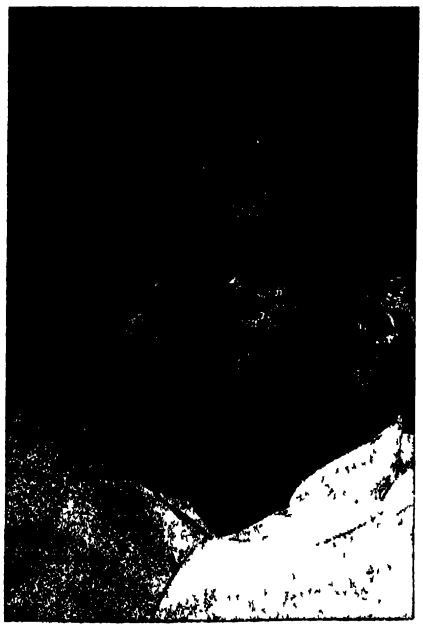
D.B.S. JEYARAJ

THERE is much anxiety-ridden speculation among Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka and abroad over allegations that a Sri Lankan Tamil youth was arrested in Chennai and then deported through "extra-legal" means to Colombo in mid-October. Controversy rages around the fate of 27-year-old Eric Soundranayagam, a native of Chunnakam in Jaffna, who is, according to police sources, being interrogated intensively by investigators in Colombo about his alleged role in masterminding the assassination of former Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) parliamentarian Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam. The circumstances under which Soundranayagam, described as a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) operative, came to be placed under Sri Lankan official custody are shrouded in mystery. Allegations have been made in the Sri Lankan media in this matter that improper procedure was adopted by Indian and Sri Lankan officials. On the other hand, there have also been reports in the newspapers that he was arrested after he arrived in Sri Lanka from India. The controversy took a new turn with media reports claiming that Soundranayagam was also suspected of having been in India to plot the assassination of Congress(I) president and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Sonia Gandhi.

The assassination of Dr. Tiruchelvam on July 29 this year initially left Sri Lankan investigators groping in the dark. While the suicide bomb method and advance intelligence reports clearly pointed to the LTTE's role in the crime, sleuths found themselves unable to detect persons actually involved in the planning and execution of the investigation. This pronounced delay impelled President Chandrika Kumaratunga to call for a status report on the investigation and order speedy action. Thereafter reports appeared in the Sri Lankan media quoting police sources that some LTTE suspects had been arrested and an LTTE safehouse in Colombo detected.

Subsequent news reports said that the man who had monitored Dr. Tiruchelvam's movements and drawn up the blueprint for the assassination was Soundranayagam. It was said that after planning the murder, Soundranayagam had gone to Chennai. According to these reports, he is an old student of Union College in Tellippalai, Jaffna. Another LTTE operative, Kathiravan, was also an old student of Union College. Chief of the LTTE's intelligence wing, Pottu Amman (charge-sheeted in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case), communicated through Kathiravan with Soundranayagam. The latter was working at a private telecommunications centre in the predominantly Tamil neighbourhood of Wellawatte, and at the same time studying in the Colombo Technical College.

All these facts had been gleaned from Kathiravan and Kamalan, an associate of Soundranayagam at the communications centre, both of whom were in police custody. Reports also said that Soundranayagam had left for India in the first week of July. He had, however, telephoned Kamalan from India after Dr. Tiruchelvam's death and allegedly boasted that he had masterminded the killing. Once the Colombo media started publishing details about Soundranayagam's alleged role in the killing and also stated that he was in India, the expectation was that his capture would be virtually impossible. In fact, there was even suspicion that the police, who were under pressure from President Kumaratunga to produce results on the investigation, "planted" this story as a red herring.



Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam.

The next twist came when Kumar Ponnambalam, a Tamil lawyer who is also the general secretary of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, sent a letter by fax to President Kumaratunga and also released it to the press. Ponnambalam has in recent times acquired an image of being an ardent sympathiser and unaccredited spokesperson of the LTTE. Ponnambalam drew attention to an alleged incident concerning Soundranayagam – that he had been informed of certain incidents by Soundranayagam's maternal uncle in Denmark. Thereafter Ponnambalam had made his own investigations, in the course of which he contacted "friends" in India. His faxed letter to Kumaratunga was based on information that was thus gathered.

Ponnambalam said that Soundranayagam had gone to India in the first week of July to attend his sister's wedding, after obtaining a visa from the Indian High Commission. He stayed in Chennai for a while after the wedding. On October 8, Soundranayagam went to Tiruvanmiyur, in Chennai, to meet Fr. Samuel Gerrard, who had solemnised his sister's wedding. Ponnambalam alleged that Soundranayagam was taken into custody at Tiruvanmiyur by Indian police officials. Subsequent inquiries by relatives revealed that he had been handed over to officials of the Sri Lankan National Intelligence Bureau, on October 16, according to him.

Ponnambalam also alleged that passengers on the Sri Lankan Airlines Flight No. 132 from Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu to Colombo on October 16 had seen a young, lean Tamil in his twenties seated with three armed Indian police officials at the airport departure lounge. Later the



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

The scene of Neelan Tiruchelvam's assassination on July 29, 1999.

same person was seen seated with Sri Lankan security officials in the rear of the plane. The curiosity of the passengers was further aroused when it was noticed that the Tamil youth had not passed through immigration. An ambulance was also seen on the runway when the plane landed in Colombo, Ponnambalam said.

On the basis of this information, Ponnambalam wanted President Kumaratunga to make clear whether it was Soundranayagam who was seen on the Sri Lankan Airlines flight. Ponnambalam also wanted Kumaratunga to state whether Soundranayagam or somebody else was being extradited to Sri Lanka and if so, whether proper legal procedure was being followed.

The media publicity surrounding this alleged episode has troubled sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil community to some extent. It was quite galling to those of LTTE persuasion. If the incident was true, it was in their perception a great "let-down" by India. These feelings were exacerbated by their reactions to the Lok Sabha elections in India. The return to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party was hailed, as the party is considered to be somewhat sympathetic to the predominantly "Hindu" Sri Lankan Tamils. Furthermore, the BJP's allies such as the Shiv Sena, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Pattali Makkal Katchi and the Samata Party, which is now a part of the Janata Dal (United), were looked upon as "LTTE-friendly". Thus there was jubilation in pro-LTTE Sri Lankan Tamil circles that the new Indian dispensation would be favourable to the LTTE.

Naturally, hardline Sinhala sentiment feared a pro-LTTE tilt in India's stand. Although the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) had been distancing itself in recent times from the militant Sri Lankan Tamil groups' cause, the party too was looked at with suspicion by Sinhala hardliners. All this led to the Sri Lankan Government seeking and obtaining an assurance from India that there was no change in its Sri Lanka policy.

Therefore, the controversy regarding the alleged role of Indian officials in the Soundranayagam affair was very unwelcome from the pro-LTTE Sri Lankan Tamil point of view. Did India really arrest and deport an LTTE suspect without following the usual procedures? If true, it was a bitter pill for the LTTE'S sympathisers to swallow. All the media hype about an LTTE-friendly government in New Delhi was negated. To what extent were the Union Government and the Government of Tamil Nadu involved in the exercise? The Sri Lankan Tamil media, particularly the overseas journals that are either controlled or influenced by the LTTE, were indignant.

There were three broad types of reaction. The first was to absolve the Central and Tamil Nadu governments of the "blame". It was alleged that Indian espionage agencies were the villains of the piece. A variant was to blame the Q Branch of the Tamil Nadu police. It was also insinuated that Indian policemen had been bribed by Colombo and that the whole affair was done clandestinely, without official sanction. Some names were mentioned.

The second type of reaction was to state that the whole incident had been managed by the law-enforcement agencies of both countries on an official-to-official level. Neither the Central nor the Tamil Nadu government was aware of this. Had the government been aware, it would not have allowed the development to occur considering the political repercussions that could follow. Now that the matter had become public, there would be remedial action. The officials responsible would be penalised. It was expected that the LTTE's "friends" in the government would raise hell over the issue.

The third type of reaction was that the whole incident was managed at a government-to-government level. It was alleged that procedures had been initiated through the diplomatic missions. Cabinet Ministers and the State Government were in the know. Although officially sanctioned, it was kept low-key to avoid embarrassment to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi. It was recalled that in the 1970s the DMK chief was accused of deporting the well-known militant Selvarajah Yogachandran alias "Kuttimani" to Sri Lanka while he was Chief Minister. It was then argued on Karunanidhi's behalf that he was ignorant of Kuttimani's actual role. So in order to avoid similar charges, the Soundranayagam incident was being kept under wraps. it was stated.

Whatever the reasons attributed by the pro-LTTE media for the manner in which the alleged exercise was conducted, it seemed that there was unanimity of opinion that it was a triumph for Sri Lankan and Indian investigators. Information had purportedly been gathered and exchanged to carry out the arrest. It was alleged that the Indian police, acting on tip-offs from Colombo officials, had traced Soundranayagam and then detained and interrogated him.

After being satisfied about Soundranayagam's alleged involvement in LTTE activity, they handed him over to their Sri Lankan counterparts in Tiruchi, who took him back to Sri Lanka. Officials of both countries were unable to

Claims and denials

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Chennai

DID the Tamil Nadu police arrest Eric Soundranayagam and hand him over to the Sri Lankan police in Chennai or did the Sri Lankan police arrest him in Colombo? There is no definite answer to this question, but one thing is clear: Soundranayagam did come to Chennai a couple of weeks before the assassination of Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam and stayed in India for nearly three months before he was allegedly taken in by the police in the first week of October.

Dr. Tiruchelvam, Member of Parliament and Vice-President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), was killed by a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bomber while he was travelling in his car. The assassination of this brilliant self-effacing intellectual and public figure, who tried to find a non-violent solution to the Sri Lankan Tamil problem, drew strong condemnation and once again inflamed public opinion against the LTTE.

Informed sources in a Sri Lankan anti-LTTE Tamil militant group in Chennai asserted that the Q branch of the Tamil Nadu police arrested Soundranayagam in Chennai on October 5, handed him over to the Sri Lankan police in Chennai, and escorted him in a flight from Tiruchi to Colombo. A top Tamil Nadu police officer, however, denied this and said: "He was not arrested in India. He was arrested in Colombo by the Sri Lankan police." The officer added: "We have called for an explanation about how we missed him here." He alleged that stories had been planted in the newspapers about Soundranayagam's arrest in Chennai.

Informed sources said that Soundranayagam had played an important role in the preparations leading to the assassination of Dr. Tiruchelvam. According to them, he was detailed by the LTTE's intelligence wing chief, Pottu Amman, to track the TULF leader's movements. He took up a job in a telephone booth at Wellawatte in Colombo, kept watch on Dr. Tiruchelvam and passed on information to the LTTE squad, which despatched a Black Tiger on a suicide mission.

Coming to Chennai about two weeks before the assassination, Soundranayagam reportedly stayed for about a week with Vimalraj, a Sri Lankan Tamil, at 64 Anna Street in Tiruvanmiyur. Police interrogated Vimalraj, who shifted to another place on October 22. The sources rebutted the version that Soundranayagam was arrested at his sister's wedding in Chennai. They also discounted media reports that he was looking for a job as a newspaper reporter in India.

There are two rows of tenements on door numbers 64 and 65, Anna Street, Tiruvanmiyur, where working class people live. A narrow footpath separates the tenements.

The house-owner, Dakshinamurthy, himself has now moved into the tenement where Vimalraj lived. According to Dakshinamurthy and others, a fair-complexioned young man in his late twenties stayed with Vimalraj for some time. Vimalraj himself was in his thirties, married to his maternal uncle's daughter, and had two children. He gave music lessons to children, many of whom were Sri Lankan Tamils. He attended church regularly. Dakshinamurthy and his neighbours said that the "CID police" came, questioned Vimalraj and took him to the police station. But the police did not arrest Soundranayagam from Vimalraj's home, they said. Dakshinamurthy explained: "After the police questioned Vimalraj, we asked him to vacate (the tenement), which he did."

A couple of weeks after Dr. Tiruchelvam's assassination, Colombo newspapers reported that Eric Soundranayagam had played an important role in the heinous crime but had escaped to India. A source from a militant group said: "He would not have gone back to Colombo on his own. Without the help of the local police, the Sri Lankan police could not have taken him away." The sources claimed that Sri Lankan and Tamil Nadu police personnel accompanied him to Colombo from Tiruchi and argued that he could have been "technically arrested after he got into the aircraft".

In the assessment of sources in the militant group, Soundranayagam could have been "a double agent but somebody felt that it was time he was compromised. He must have been trained even to intercept conversations by Indian officials." They claimed that Soundranayagam was now "cooperating with the police in Colombo and they have got various details" from him.

A top officer of the Tamil Nadu police said that the State police came to know that Soundranayagam had been taken into custody in Colombo only after *Virakesari*, a Colombo-based Tamil daily, reported it. The officer said, "His name has never come to our notice. This worries us a little – how he came here and went back. We have called for an explanation about how we missed him." ■

claim credit for the joint exercise because of possible political repercussions and potential embarrassment to the political leaders, it was alleged.

A noteworthy feature of the controversy was the conspicuous silence maintained by pro-LTTE political leaders in Tamil Nadu. A journal published in Canada stated that MDMK leader Vaiko had been requested by an organisation in Britain to condemn the alleged action taken in the case of Soundranayagam. Vaiko, however, declined, and according to the journal, explained that any statement by him would cause discomfiture to the Chief Minister.

Even as pro-LTTE media abroad began focussing on the Soundranayagam affair, the Sri Lankan press began presenting a different picture. Reports citing police sources said that Soundranayagam had neither been arrested in nor deported from India, and that he had returned of his own volition. Vigilant police officials had traced his whereabouts within a few hours and arrested him at Kerawalapitiya, a suburb of Colombo, they said. This claim, however, was a little unconvincing. Given the official reactions and public mood generated by the assassination, Soundranayagam would have to be foolish to have returned to Sri Lanka.

Once it was tacitly admitted that Soundranayagam was in police custody, a number of details about his alleged involvement with the LTTE began to surface in the media. It was said that Soundranayagam was assigned the task of

planning attacks against seven targets, of which he had accomplished only one – Neelan Tiruchelvam. The others included Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, and Posts Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

The next stage was the appearance of news reports in the Sri Lankan and Indian media that Soundranayagam might have had an ulterior motive in visiting India. It was said that he had been taking a Hindi language course at the Indian High Commission in Colombo. He had also allegedly tried to gain employment as a reporter on an English-language daily in India. He was supposed to have approached newspapers in Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram. He had also travelled to Tiruchi where both Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi had attended election rallies. His visits to Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh were also viewed with suspicion because Sonia Gandhi had attended election meetings in these States. Given the *modus operandi* involved in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 at Sriperumbudur during an election rally and the fact that Sivarajan, the leader of the assassination squad, successfully posed as a pressperson during a "dry run" at former Prime Minister V.P. Singh's election rally, Soundranayagam's Indian itinerary as well as his supposed attempts to become a reporter were regarded with suspicion. There have been speculative reports that a team of investigators from India may go to Colombo to interrogate him further.

Whatever be the truth about Soundranayagam's objectives, there is no denying that a strong case has been built up against him through media reports. But there have been many instances where such "trials by media" have occurred without any substantial follow-up action. Until and unless Soundranayagam is produced in an open court, the precise truth about his activities is unlikely to become public knowledge.

P. Nedumaran, the Tamil Nadu State convener of the Tamil National Movement and a loyal supporter of the LTTE, has issued a statement condemning the manner in which the whole incident occurred. He faulted the Central and Tamil Nadu governments for conniving with Sri Lanka on this issue. Nedumaran called upon both governments to clarify their position. It remains to be seen whether this will be done in the near future. ■

■ RAJIV GANDHI ASSASSINATION CASE

Questions of clemency

The four persons sentenced to death in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case challenge in the Madras High Court the rejection of their clemency petitions by the Tamil Nadu Governor.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Chennai

CAN a Governor reject mercy petitions from persons, who are sentenced to death, without seeking the advice of the Council of Ministers? This question may dominate arguments in the Madras High Court on the admissibility of writ petitions from Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan, whose death sentences in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case were re-confirmed by the Supreme Court last month. The petitions challenge the order of Tamil Nadu Governor Fathima Beevi rejecting their clemency petitions. The four had sought commutation of their death sentence to life imprisonment.

When the petitions came up for admission before Justice K. Govindarajan on November 2, the Judge said he found from the file that "there is no advice" from the Council of Ministers. Additional Advocate-General T.R. Rajagopalan replied that the Government had sent a note and that advice from the Council of Ministers was necessary only for giving pardon and not for rejecting clemency petitions. Senior advocate K. Chandru, appearing for the four condemned prisoners, argued that what was required was "aid and advice from the Council of Ministers" and not a note. The arguments on the petitions' admissibility will resume on November 10.

The petitioners said that the Tamil Nadu Governor had rejected their clemency petitions in "a hasty manner" without getting advice from the Council of Ministers.

By a two-one majority, the Supreme Court on October 8 dismissed the petitions of the four prisoners, seeking a review of its May 11, 1999 judgment under which all the four were sentenced to death for their participation in the conspiracy to assassinate former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (*Frontline*, November 5, 1999). The three Judges were Justice K.T. Thomas, Justice D.P. Wadhwa and Justice Syed Shah Mohammed Quadri. The four accused were sentenced to death under Section 120-B (conspiracy) read with Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code. Justice Thomas, who gave a dissenting judgment, said Nalini's review petition "should be allowed and her sentence should be altered to imprisonment for life". (He had given a similar dissenting judgment with regard to Nalini on May 11.) But Justices Thomas, Wadhwa and Quadri were unanimous in their opinion that it was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that murdered Rajiv Gandhi. (Many of the accused, including Murugan and Santhan, belong to the LTTE.)

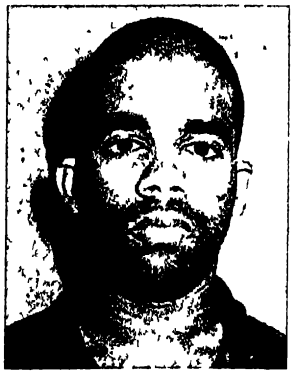
RAJIV GANDHI was killed by an LTTE belt-bomb assassin, Dhanu, at Sriperumbudur, about 50 km from Chennai, on May 21, 1991. On January 28, 1998, Designated Judge V. Navaneetham sentenced to death all the 26 who faced trial. All of them appealed to the Supreme Court, which, on May 11, confirmed the death sentences awarded to Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan. The death sentences given to Robert Payas, Jayakumar and Ravichandran were "altered" to life imprisonment. Of the remaining 19 persons, 18 were released because they had served out their terms for the offences they committed. S. Shanmugavadivelu was acquitted.

After the Supreme Court re-confirmed their death sentences on October 8, Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan sent separate clemency petitions to

Governor Fathima Beevi on October 17. They said that Santhan, Murugan and Perarivalan did not go to the place where the former Prime Minister was killed. Although Nalini was present, what she was aware of was only that Dhanu carried a bulky object around her waist. The clemency petitions added that Nalini had had a traumatic childhood. Her father did not support the family. (Her mother Padma and brother Bhagyanathan were among the accused who were released because they had served out their sentences.) Murugan stayed with them as a guest. Nalini and Murugan got married subsequently, and a daughter was born to her in prison. According to Nalini's petition, if she were to die, her daughter would be orphaned.



Nalini.



Murugan.



Santhan.



Perarivalan.

The petitions said that the four had undergone solitary imprisonment for eight years. "This alone is a mitigating factor for commuting their sentence to life," the petitions said. They pleaded with the Governor for an oral hearing through their representatives.

The clemency petitions quoted from the judgment of the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Kehar Singh v Union of India* (1989) that "the power under Art. 72 entitles the President to examine the record of evidence of the criminal case and to determine for himself whether the case is one deserving the grant of the relief falling within that power." The four petitioners said that since the power to grant pardon or commute the death sentences was vested in the Governor under Article 161 of the Constitution, which is similar to Article 72, "the above observation could be taken as dealing with Your Excellency's power also."

The Governor rejected the petitions on October 27. The four filed writ petitions in the High Court challenging this. The petitions said that the Governor, without getting the advice from the Council of Ministers, had rejected their petitions in "a hasty manner", while similar petitions pertaining to other cases have been pending with the Governor for more than a year. This was "illegal, arbitrary and violative of the Constitution", they said.

They added that Article 161 empowered the Governor to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment, or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extended. There was nothing to debar the Governor from reconsidering the relevant circumstances, including the worldwide opinion against capital punishment, irrespective of the findings given by courts of law, the petitions contended.

POLITICAL parties in Tamil Nadu, depending on their position *vis-a-vis* the LTTE, have demanded that either the death sentences be commuted or they be carried out. The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Samata Party, whose leaders Dr. S. Ramadoss and Defence Minister George Fernandes respectively espouse the LTTE cause, wanted the death sentences to be reduced to life imprisonment. Ramadoss wrote to Rajiv Gandhi's widow and Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi asking her to request the President to commute, on humanitarian grounds, the death sentences on the four persons to life imprisonment. (The four persons have not yet appealed to the President. They are awaiting the High Court's verdict.)

Samata Party general secretary Jaya Jaitely said that as a matter of policy her party had consistently opposed capital punishment. "Pending a national policy to abolish capital punishment in the new millennium year of 2000, the Government should commute all cases of capital punishment to life imprisonment," she said.

Surprisingly, Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) general secretary Vaiko declined to comment on the issue although his party backs the LTTE's struggle to carve out an independent Eelam out of Sri Lanka.

Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, who is also president of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, reacted cautiously. He said: "Our general viewpoint about death sentence – this is not (only) about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination – is that if prisoners get life imprisonment instead of the death penalty, there is a chance for them to repent. I am not saying this about this case. I have expressed this opinion long ago."

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Congress(I), the Tamilaga Rajiv Congress (TRC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party were categorical in opposing the grant of clemency. AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha said: "I do not think that any right-thinking person will say that the assassins of Rajiv Gandhi should be let off Capital punishment is a deterrent against horrendous crimes." Tamil Nadu Congress(I) Committee president, Tindivanam K. Ramamurthi objected to Karunanidhi's viewpoint that he generally favoured life imprisonment rather than the death penalty. "He talks like this because of the compulsions he faces," the TNCC president said.

TRC president Vazhappadi K. Ramamurthy said political parties should not interfere in the President's prerogative to dispose of the clemency petitions from the four persons. "Any intervention would amount to questioning the Supreme Court's judgment," he contended.

M. Venkaiah Naidu, BJP spokesperson, said Rajiv Gandhi's assassins should be "mercilessly punished for the heinous crime." ■

Judgment reserved

General Pervez Musharraf inducts an administrative team, but democracy itself is nowhere in sight.

AMIT BARUAH
in Islamabad

PAKISTAN has entered a make-or-break phase of its history. The people, for the moment, are solely interested in results and performance. Will General Pervez Musharraf and his team be able to deliver? Will the coup leader be able to recover looted national wealth, bring offenders to justice, restore a semblance of economic order, ensure law and order and put the country on course for "real" democracy?

The country has its ninth government in 11 years – four elected governments, four caretaker set-ups and now the military regime with a "civilian front". No civilian government has been allowed to complete its five-year tenure in office. It is hardly an enviable record.

Right now, the Army and the General are on trial. Sick and tired of the Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto duo that has dominated the political scene for almost a decade, the people are relieved to see the back of the ousted Prime Minister. They may not have much to say about the way the change was effected, but they do have lots to say about their expectations from the new regime.

Gen. Musharraf will find that he has no honeymoon period. The people expect him to show results immediately. The crackdown on loan defaulters and tax evaders, which is to begin from November 17, will be the first test for the Government. Will the Army be able to trap the big fish and make them cough up defaulted loans of over Rs.200 billion?

The fact is that "good words" have been heard before. A senior Pakistani journalist, veteran of many a martial law, told this correspondent: "We are good at formulation and planning. But there has been no implementation in the last 52 years. Gen. Musharraf will have to demonstrate that he is different."

You find the same mood on the streets of Pakistan. Yes, it is good to see that Nawaz Sharif is gone, but we have to wait and see what the new regime does. The people's judgment is reserved.

So far, the General has appointed six members to the National Security Council (NSC) and announced a 10-member Cabinet, which is likely to be expanded to a 12-member one. The appointment of Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, who was a legal "wizard" to the late Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, and that of Mohammad Yaqub, State Bank Governor, to the NSC, has been greeted with considerable scepticism.

Pirzada has been the handmaiden of martial law regimes past; he has provided the legal "cover" to the illegal acts of martial law governments. Yaqub has been around for several years; he has not been able to do much for the country's economy. In fact, during his tenure the economy has continued its downhill slide.

In the Cabinet, barring four members, the others are relatively unknown faces, something that is welcome in itself in a country like Pakistan. The Foreign Minister, Abdul Sattar, is hawkish on India, though his views are well-argued from a Pakistani standpoint. Recent statements from the Pakistani Foreign Office have accused India of furthering its "hegemonic interests" – such phraseology was missing from the Pakistan-India discourse at least during the second tenure of the Sharif Government.

Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz is on loan from Citibank to Pakistan. Acceptable to the West and the donor agencies, Aziz's appointment indicates that there will be no departure from past policies; an element of greater implementation in the collection of taxes and continuity of policy will be welcomed by the West.

Lt. Gen. (retd) Moinuddin Haider, the Sindh Governor removed by Nawaz Sharif, is the Interior Minister. As Sindh Governor he showed himself to be a man of ideas, but was apparently thwarted at every level by the former Prime Minister, who finally sacked him.

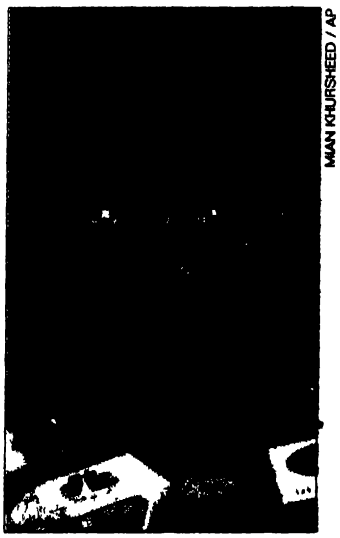
The other appointment that has evoked interest is that of Omar Asghar Khan. His appointment as Minister for Rural Development is a welcome one. The son of Air Chief Marshal (retd) Asghar Khan, he runs a non-governmental organisation called Sungi. Omar Asghar Khan has been at the receiving end of the religious Right. Qazi Hussain Ahmad, chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami, has accused the General of inducting members of the "NGO mafia" into his Cabinet.

Gen. Musharraf, it seems, will finally have three members from each of the four Pakistani provinces of Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province. Such a policy is a deliberate one, aimed at giving the "smaller provinces" the feeling that they are equal partners in the Pakistani Federation. Of course, such equality cannot be ensured by parity of numbers alone, but this move is seen as a step in the right direction.

The General has appointed two women – Atiya Inayatullah to the NSC and Zubeida Jalal to the Cabinet as Education Minister. This follows his statements that women need to be given greater representation at all levels.

In the area of the economy, however, there seems to be little attempt at any fresh thinking. Pakistan's "one-tranche" economy is heavily dependent on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other agencies. Their conditionalities stress on one simple issue – greater revenue generation – which in the Pakistani context means recurring increases in direct taxes.

S. Akbar Zaidi, a leading economic analyst, argued in a recent article: "Since it is more than probable that the same policies devised by



MIAN KHURSHEED / AP

Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

the IMF and World Bank which were responsible for these downward (economic trends since 1988) are likely to continue into the future, we have little reason to celebrate. Moreover, under the four democratic regimes since 1988, the policies of the IMF and the World Bank were, at times, half-heartedly followed through because of their obvious negative consequences, and had to be slowed down or even abandoned due to public pressure and protest. What is worse and more worrisome then is that with little need to be popular as they do not have to face an election, the military government can go all out to enforce these policies. The eventual consequences are likely to be far different from the expectations of the military or its supporters."

Zaidi argued that since Pakistan began pursuing the IMF-Bank-directed policies since 1988, its growth rate has dropped in comparison to the trend level of previous years. In the last 11 years, in only one year was GDP growth more than the six per cent demonstrated since 1977.

IN a sense, Pakistan has gotten used to change of governments and political turmoil. Zia-ul-Haq had the longest tenure of 11 years; but in the 1977-85 period he ruled as the Chief Martial Law Administrator. During the 1985-88 period, he had an uneasy relationship with Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo, who became the first victim of the President's new powers under Article 58 (2)(b).

Writing in *Dawn*, columnist Ayaz Amir draws attention to the distorted democracy that has existed in Pakistan:

"Military interventions in Pakistan have always followed a genetic code. In the beginning they exude a sense of vitality and vigour. Public expectations are high and there is talk of reform in the air. Politicians as a class are reviled and stories of their ineptitude and corruption are laid bare. Then as time passes military rule mutates into a hybrid democracy with a section of the political class becoming willing tools of the new dispensation. This was the pattern both under Ayub and Zia. Yahya who came in between had not the time for it because he was busy presiding over the break-up of Pakistan.



The newly inducted Cabinet Ministers, who were administered the oath of office by President Rafiq Tarar and Gen. Musharraf, at the presidential residence on November 6.

"Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and then, a political generation later, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, were products of the mutant and distorted democracy growing out of military rule. Bhutto senior was a product of the Ayub regime; Nawaz Sharif and his Muslim League the most outstanding political products of the Zia regime. In blaming these knights for their failures, and there is no doubt that their failures have been conspicuous and enormous, the Army cannot absolve itself of a large share of the blame.

It is widely felt that Gen. Musharraf, if he has to carry credibility with the mass of the Pakistani people, must think and act differently. He has to distance himself from the record of the Chief Martial Law Administrators of the past; not just in form but in content. And that, clearly, is a tall order. Also, there is a growing demand that the promised process of accountability must also cover the Army itself. The Jamaat-e-Islami chief, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, once described the Army's "corps commanders" as "crore commanders" – a description that could hardly have endeared him to the Army

In reply to a question from the BBC, the General conceded that there could be corruption in the Army. Earlier, at his November 1 press conference, the Chief Executive said that Army personnel would also be covered under the ambit of the newly-formed National Accountability Bureau (NAB) headed by Lt. Gen. Syed Amjad.

Musharraf also referred to the possibility of holding a referendum in a "bid" to legitimise his rule and the setting up of a Constitution Commission to reform the statute. The General also said that the Army would not intervene directly in the work of civil institutions, but would be engaged in an elaborate "monitoring system" in order to ensure the implementation of government policy. The use of the "intelligence system" to vet civilians being appointed in the civilian administration is an indicator of the widespread use of the "eyes and ears department" in Pakistan and its institutional status.

At his first press conference, the General revealed that he was conscious of the criticism against the first batch of appointments. He promised to be more careful and declared that those who did not perform would be replaced.

MUSHARRAF, who met delegations from the Commonwealth and the European Union, has meanwhile refused to spell out any time-frame for the return of democracy With "due deference" to the wishes of the international community, he maintained that he would act in the national interests of Pakistan. Taking this logic forward, the Army chief said that he was not even thinking in terms of a time-frame for a return to "democracy". Earlier, he told the official APP news agency· "Firstly, I have seen whenever you give a time-frame, a countdown starts and everyone gets into a standstill. The government machinery doesn't work seriously because they know that the time is limited and on the other side they start whiling away the time."

The General added: "I'm a strong believer in honouring my words. I don't want to say for the sake of saying it. Whatever I say must be done. And, if it is not done, I would like to tell the nation why it is not being done. Because, I mean it. I'm saying it from (my) heart. So, if I give a time-frame and then go back on it, it doesn't fit into my way of thinking. I don't like to do that. Then, I have said there are so many issues to be addressed. Therefore, I would not like to give the time-frame. I have to complete that work first."

The General also said that the international reaction to his October 12 coup was milder than what he had expected. In fact, he was surprised by its mildness. Domestically, he was of the view that he had expected the response to his coup to be positive. "I was pretty sure that the conditions were so bad that the people are

Souring relations

AMIN BARUAH

THE days of lambasting "Indian hegemony" are back. The Lahore process stands undermined as the new Pakistani leadership reverts to a classic anti-India mode which has continued for much of the last 52 years.

A new process of engagement will have to be negotiated between India and Pakistan, signals coming from the military leadership suggest. Already, the General, in his remarks to the BBC's Urdu Service, has given short shrift to the Lahore process and the related agreements. And, that process of engagement is nowhere in sight.

Stressing that India's sole intent was to "sideline" the Kashmir issue and focus on the other issues in the "two plus six" Foreign Secretary-level talks, the General said India was wrong to believe that Pakistan could be browbeaten like other "smaller" nations. Denying that Pakistan posed any threat to India, Gen. Musharraf claimed that in terms of size the Indian Army was three times that of Pakistan, and Pakistan's population was one-ninth that of India. And New Delhi was getting set to test an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). "What kind of threat can we pose to India? We are a small country," the General said.

Obviously, the General's initial announcement that he was unilaterally pulling back troops moved to the international border with India did not amount to much. The fact that there was no intention to extend the withdrawal to the Line of Control (LoC) or even to discuss the issue with India revealed the intentions behind the announcement.

On November 6, the Pakistani Foreign Office criticised the Government of India for getting the Kathmandu summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) postponed. Giving sufficient indication of the new terms of discourse with India, the Foreign Office accused India of scuttling the summit in "reckless pursuit of her compulsive hostility and her persistently negative attitude towards dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes". Such language had been absent for some time from Foreign Office statements.

In his November 1 press conference, the General said Indian hostility would be met with hostility, peace with peace and threats with threats. "I will ensure the honour and dignity of this country. Nobody threatens us without getting a threatening response...." the khaki-uniformed Army chief stated in response to questions. He made it clear that Pakistan wanted a Kashmir-first solution, or at least a simultaneous resolution of the Kashmir issue along with other issues. "We would like to resolve all our differences, and when I say all our differences I mean the core issue of Kashmir first of all – or simultaneously at least."

"But if there is any design to address issues other than Kashmir and sideline the Kashmir issue, I am not a part of it. The Kashmir issue has to be addressed and with that all other issues can be addressed. If this is the attitude we see from across the border, I can assure that I will be going far ahead of them (the Indians) in this area," the General added.

When he was asked about a recent article written by former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral about his relationship with Sharif, the General found it to be an interesting issue. He said there was a "very close relationship" across the border. Whether it was a business relationship, setting up factories or investing money "there" (in India) – all this was being investigated as part of a general probe into charges against the former Prime Minister. There was also the issue of "meeting people secretly" and considering "them" closer than "our own people".

Evidently, the General has not been able to rid himself of the "commando" image that he has *vis-a-vis* Kargil and India. In initial rounds of plainspeaking, Musharraf had not indicated his views on the dialogue process with India. Now, by undermining the Lahore process, the General has confirmed that the Pakistan Army is the stumbling block in the normalisation of relations with India. Nawaz Sharif, who approved the Kargil operation, had a flawed India policy; but that policy was low on hawkishness.

India will now find a more hawkish policy in Islamabad towards it – one that will make mutual engagement difficult. Clearly, Sharif's muddled approach to India, led from the front by Gen. Musharraf, has ruined the prospects of any rapprochement. ■

going to accept this change," he said. Interestingly, the General chose to characterise his action as a counter-coup. "(The) coup was by the previous government," the Army chief said in a reference to his "sacking" by Nawaz Sharif.

The agenda set by the General and his outright refusal to set any time-frame to his rule implies that he is going to be around for some time. Musharraf told CNN television that he was certainly looking at his tenure in terms of months. Since it cannot be in weeks or days, then clearly we are looking at a period running to years.

THE first stirrings of protest have come from the religious right. Qazi Hussain Ahmad, who was barred from entering the NWFP after he made a speech critical of the General, later had the ban revoked. In his first post-coup speech on November 5, the Qazi criticised the selection of members to the NSC and the Cabinet, describing them as members of the "NGO mafia". Those selected are broadly Western-educated, with no perceptible leanings towards hardline Islam. The Qazi said in Peshawar that the members of the Cabinet and the NSC did not have the support of the masses. "These people will tax the masses, line their pockets and leave this country," he said. Decrying the ban on the use of loudspeakers in mosques in the NWFP, he said this was outrageous. "There is no ban on dance parties, full of obscenities, in cantonments," he said.

It would appear that the religious Right is the first to oppose the General. The reasons are not far to seek – Musharraf has, so far, shown no inclination to appease the clerics though he has made the mandatory "*umra*" visit to Mecca. The Jamaat and other members of the family of the religious Right are aware that the General is in a position to hit at their roots if he so chooses.

A Government is in place, the Ministers have taken their oath of office, deriving their power from the Chief of the Army Staff. The waiting period is over. The General must now deliver on his promises to a restless Pakistan. ■

A crisis in Armenia

The serious threats to stability in the Caucasus region have come to the fore with the killing of the Prime Minister and several top government functionaries of Armenia inside the country's Parliament building.

JOHN CHERIAN

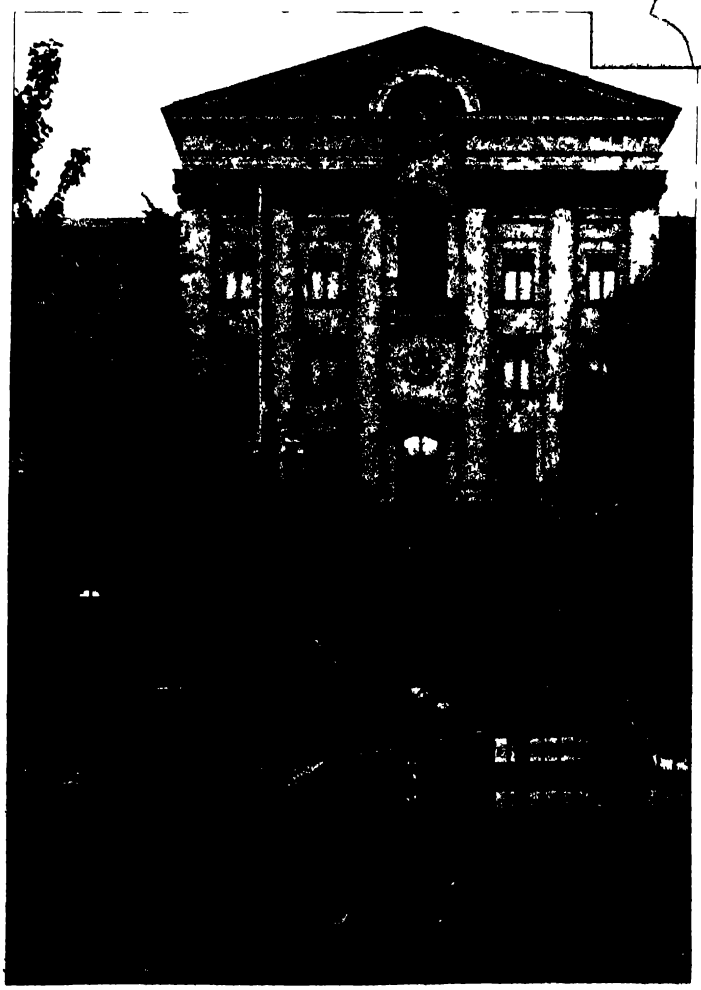
THE brutal killings of the Prime Minister and several top government functionaries of Armenia in the capital Yerevan on October 27 could further destabilise the situation in the Caucasus region.

Armenians and the international community were shocked by the manner in which the killings were carried out. Five gunmen burst into the Parliament building when the House was in session and shot in cold blood Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkissian, Speaker Karen Demarchian, Deputy Speakers Yuri Bakshian and Ruben Miroaian, Energy Minister Leonard Petrasian, senior civil servant Michail Kotanian and two legislators. Seven parliamentarians were injured, one of them critically. The incident was captured on national television, which was broadcasting live the parliamentary proceedings.

After accomplishing their major objective of eliminating the top political leadership, the assassins barricaded themselves in the Parliament building and held many lawmakers hostage. Led by former journalist Nairiu Unanian, they demanded that they be allowed to declare on national television that the government had been overthrown. The hostages were released after more than 48 hours of tortuous negotiations, a task in which President Robert Kocharian was personally involved. The President publicly assured the gunmen that force would not be used against them and that they would not be physically harmed after their arrest. He also conceded the assassins' demand for time on national television.

In his televised statement, Unanian accused the government of allowing Armenia to disintegrate and charged the country's elite with corruption. Unanian was a member of the extreme right-wing and ultranationalist Dashnak Party. The five assassins, three of whom belonged to the Unanian family, are now in jail awaiting trial.



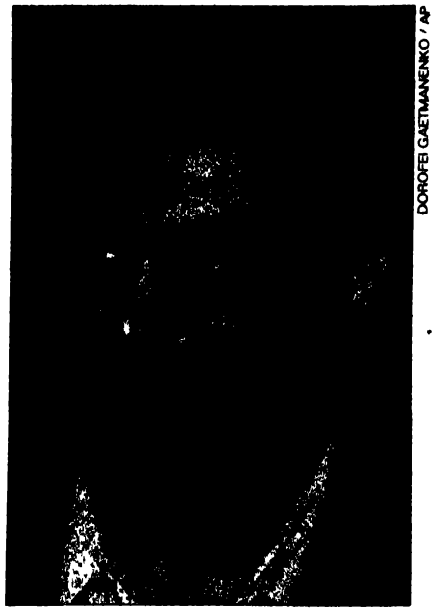


MISHA JAPARIDZE AP

Armenian soldiers stand guard at the gate of the Parliament building in Yerevan.

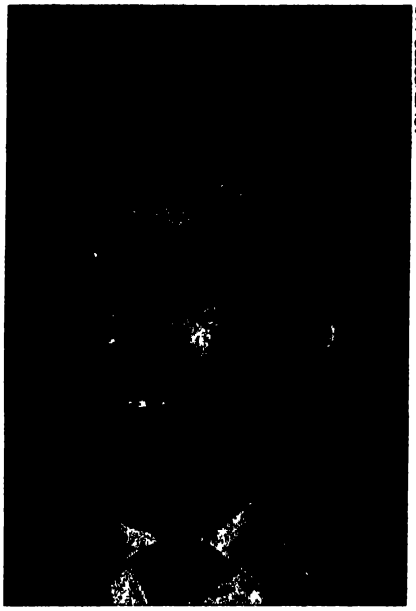
POLITICAL terrorism is not a new phenomenon in states that emerged out of the former Soviet Union. Eduard Shevardnadze, the President of the neighbouring republic of Georgia, has escaped at least two assassination attempts, the last of which was made early this year. The President of Uzbekistan escaped death in a car bomb explosion this year.

Politics in Armenia has been volatile since its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The struggle between Armenia and its immediate neighbour Azerbaijan over the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh has proved costly for both countries. Although Armenia gained militarily and is in full control of the enclave, it has had to pay a high price for this. It was reported in recent months that the leaders of Armenia and



DOROFEI GAETMANENKO / AP

Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkissian.



ARMENPRESS / AP

Speaker Karen Demarchian.

Azerbaijan had come close to a settlement. There is speculation that the assassinations of the Prime Minister and the equally influential Speaker were connected with the Nagorno-Karabakh problem.

Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1988 and separatists, helped by Armenian troops, threw out from the territory the Azeri army along with the Azeri population. A truce was signed in 1994 but sporadic fighting continued. The Clinton administration is interested in an early settlement of the problem, for geopolitical considerations of its own. Just hours before he was killed, the Prime Minister had had a meeting with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. Talbott reportedly discussed with Sarkissian the U.S.-supported plan to designate Nagorno-Karabakh an autonomous republic attached to Azerbaijan. The U.S. plan envisages a separate army and currency for the Armenian-dominated enclave, which in many respects would enjoy the kind of independence Kosovo enjoys today.

Sarkissian was a nationalist who made a name as the commander of the forces that fought the Azeri army. It was speculated that the President and the Prime Minister were all set to sign a crucial deal. There was also a rumour that Armenia was offered participation in a lucrative deal involving a pipeline that would transoil from the Caspian Sea to key. Armenia, whose economy has been in free fall for some time, is cash-strapped.

About a million Azeris have become refugees because of the war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has occupied more than 10 per cent of Azerbaijan's territory. The military defeat precipitated violent political turmoil in Azerbaijan and led to the re-installation of Gedar Aliyev as President. Aliyev, who was a Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union under President Leonid Brezhnev, is today the staunchest ally of the U.S. in the region. One of Aliyev's senior-most advisers recently issued an appeal to the U.S., the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Turkey to station troops in his country. Armenia, on the other hand, is one of the closest allies of Russia in the region and Azerbaijan's growing tilt to the West had alarmed the Russian leadership.

At the request of the Armenian government, the Russians have shipped S-300 surface-to-air missile systems and a squadron of advanced MiG-29 fighters to Armenia. Jewish-American lobbyists in Washington, meanwhile, have been trying to get the U.S. Congress to reject Article 907, which prohibits U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan, in exchange for Azerbaijan entering into a quasi- alliance with Israel and Turkey against Iran. This is done in order to enable the shipment of vast quantities of the Caspian oil into the world market while at the same time keeping important players such as Russia and Iran out of the "great game".

Russia is naturally concerned at the alarming events in Armenia and fears that the republic's domestic and foreign policies could change in the wake of the assassinations. Many Russians view Armenia as the only strategic partner of their country in the region at this juncture. Russian-Armenian military cooperation started in 1992, when the Presidents of both countries signed a treaty allowing Russian troops to remain on Armenian soil. In 1995, a 25-year treaty was signed, allow-



AP

Police officers escort parliamentarians who were held hostage and then released by ultranationalist terrorists.

ing Russian troops to retain the use of their bases in Armenia. The Russian military units stationed in Armenia are supposed to defend the southern air space of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The 2,500 Russian troops deployed in Armenia have enough weaponry and equipment to deploy several mechanised-infantry divisions. It is feared that if Russia loses its foothold in Armenia, it will lose control over the entire Caucasian mountain range.

The Russian government and media have also been interpreting the events in Yerevan as yet another illustration of the dangerous proportions that terrorism has assumed in the states that were part of the Soviet Union. The terrorists who occupied the Armenian Parliament building kept the hostages at gunpoint for two days. Russian officials have reacted positively to the demand of the Armenian Defence Ministry that the Prosecutor-General of the Republic be dismissed along with the Heads of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of National Security. In a statement, the Armenian Defence Ministry called the assassinations "a treacherous crime, planned and prepared beforehand, that was aimed at Armenia's statehood and against the future of the Armenian nation."

Moscow has, however, given an assurance that it will continue to support the ongoing peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. After talks with Talbott, who visited Moscow in the last week of October, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said that his country's support for the talks, which are co-sponsored by Russia, France and the U.S. would not be affected. "We hope that the recent tragic events will not make the process of solving the Nagorno-Karabakh problem more difficult," he said.

Talbott was present at the funerals of the Armenian leaders. He was on a tour of the countries in the region seeking to expedite a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. He admitted in Moscow that the killings would "cast a pall" over the peace negotiations. More than 35,000 people were killed in the fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh before a tenuous ceasefire took hold in 1994.

Meanwhile, in Yerevan, President Kocharian has assumed control over the government until a new Prime Minister is appointed. The Interior Minister has handed over his resignation for the security lapse that allowed the assassins to enter the Parliament building with semi-automatic weapons. ■

Electoral imponderables

Chandrika Kumaratunga opts for early presidential elections; a tough battle awaits her.

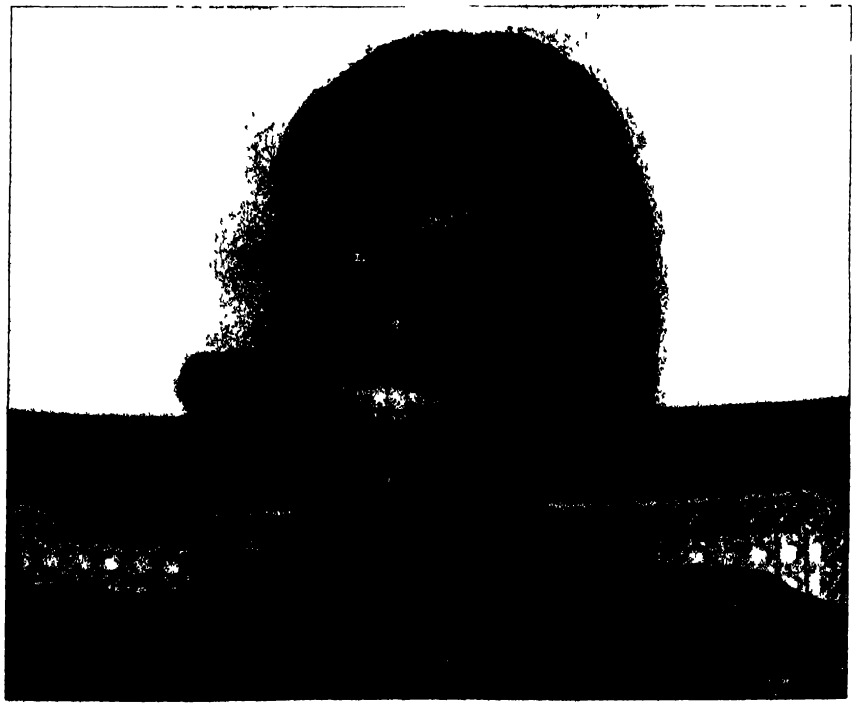
V.S. SAMBANDAN
in Colombo

CONFRONTED with a political impasse in her efforts to resolve Sri Lanka's decades-old separatist conflict, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has called an early election to the presidency. An estimated 11 million Sri Lankans will now vote on December 21. Kumaratunga, who was elected to a six-year term in 1994, opted for early polls in order to obtain a fresh mandate to resolve the ethnic conflict. Within hours of addressing the nation, she set the agenda, saying that she would resolve the conflict within months of her re-election. The President also dwelt at length on the efforts made by her administration to work out a lasting solution.

With nominations yet to close, it appears that the main challenge to Chandrika Kumaratunga will come from Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe.

As in the 1994 elections, the presidential contenders have given top priority to finding a solution to the strife in the North and the East. But unlike at that time when Chandrika Kumaratunga won by a handsome margin – she won 62.2 per cent of the vote – a close contest is expected this time.

In 1994, a big chunk of the Tamil vote in the North and the East went in Chandrika's favour; this time, however, there is no such certainty. It was a vote for change then; the electorate hoped that by rejecting the United National Party (UNP) and by choosing Kumaratunga, the People's Alliance candidate, the Tamil question could be resolved. This expectation had its basis in the fact that Chandrika Kumaratunga was groomed in liberal traditions.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

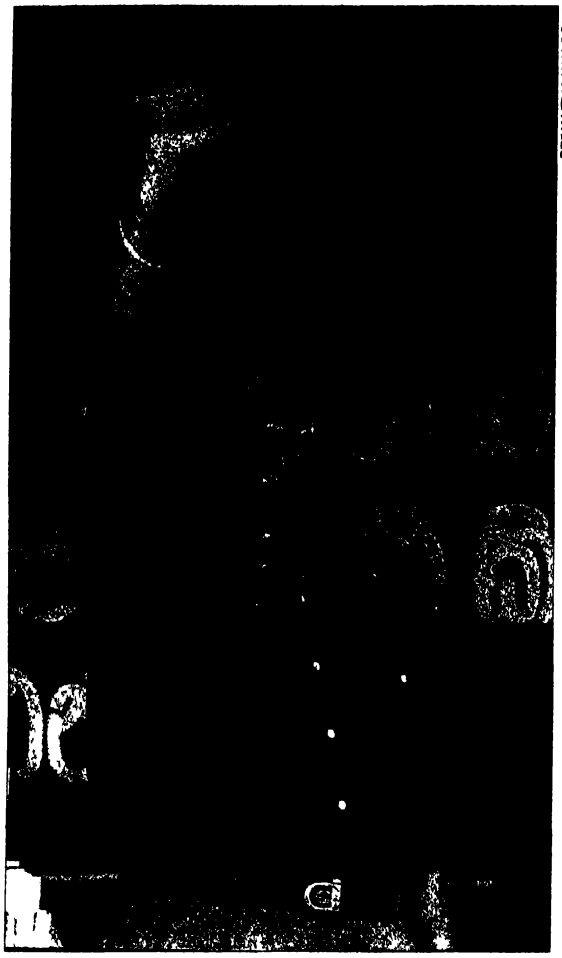
President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

But, as it turned out, the island's Tamils are a disappointed lot. Lack of cooperation from the UNP on the one hand and a no-win situation facing the military in its offensive to recapture areas held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the other have constrained the President's efforts to break the political deadlock.

In 1994, while her vote-share at the national level was 62.28 per cent, Chandrika Kumaratunga polled 85.14 per cent of the votes in the four Tamil-majority districts of Jaffna, Vanni, Batticaloa and Trincomalee, a clear indication that the Tamils set great score by her leadership.

In Batticaloa, where 64.32 per cent of the 2.6 lakh voters exercised their franchise, Chandrika Kumaratunga got the second highest percentage of votes, 87.30, next only to that she won in Jaffna, which was 96.35. The figure for Jaffna must be seen in the backdrop of the fact that only 17,716 of the 5.9 lakh voters in the district exercised their franchise. Parts of the district were under the control of the LTTE.

This groundswell of Tamil support, however, appears to have vaporised, going by reports from the North and the East (independent access to areas held by the LTTE is hampered by restrictions on the movement of journalists, for security reasons). "We asked the people to vote for Chandrika Kumaratunga last time. This time, we dare not do so," said a Tamil political leader from the East. A leader of a former militant group said emphatically that his party would not be in a position to seek the people's vote for the P.A. candidate as she did not deliver on her earlier promise to end the conflict.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe.

THE announcement of elections did not take the island by surprise. It received mixed reactions from the political parties. The UNP said it was ready to face the electorate. Wickremasinghe's initial reaction was: "I am ready, my party is ready and we will win."

Days later, kicking off his party's campaign, he said he would accord the "highest priority" to resolving the ethnic conflict. He also laid emphasis on "economic revival" and changes in the education system with the focus on English education and computer literacy.

Having played truant on supporting the peace proposals for almost five years, the UNP is gearing up for the elections on the promise that it will "end the war", commence "de-escalation" and "talk to the LTTE". However, there has been no elaboration on its strategy; the possibility of the Tamils supporting Wickremasinghe will become clear only with the unfolding of the party's position on the peace proposals.

If he continues to harp on "talking to the LTTE", there is the likelihood of the Tamils considering supporting his efforts. But, given past experience, this seems unlikely as Tamil political leaders want to emphasise that no 'Sinhala' government would be able to resolve the crisis.

Moreover, Tamil voters who are against Chandrika Kumaratunga's re-election are equally forthright that they would not like to back the UNP.

This leaves the Tamil vote wide open at this stage. Former militant parties are considering the possibility of fielding a common Tamil candidate in order to garner this "protest vote".

Their argument is that such a measure would make the political statement – that the "Sinhalese leadership" does not enjoy the confidence of the Tamil electorate in resolving the conflict.

However, the most important factor that will determine the Tamil vote, according to political observers, could be the 'signals' given by the LTTE. Some feel that one extreme choice open to the Tigers is to field a candidate under the People's Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT), a registered political party. Even otherwise, any indirect signal from the LTTE is bound to influence the Tamil vote.

The demise of the Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC) leader S. Thondaman has introduced an element of uncertainty into the vote of the Tamil plantation workers, who are of Indian origin. They are estimated to comprise 5.5 per cent of the island's electorate. Under Thondaman's leadership they constituted almost a bloc vote – although there were internal problems that troubled the CWC. However, in a resolution adopted on the day Thondaman died, the party announced its support to Chandrika Kumaratunga. This decision, CWC leaders say, would be treated as his "last wish".

The UNP, however, feels that it can draw on the plantation workers' vote in the absence of Thondaman. It was during the UNP rule that plantation workers derived considerable benefits, including citizenship for a large number of them whose fate had remained undecided.

The nominee of the Left-radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and a rebel Left candidate, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, are also contesting the elections. While the JVP will field a relative lightweight, politburo member Nandana Gunatilake, on the one-point agenda of "abolition of the executive presidency," Nanayakkara's candidature is more a reflection of the internal differences in the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). These two candidates could at best wean away the votes of the people who are disenchanted with the two main parties.

The electoral battle, which may be a tough one, will essentially be between Chandrika Kumaratunga and Wickremasinghe. ■

In the cause of plantation labour

Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman, 1913-1999.

D.B.S. JEYARAJ

SAUMIYAMOORTHY THONDAMAN, who passed away on October 30, was the undisputed leader of Sri Lanka's predominantly Indian Tamil plantation proletariat. At 86, he was both the oldest and the seniormost members of the Sri Lankan Cabinet: he had served continuously for 21 years from 1978, under Presidents J.R. Jayewardene, Ranasinghe Premadasa, D.B. Wijetunge and Chandrika Kumaratunga. Thondaman was the leader of Sri Lanka's Tamils of recent Indian origin, known as "Indian Tamils" and consisting mainly of tea and rubber plantation workers.

Thondaman had gone to Nuwara Eliya, in the central highlands, to preside over a meeting of the India Vamsavali Makkal Perani (Front of People of Indian Descent), an umbrella organisation of which his Ceylon Worker's Congress (CWC) was the pivotal force. Having thrown in his party's lot with President Kumaratunga in the coming presidential election, Thondaman was working to win over the support of the other 19 constituents of the Perani to his way of thinking. Having taken ill on the morning of October 30, he was rushed to a hospital in Nuwara Eliya and from there flown to the Sri Jayewardenepura Hospital in Colombo. The cause of death was myocardial infarction.

Born in 1913, the political veteran celebrated his 86th birthday on August 30. As president of Sri Lanka's largest and one of the oldest trade unions, the CWC, Thondaman played a prominent role in the country's post-independence politics. His political life was intertwined with the vicissitudes of the Indian Tamil people of Sri Lanka, who form the most deprived section of Sri Lankan society. His goal was to emancipate these people from the wretched plight they were in owing to historical injustice. Although he could not fully realise these aspirations, it cannot be denied that the pragmatic leadership of Thondaman helped the people he represented to better their circumstances from the dire position they were in at the dawn of Sri Lanka's independence.

Thondaman's father Karuppiah Thondaman was connected to the royal family of Pudukkottai. This branch of the family, however, underwent a decline in fortunes, and it was on the verge of impoverishment when Karuppiah migrated to Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was called by the British, to become a "Kankani", or supervisor, of tea estate workers. Through hard work and shrewd business acumen he became the owner of a prosperous tea plantation, Wavendon estate, in Ramboda in the Nuwara Eliya district.

Young Thondaman, born in Munappudooi, came over at the age of 11. He went to secondary school at St. Andrews, Gampola. He then took to planting as estate management was then known. In his late teens and early twenties Thondaman led the life of a brown sahib, as the son and heir of a prosperous plantation owner.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

There was, however, an idealist streak in the son, who was not content to lead a luxurious life. Instead, he chose to espouse the cause of plantation workers, who were exploited ruthlessly. The bulk of these workers were Tamil people who were brought as indentured labourers from the then Madras Presidency. Thondaman and other like-minded idealists started organising plantation workers on the lines of trade union movements.

The Indian freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi had a demonstration effect. The Indian community, guided by Jawaharlal Nehru, declared itself formally, in his presence and according to his advice, as the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC) on July 25, 1939. The War years saw trade unionism taking firm roots in the estates. Thondaman at times spent his own money to finance strikes. The CIC developed into a formidable organisation at the time of independence, with Thondaman as a leader.

In the elections to the first Parliament in 1947, eight persons representing plantation Tamil interests were returned. Of these, six were from the CIC. Thondaman himself won from Nuwara Eliya with a majority of 6,135 votes. In addition to this, Tamil workers helped influence results in a further 12 constituencies. Parliament at that time had 95 elected and six appointed members. Interestingly, Thondaman was the only member of the first Parliament to be a member of the current Parliament.

The United National Party (UNP) government under D.S. Senanayake felt threatened on class and ethnic lines by this "alien presence". It introduced legislation in 1948 and 1949 to deprive the Indian Tamil community of citi-

zenship and franchise. Thondaman and other Indian Tamil leaders, inspired by the Gandhian ethos, chose to combat these blatantly discriminatory measures by resorting to mass satyagraha. After 18 months the struggle was called off.

Accepting the inevitable, the plantation workers began applying, under the new regulations, for citizenship afresh. The stringent requirements imposed and the strict application of those requirements during processing saw most workers being denied citizenship and, by extension, voting rights. Of the 1,071,000 Indian Tamil people who were residents of the Island at the time of independence, only 1,32,000 became eligible for citizenship by 1962.

In the meantime, lakhs of Indians returned to India voluntarily. The 1958 communal riots accelerated this process. The CIC transformed itself into the CWC in 1950. With the deprival of voting rights it became more of a trade union with a political wing than a political party with a trade union. No member of the CWC was elected to Parliament in the 1950s.

In July 1960, Thondaman became an appointed Member of Parliament under Sirima Bandaranaike's government. He represented the hill country Tamil category known as "stateless" people, that is, Tamils who were citizens of neither Ceylon nor India. The worst, however, was yet to come.

In October 1964, Prime Ministers Lal Bahadur Shastri and Bandaranaike signed an accord which arbitrarily determined the future of these so-called stateless persons. The Sirimavo-Shastri Pact, as it was popularly known, divided the stateless people on a ratio of seven to four between India and Sri Lanka respectively. Out of the 9,75,000 stateless persons, 5,25,000 were to be repatriated to India while 300,000 were to be granted Sri Lankan citizenship. The fate of another 150,000 people was kept in abeyance. In 1974, Prime Ministers Bandaranaike and Indira Gandhi signed another accord, which divided these people equally – 75,000 each between the two countries.

The tragic dimension to this exercise was that the CWC, which represented the stateless persons, was not consulted. Angered over these developments, Thondaman joined with dissident Sinhala MPs and brought about the downfall of the Bandaranaike government in December 1964; Thondaman abstained during a crucial vote, and the government fell by a one-vote margin. The incident also brought under the spotlight the political animal that was Thondaman. Instead of striking out against the government in opposition to the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact and inviting political isolation, Thondaman chose to bide his time and team up with other Sinhala MPs on the question of press freedom at the opportune moment and help deliver the *coup de grace*.

In 1965, Thondaman became an appointed Member of Parliament at the time of the UNP government of Dudley Senanayake. He used the opportunity to delay the repatriation while encouraging the process of re-enfranchisement. Thondaman reportedly told a political scientist that he had single-handedly nullified an agreement entered into by two sovereign governments.

THE return of Bandaranaike to power in 1970 saw a reversal of this state of affairs. The nationalisation of plantations saw Indian Tamil people being evicted from the estates and landless Sinhala people being settled in their place. A large number of Tamil people were relocated in the Sri Lankan Tamil districts of North and East. In spite of the dire economic circumstances, a silent revolution was on within the Indian Tamil community. Aided by CWC leaders, more and more Indian Tamils were regaining citizenship and consequently voting rights. As more and more children grew up and reached the voting age of 18, the community's voting strength increased.

This empowerment became evident for the first time in the 1977 elections when, after 30 years, Thondaman was re-elected to the multi-member constituency of Nuwara Eliya-Maskeliya. He joined the UNP government of J.R. Jayewardene in 1978. The new Constitution of 1978 removed the distinctions between citizens of descent and citizens by registration. This put an end to many problems faced by Indian Tamils. As Minister for Rural Industrial Development, Thondaman was able to foster dairy projects and small industries among the Indian Tamil people. When it was found that there was a shortfall of 93,000 in the number of applicants for Indian citizenship and a corresponding excess for Sri Lankan citizenship. Thondaman persuaded the Jayewardene government in 1987 to grant citizenship unilaterally to this category and end for all time the "Thrishanku state" of the stateless people. Concessions were also gained in the case of Tamil people who had obtained Indian citizenship but were staying on.

Thondaman was successful in these attempts because of five factors. First, the increase in votes within the community and the CWC's ability to deliver them en bloc provided Thondaman considerable bargaining power. Secondly, the rise of political violence in the northeastern region of the country saw Colombo awarding priority to the needs of the Indian Tamils. Thirdly, India had begun to take greater interest in the affairs of Sri Lanka, thereby impelling governments in Colombo to remove possible irritants pertaining to the plantation Tamil community, which claimed an umbilical relationship with "mother India".

Fourthly, the CWC illustrated through well-executed strikes its capability to paralyse tea and rubber production. This provided economic clout, which enhanced the CWC's bargaining power. Fifthly, Thondaman enjoyed close personal relations with UNP leaders such as Jayewardene, Premadasa, Gamini Dissanayake, Lalith Athulathmudali and Anandatissa de Alwis, and used them to the advantage of his people.

The CWC contested several elections in association with the UNP. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement, which helped both parties to increase their representation. For the Indian Tamil people, it was a slow return to political representation after being in the cold for more than 25 years. The Indian vote helped Jayewardene and Premadasa win the presidential elections in 1982 and 1988.

The CWC contested the 1994 parliamentary elections along with the UNP under the latter's symbol of elephant. Seven of its candidates were elected and two persons, including Thondaman, appointed National List MPs. But the People's Alliance under Chandrika Kumaratunga won the elections with a wafer-thin majority. Thondaman then changed sides and became Minister of Livestock Development and Estate Infrastructure in her Cabinet. His colleagues, however, sat in the Opposition but supported the government during voting time. Thondaman helped increase the majority of Kumaratunga in the presidential elections, which were held subsequently, by once again delivering the bulk of the plantation Tamil votes.

In spite of certain problems and tensions, Thondaman remained supportive of Kumaratunga to the very end. When she opted to advance the elections to December 21 this year, the CWC decid-

ed to back her again mainly because Thondaman decided to do so in spite of some CWC MPs holding a different opinion.

Thondaman was a leader who helped his people with single-minded devotion for more than 60 years to realise their aspirations against overwhelming odds. The passing of the Tamil patriarch is an irreparable loss.

AS the undisputed leader of the Indian Tamil community, Thondaman enjoyed the reputation of being a king-maker in Sri Lankan politics. Even during the Provincial Council elections of April 6 early this year, Thondaman lived up to this sobriquet. He floated the India Vamsavali Makkal Perani. It won six seats in the Central province and one seat each in the Uva and Sabragamuwa provinces. Again, it was Thondaman who provided a narrow but effective majority that enabled the ruling alliance to form viable administrations in the councils of these provinces.

Thondaman was sympathetic to the problems of the Sri Lankan Tamil community but knew clearly that there was no uniform identity of interests. In 1961 he launched a plantation workers' strike as a demonstration of sympathy for the satyagraha campaign undertaken by Sri Lankan Tamils in the North and the East. However, against the Sri Lankan Tamil community's expectations that he would prolong the strike, he called it off early after making his point.

Thondaman cooperated with Sri Lankan Tamil political parties in forming the Tamil United Front in 1971. But when it metamorphosed into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and opted for a separate state in 1976, Thondaman opted out despite being elected as one of the triumvirate of its leadership. Tamil Eelam will not help resolve the problems of plantation Tamils was his practical credo. He campaigned for the TULF in 1977 and enlisted TULF support for the CWC in elections, but contested separately under the cockerel symbol instead of the rising sun symbol of the TULF.

He was also critical of the confrontational tactics of Sri Lankan Tamils, both violent and non-violent. He told this writer several times that the trouble with the TULF leaders was that they did not know how to negotiate. "The art is to put five demands, win one completely, gain partial compromises on two and put on hold the remaining two for another day. Since we are trade unionists, we know that art. But TULF leaders are all lawyers who only know how to argue their brief eloquently but not how to extract concessions," he said.

Thondaman was not overtly critical of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or the armed struggle by Sri Lankan Tamils. His pragmatic proposal that power be handed over to LTTE leader V. Prabakaran for a stipulated period of time without being obligated to face elections was thoroughly misunderstood in the South. He was accused unfairly of collaborating with the LTTE to create a "Malaya Naadu" upcountry. But actually Thondaman strove hard to prevent violence entering the plantations. He knew that if the upcountry youth started emulating their northeastern counterparts, it would lead to tragedy. He approved of violence only as a means of self-defence. Thondaman was instrumental in preventing violence from overwhelming the plantations. His importance will be felt only in his absence.

He also had an earthy way of describing when to call off a strike and go in for a negotiated agreement. The comparison was to the cooking of dosa, a staple of Tamils. "The cook has to flip-flop the dosa alternately on the cooking tray so that both sides get cooked. It has to be taken off at the right moment. If this *pakkuvam* (finesse) is not adhered to, the dosa will be either burnt or not cooked well on one side. It is this *pakkuvam* of timing that is required in conducting strikes and negotiations. If the correct moment is not seized, everything will be lost."

THONDAMAN'S politics was that of brinkmanship at times. There was however deep subtlety to it. A major example is the plantation strike he launched while being a Minister in the Jayewardene government. "It was not a strike," Thondaman said, "but a prayer campaign where every worker would attend a place of worship and be there praying the whole day for a wage increase instead of working." To prevent personal pressure being exerted by Jayewardene, the wily Thondaman got himself admitted to hospital and got a no-visitors rule implemented. The government caved in to Thondaman's demand. There was no triumphant boast by Thondaman. "Prayers can move mountains. Our prayers have been answered," he said in a deadpan tone.

Thondaman was a man who could reconcile seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. An estate owner leading plantation workers, a Minister leading a strike against his own government, an MP elected on the UNP ticket sitting with the P.A. as a Minister – were some of these. When asked about these different aspects of his personality, Thondaman would say with a twinkle: "I am like the ideal woman. She can be a daughter to her parents, sister to her siblings, wife to her husband, and mother to her children, and remain the same woman."

The king-maker role he played and the pragmatic approach he adopted to the dynamics of politics fuelled resentment against Thondaman in certain chauvinist quarters. The fact that an "Indian Tamil" was helping make and unmake Presidents and administrations strengthened these feelings. Also, his role in resolving the problems of the Indian Tamil community was not fully appreciated by some sections of the community.

Whatever the misgivings and misunderstandings, there is no doubt that Thondaman was a leader who helped his people with single-minded devotion for more than 60 years to realise their aspirations against overwhelming odds. The passing of the Tamil patriarch is an irreparable loss.

Thondaman leaves behind a son, Ramanathan, three granddaughters and a grandson, Arumugam Thondaman. The grandson, in his early thirties, is both a Member of Parliament and the general secretary of the CWC and is tipped to be Thondaman's political successor. There is speculation that the CWC may split over the succession question. There was a time when the CWC had 600,000 members. Now the membership has dropped to around 350,000. Still it remains a force to be reckoned with. The reason for this is the astute and bold leadership of Thondaman.

If the CWC now splits, it can only lead to a disempowerment of plantation Tamils. This can only bring more misery to a pathetic section of Sri Lankan society. ■

Victory for Centre-Left

Argentina elects Fernando de la Rua, the candidate of the Opposition alliance, the country's next President, ending 10 years of Carlos Menem's rule.

JOHN CHERIAN

IN the October 24 presidential election, the voters of Argentina, like their counterparts in other Latin American countries that went to the polls recently, voted against the *status quo*. Buenos Aires Mayor, Fernando de la Rua, representing Alliance, a coalition of Centre-Left parties, won the election comfortably, ending the decade-long rule by Carlos Saul Menem and the Peronists. The Alliance won 48 per cent of the votes polled and the ruling Justicialist Party (J.P.) 38 per cent.

The J.P. dominated Argentinean politics for most of the time since the military lost its grip over power in 1983. It was originally a populist party, inspired by the vision of Juan Peron, the late Argentinean strongman, and his second wife Evita. The Peronists had their political base among the working class and the progressive sections of the population.

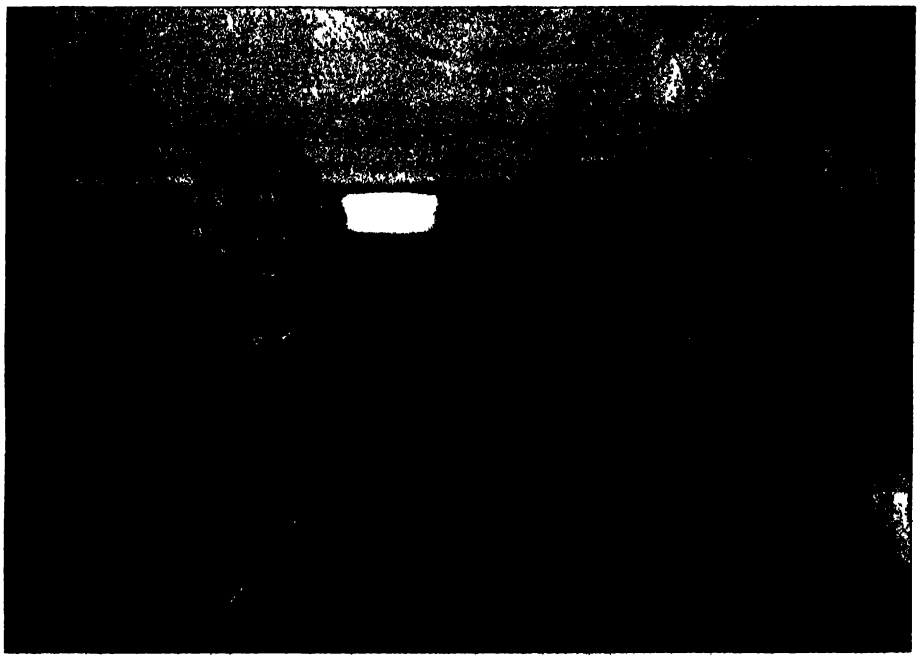
Matters, however, changed dramatically after Menem became President 10 years ago. Although elected on a populist platform, Menem discarded the radical Peronist policies and embraced the free market. He also gave up the independent foreign policy pursued by his predecessor, Raul Alfonsin of the Radical Party. Argentina was an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and had close relations with many developing countries in Asia and Africa. Menem, however, went out of his way to identify the nation with the United States on almost all issues of international importance, ranging from disarmament to the inhuman economic blockade of Cuba. He put the Malvinas (Falklands) issue on the backburner, and he was given the privilege of lunching with the Queen of United Kingdom in the Buckingham Palace. On social issues, Menem's positions were incongruous: while he spoke out against abortion rights, like a conservative, he unabashedly revelled in the playboy image he so assiduously cultivated.

However, it was Menem's far-reaching structural adjustment programme that was the hallmark of his long stint. The principal components of the programme, inspired by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, were privatisation, deregulation and containment of inflation, which was rampant. (When Menem took office, inflation was in triple digits, the annual average rate being over 300 per cent. The cornerstone of his anti-inflation programme was the 1991 Law of Convertibility which pegged the peso with the U.S. dollar and required that the money supply have be kept on a par with the foreign exchange reserves deposited in the Central Bank.)

Inflation was curbed drastically within a short time: by 1997, it was less than 1 per cent. But the privatisation campaign has left the government with very little assets. Telecommunications, energy and public services sectors were privatised. Menem used the funds generated by the sale of the state's assets to build up foreign reserves and temporarily cushion the population from the harsh impact of the structural adjustment programme.

But in the last few years, budget deficit increased substantially. The rate of unemployment now stands at 14.5 per cent, twice as high as it was in 1990. Menem's free-market policies, although initially popular, have lost their allure. Argentina is in the grip of the worst recession of the decade and in all probability the gross domestic product will shrink by 3.5 per cent this year. Some 45 per cent of the children under 14 live in poverty.

THE Mexican daily *La Jornada*, while hailing the victory of the Alliance, said that it hoped the result would signal an end to free-market policies, which have meant a high rate of unemployment, rising inequality and corruption. The



GERARDO HOROVITZ / AP

President-elect Fernando de la Rua (left) with his running mate Carlos Alvarez in Buenos Aires on October 24 after winning a landslide victory.



ROBERTO CANDIA / AP

Posters showing Carlos Menem as a candidate for the presidential elections in 2003, which appeared in Buenos Aires immediately after the results of the presidential elections were announced. Menem's Peronist party lost the elections after ruling the country for 10 years.

newspaper compared Menem's economic reforms with those of Augusto Pinochet of Chile and Alberto Fujimori of Peru. "The results (of free-market policies) were invariably a serious increase in social inequality, deepening marginalisation, poverty, concentration of wealth in a select group of individuals, families and businesses, and the looting of national assets," *La Jornada* said.

The corruption in the top echelons of the government contributed substantially to the unpopularity of the Peronists. The ruling party split into pro- and anti-Menem factions. Although barred by the Constitution from contesting for a third term as President, Menem tried for a re-nomination. He extended only lukewarm support to the J.P's presidential candidate, Eduardo Duhalde. The impression that had gained ground was that Menem would rather see an Opposition candidate win than live with another Peronist as President. Menem has vowed that he will run for President five years hence; posters declaring "Menem 2003. The country needs him" already adorn public places in Buenos Aires. Menem himself claimed that his presidency was "the best in history".

The Duhalde group replied with its own posters, accusing Menem of having contributed in a major way to the victory of de la Rua. It would have been difficult for Menem to get a re-nomination, with Duhalde in the presidential palace. Duhalde had in fact inched ahead of de la Rua in the middle of the year. However, the in-fighting among the Peronists affected his campaign. Several prominent Peronists refused to support him. Duhalde has refused to own up responsibility for the J.P's debacle, saying that he did not consider himself "the father of the defeat". Inner-party wrangles are bound to continue as the Peronists begin apportioning blame.

THE electoral results can be interpreted as a reversal of fortune for the Radicals. They had reached the nadir of their popularity in 1996, when their candidate, Horacio Massaccesi, won only 17 per cent of the votes. They were relegated to the third place in the country's two most populous provinces, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. The Radicals thus came to the conclusion that if they fought alone it would result in a cakewalk for the Peronists. The decline of the Radicals coincided with the emergence of the Centre-Left Front for a Country in Solidarity, known by its acronym Frepaso, which was formed in 1994. The membership of Frepaso consisted mostly of disillusioned Peronists and members of smaller Centre-Left parties.

Several Frepaso leaders, such as Carlos "Chacho" Alvarez (who was de la Rua's running mate), have a clean image. However, the party's support base remained mostly confined to urban areas. On its own, it had no chance of coming to power at the centre: the best alternative before it was an alliance with the Radicals. Thus, three years ago Frepaso joined hands with the Radicals and formed the Alliance for Work, Justice and Education (the Allianza) to fight the provincial elections.

The Alliance's victory in the provincial elections in 1997 established the fact that there existed a credible alternative to the Peronists. The Alliance had made it clear at the outset that it would not tinker with the major components of Menem's economic policies and would not jeopardise the economic stability that the currency reforms had brought about.

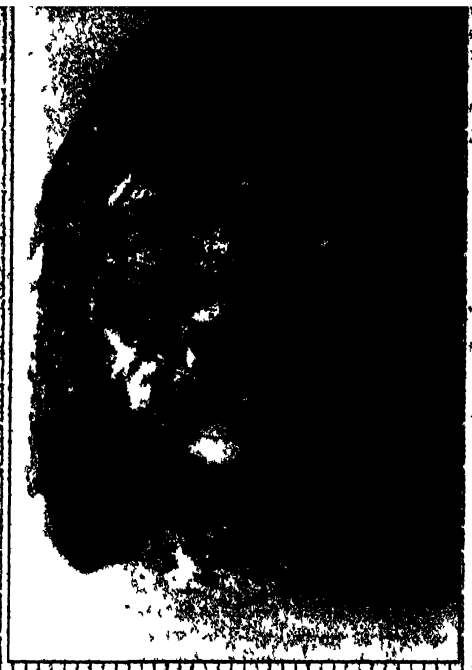
Argentineans today are majorly preoccupied with the problem of unemployment, and not inflation. The other important problem identified by them is corruption, which rose significantly during Menem's second term. Transparency International, in its annual report on corruption, has placed the country among the 20 top corrupt countries in the world.

The Opposition used the theme of corruption very effectively in its electoral campaign. In a public opinion poll taken last year, residents of Buenos Aires identified the ruling party as the most corrupt. In all 51 per cent of the respondents considered Menem corrupt while 43 per cent considered Duhalde also corrupt. On the other hand, only 7 per cent thought de la Rua was corrupt. About 58 per cent of the respondents identified the Alliance as the political grouping best suited to tackle corruption; 22 per cent identified the Peronists as the party that could do the job. The opinion poll showed that Argentineans also wanted the judicial system reformed; 87 per cent of the respondents did not believe that all Argentineans were equal before the law.

The President-elect has a tough task ahead. The Senate is still dominated by Peronists. Many of the provinces, including Buenos Aires, the richest, are under their control. De la Rua has promised a war on corruption. This could mean investigations into the assets of Menem and his cronies. The Left-leaning Frepaso has been insisting on a thorough clean-up of the administration.

Argentina's neighbours are happy at the turn of events. Menem was interested only in the relations with the U.S. Mercosur, the regional trade bloc, weakened because of Menem's disinterest and in the wake of the shock devaluation of the Brazilian currency, the real. De la Rua is expected to breathe life into the embattled bloc. The leading Brazilian daily, *Folha de Sao Paulo*, said that Brazil would benefit from de la Rua's pragmatism because he was less inclined to look to the U.S. for political guidance. "He doesn't have Menem's fascination with the United States," it said. ■





(Left) *Flowers*, oil on paper, 38.7 x 46.3 cm, by Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958). (Above) *Head of a Savage*, ceramic sculpture, 25 x 19 cm approximately, by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903).

ART

The Vollard collection

The collection of French art dealer Ambroise Vollard, who helped democratise fine art and brought it to the masses in the early 20th century, is on show in India. However, the collection is neither insive nor com

SUNEET CHOPRA

WORKS from the collection of the noted French art dealer, Ambroise Vollard, were on show from October 1 to 31 at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in New Delhi. (The exhibition will now run in Mumbai from November 16 to December 15.) The works were largely gifted by his brother, Lucien, to the Leon Dierx museum in the Indian Ocean island of The Reunion in 1947, some eight years after the death of Ambroise in a car accident in 1939. They are neither a representative show of French art between 1880 and 1930, nor a true reflection of the eye of Vollard. For, like every dealer, some of the best works that came into his hands were sold to other collectors; for instance, Gauguin's *Woman With Fruit* and Cezanne's *Young Girl*, were sold for 8,000 francs and 22,000 francs respectively, to the art collector Morosoff in 1908. Vollard gifted others to museums in Paris – such as the well-known portraits by Cezanne and Renoir. Moreover, much of what remained with him was sold off by his brother immediately after his death. The museum in Reunion Island got only fragments of his collection.

Still, there is enough in these remains for us to reconstruct the passion of the times, based primarily on the enormous advance in the production of artists' colours. In fact, Cezanne (whose first one-man show Vollard organised when the artist was 56 years old) pointed out: "It is colours packed in tubes, so easy to carry, that enabled us to paint completely from life. Without these colours in tubes, there would have been no Cezanne, no Monet, no Sisley, no Pissarro. Nor in fact what the journalists would one day call Impressionism."

Indeed, it is the development of coloured pigments that is resplendent in so many of the works on show at the NGMA. And though there are only 22 paintings, one can see how the treatment of colour evolves from Gustave Caillebotte's landscape of the gate of his country retreat at Petit-Genneviliers in



Entrance to the Garden, oil on canvas, 90.8 x 70.8 cm, by Gustave Caillebotte (1848 - 1894).

1893, with his companion, Charlotte Berthier's figure as the subtle transition between the interior and exterior the canvas is divided into, accomplished by different tones of mauve, to a much more forthright use of colour in Louis Valtat's *Sea and Red Rocks* of around 1905, where he uses the bauxite rocks at Antheor along the Esteral Coast near his estate at Agay, to communicate a sense of upheaval. This was something that was in the air after the defeat of a major European power, Russia, by an Asiatic one, Japan, in 1904. It was an event that not only shook imperial Europe but also saw in 1905 the rehearsal for the dismantling of the Tsarist Empire and the birth of the Soviet Union just 12 years after. It was a vindication of the correctness of the first short-lived state of the working class, the Paris Commune, the importance of which was not lost on painters of that period in the French capital.

Valtat's landscape is not only an early example of Fauvism but also a warning of the crisis of the colonial system that Europe was facing at the time. One is inclined to think that the Japanese influence that permeates the work is not merely a stylistic choice. It reflects an understanding that the age of Eurocentric thinking was facing a serious challenge and had to be re-assessed. It definitely is a significant work as it is one of the two – the other being Maurice de Vlaminck's still life – that were actually gifted to the museum in 1911 by Ambroise himself

The still-life by Vlaminck, where powerful brush strokes highlight colour as an index of light bursting out upon one, something that is transformed in this work in a sequence that travels from bright red to the sharp white of the flowers in the vase, to diffuse areas of white in the blue behind it. One understands the relevance of this work in the light of Vlaminck's statement: "I wanted to set the Ecole des Beaux Arts on fire with my cobalts and vermilions, and with my brushes translate my emotions and feelings without giving thought to what had been painted before." With this, the break with the past is complete. The grandiose representational art of the Empire had been shown the door by the turn of the century by a more irreverent and experimental visual expression.

There is enough in the fragments of Vollard's collection to reconstruct the passion of the times, based primarily on the enormous advance in the production of artists' colours.

Everything that was previously rejected as wild and uncouth had come to the centre stage. Paul Gauguin's ceramic *Head of a Savage*, Picasso's *Mask* that was obviously influenced by African art, or Matisse's etching of a reclining Odalisque, all reflect a rejection of the colonial concept of a superior metropolis providing aesthetics for inspiration to the savages. Now the savages of yesterday



Spanish Women in Shawls, oil on canvas, 80 x 101.8 cm, by Francesco Iturrino (1864 - 1924).



The Frugal Meal, etching, 31.9 x 44 cm, by Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973).

had become the inspiration for the metropolitan artists in a revolt against the past. An enormous change was overtaking imperial Europe.

This change had another dimension which has been reflected in this exhibition. The emergence of a democratic art for popular consumption that was made possible by the advance in engraving techniques and printing.

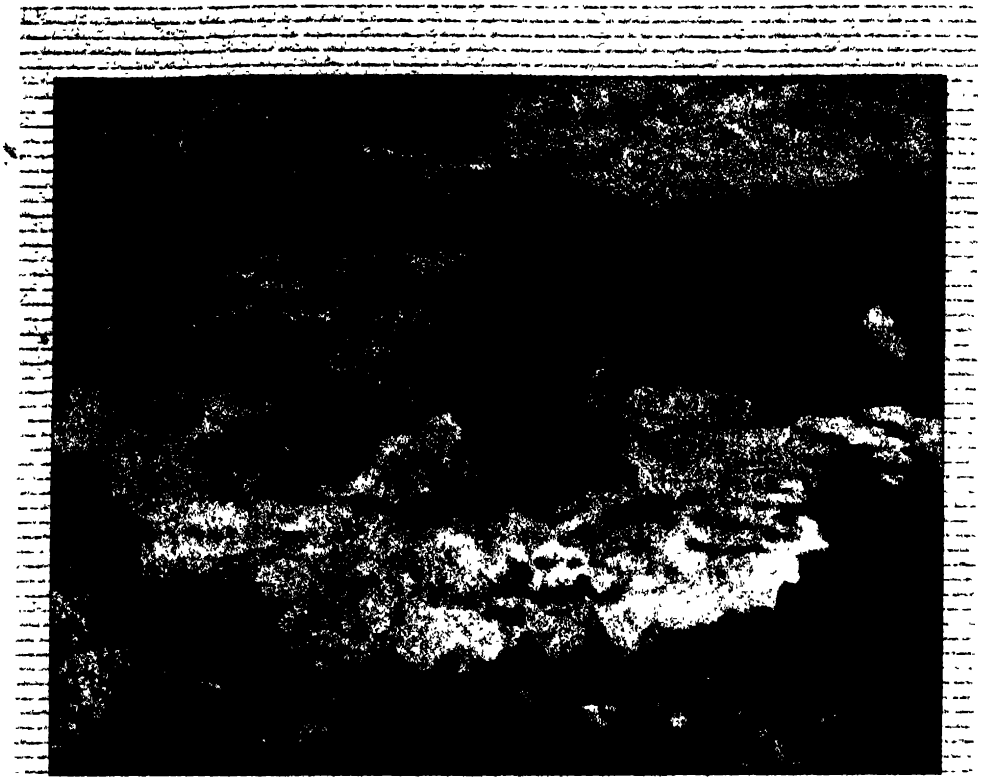
Indeed, prints were a life-long passion for Vollard, who admitted in his memoirs published in 1937: "I have always loved engravings. Almost as soon as I set up my base in the Rue Lafitte, in around 1895, my greatest wish was to publish them."

That he could get some of the finest artists of his age, like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Auguste Renoir, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Pierre Bonnard, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Rouault and Marc Chagall, to create works for editions of lithographs or for books, helped break down the elitist barriers between fine and applied art. He brought fine art to the masses at a cheap price. Vollard not only used new techniques like paper transfers onto lithographic stone to ensure that art of a high standard could faithfully be reproduced, but he freed art from the salons of the Parisian elite and democratised it in the cellar and the book-store.

It is unfortunate that his editions of prints have not survived in the collection as a whole; but fragments that have, like Pablo Picasso's *The Frugal Meal* of 1904, the second and most significant print made by the artist on a salvaged zinc plate, are more than able to hold their own even singly.

Indeed, this print is so outstanding that the art critic Andre Salmon recorded in his memoirs the moment Vollard saw one in his home: "What a sidelong look that whimsical Vollard gave the two heart-rending figures of a poor couple at their beggarly table!" He later acquired the print. It is in the Dierx Museum collection today.

THIS brings us to the third element that characterises the art



Sea and Red Rocks, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 66.2 cm, by Louis Valtat (1869 - 1952).



[illegible] oil on canvas, 98.3 x 81 cm, by [illegible]

of the twentieth century – its radical content. Not satisfied with breaking away from Eurocentric aesthetics and elitist imperial art with its theatricality and pompous posturing, the *avant-garde* artists dared to challenge the continuing existence of poverty and oppression despite the industrial progress.

Indeed, it is no surprise that Picasso's greatest work *Guernica*, a persevering indictment of fascism and the destruction it wreaked in the Spanish Civil War, was started on May Day. This collection has other such works like *The Poor Fisherman* of Puvis de Chavannes, which Vollard commissioned in 1897, or the *Jesus in Agony till the End of the World* of Georges Rouault. It is evident that what made Vollard a successful dealer was his perception of an art of the future that would turn its back on Eurocentrism, that would be available to a wider section of people and would be critical of a *status quo* that had committed more crimes against humanity than any other social system known to mankind.

It is not surprising that such a vision for the arts found ready takers in the *avant-garde* of the colonies. One can see how the smile on the faces of the Spanish women of Francesco Iturrino in the 1920s saw its reflection in the self-portraits of Amrita Sher-Gil a decade later, while the Christ of Rouault reminds one of a similar theme both in F.N. Souza and Jamini Roy. Matisse and Picasso also find an echo in many of our best contemporary artists like K.K. Hebbar, N.S. Bendre and M.F. Husain. The vision that encompassed a rejection of imperialism, a call for democratising culture and for social justice, was something universal right through the twentieth century. That is why we relate to the Vollard collection so readily despite the fact that we know it is neither comprehensive nor complete. ■

A rip-tootin' campaign

WILLIAM SAFIRE

"VICE-PRESIDENT Al Gore today continued his efforts to put a new face on his presidential campaign," wrote Katherine Q. (for Quimby) Seelye of *The New York Times* from Nashville, Tennessee, "... promising supporters a rip-tootin' candidacy." His actual words were "a rip-tootin' campaign that is going to win in the year 2000."

I was not the only student of language who noticed that odd locution. Michael Kelly, next editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, wrote in his column, "He has moved his campaign headquarters from, as he says, K Street to Main Street, the better to run what he, God help us, called 'a *rip-tootin'* race."

This term may have an Australian origin. In a review of Genevieve Lemon's one-woman show in Sydney, Pamela Payne of *The Sydney Sun-Herald* wrote in 1997, "This first one is *rip-tootin'* great."

More likely, Gore took the first part of *rip-roaring* or *rip-snorting* and married it to the last part of *rootin'-tootin'*. In linguistics, the linkage of the first part of a compound with the second part of another compound is called a *blend*.

Rootin'-tootin' was adopted by American slang from England's Lancashire dialect. Nodal and Milner's 1875 glossary of the local patois cites, "He's a *rootin' tootin'* sort of chap." George Bernard Shaw, in his 1907 play "Neolith," wrote, "The trumpet angel ... *root-a-tooted* at the sky." The meaning is "noisy, boisterous, lively"; the OED adds *rip-roaring*.

It strikes me as onomatopoeic, imitative of a trumpet sound, and was popularised in the United States by the 1924 song "*Roottin-toottin*-Lou From Kalamazoo." Since then, it has often been applied to cowboys: Russell Hayden was known in the 1930s and 1940s as the "*rootin', tootin'*, ridin' Romeo of the screen."

Rip, a verb meaning "tear," is rooted in the Flemish *rippen*, "to strip off roughly." In dialect, it is a combining form for expressions like *rip-stave, rip-snort* and the airheaded television presenter's *rip-'n'-read*.

When not meaning "tear," notes Joan Houston Hall of the Dictionary of American Regional English, "*rip* can mean 'to let out a wild yell or expletive' and in these combinations usually has to do with noise." It also means "to start noisily, frantically or suddenly," as in *let 'er rip*!

Rip-roaring's first citation was from *The Kentuckian in New York*, by William Caruthers, in 1834: "There was a *rip-roaring* sight of slight o' hand and tumbling work there." Two years later, the *Yale Literary Magazine* noted, "What a *rip-snorting* red head you have got!"

ANOTHER dialectical variant presents itself: This bids fair to be a *rootin'-roaring* campaign. And now to the metaphor used by George W. Bush to dissociate himself from what he sees as less compassionate conservatives.

When Republicans in the House suggested distributing an earned income tax credit to the "working poor" monthly rather than in a yearly lump, Bush said, "I don't think they ought to balance their budget *on the backs of the poor*."

This talk caused much anguish in conservative ranks, along with muttering about Clintonian centrist "triangulation," because the metaphor has a long Democratic history.

The Weekly Standard found a May 1977 use by Sen. George McGovern, charging that President Jimmy Carter was trying "to balance the budget *on the backs of the poor*, the hungry and the jobless." Soon after, Barney Frank, a disaffected liberal aide to Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis, denounced his former boss for "balancing the budget *on the backs of the poor*." A decade later, as the Democratic candidate for president, Dukakis threw the identical charge at Vice President George Bush.

The earliest use I can find about the poor's burdened back came from a far-left group led by Rep. Vito Marcantonio, the Committee to Defend America by Keeping Out of War. Until June 1941, its slogan was "Take the burden of war *off the backs of the poor*." (After Hitler invaded communist Russia, the rallying cry switched overnight to "For Victory Over Fascism.") Earlier uses, I imagine, will also spring from anti-capitalist sources, which is why it so set Republican teeth on edge. Adding insult to rhetorical injury, Al Gore called for another increase in the minimum wage, adjuring the Republican-controlled Congress to "stop paying off their special-interest friends *on the backs of the working poor*."

In his own speech, Bush had also said, "Too often, on social issues, my party has painted an image of America *slouching toward Gomorrah*." This phrase was an ironic play on a line in a 1921 poem by William Butler Yeats: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

The ironist was former Judge Robert Bork, who titled his 1996 book about America's moral decline *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*. (In the Bible, Gomorrah and its twin city, Sodom, were destroyed with fire and brimstone for their *rip-tootin'* iniquity. The escaping Lot's backward-looking wife is revered by arms-control advocates for being turned into a pillar of Salt II.)

Responding with rhetorical zest to this blast at his work from the Republican front-runner, Bork evoked the poorback metaphor in *The Wall Street Journal*, suggesting that Bush "gives the impression that the *backs of the poor* would be safe in his administration, but that he intends to reach the White House over the dead bodies of conservatives."

Politicians have to be careful about figures of speech; they can hurt themselves. The best admonition to those who would blithely practice rope-a-trope came from the 19th-century vituperator William Cobbett, who told a rival in political pamphleteering, "When I see you flourishing with a metaphor, I feel as much anxiety as I do when I see a child playing with a razor." ■

New York Times Service

A novel of memory

SUSAN RAM

The Blue Bedspread by Raj Kamal Jha; Picador, 1999; hardback; pages 228, price not stated.

IN the years since *Midnight's Children* hit the publishing and reading world with explosive force, contemporary Indian writing in English has commanded a degree of attention and acclaim unimagined in earlier times of marginality and struggle. Much of this has been deserved. Young Indian writers have demonstrated linguistic flourish, inventiveness and imaginative power; they have contrived plots that twist and tease and surprise. Many have been able to render subcontinental experience accessible to readers foreign to its complexity. With their old-school groundings in the English language, they have proved deft in subverting its grammatical conventions and niceties. And with limitless material before them, they have contrived to push contemporary British fiction into a penumbra of provinciality and small concerns.

But this swift ascendancy is not all substance. Behind at least some of the hyperbole enveloping the new fiction from South Asia can be seen to lurk hardheaded business calculations. As literary publishing, once associated with a strong measure of editorial independence, becomes subsumed within vast corporate media empires, publishing decisions are increasingly governed by extra-literary criteria. Sales graphs loom larger, novelty is at a premium, and the search intensifies for the intriguing and the exotic. While not every aspiring young Indian writer may make it into the big time, one senses, among profit line-conscious publishing executives, an avidity for subcontinental wares that has an unhealthy edge. Indian fiction, it seems, is one of several bankable publishing flavours of the moment.

The Blue Bedspread, Raj Kamal Jha's first novel, exemplifies this ambiguity. In literary terms, there is much to commend it: the writing is in the main controlled, there are passages of great descriptive power, and the prose is permeated by a poetic sensitivity to language. It is also daring in its choice of theme: incest within the confines of Indian middle class respectability. But, somehow, it all fails to add up. The plot is thin, the characters receive so impressionistic a treatment that one cannot identify with them, and the journalist in Jha keeps surfacing, to the detriment of the fledgling writer of fiction. So deep and persistent are the problems evident in this book that one cannot help questioning the wisdom of the decision, by a major publishing house, to make it available to an international readership.

THE setting is Calcutta, the city of Jha's birth and growing up and the backdrop for an earlier phase of his career as a journalist (he now works in New Delhi as an editor with *The Indian Express*). In the West, Calcutta conjures up images of peculiar intensity: limitless squalor, shrouded bodies amid urban decay, a culture of indifference offset by the foil of Mother Teresa's ministering angels. Jha's Calcutta, however, is less an embodiment of poverty and deprivation than a place of sadness, shadowed by the past and haunted by secrets that dare not speak their name.

It is night, and in a house on a Calcutta street a middle-aged man sits at his typewriter. In the next room, a newborn baby lies asleep. It is soon established that these are uncle and niece, and that what has brought them together is tragedy: the man's sister has just died in childbirth. The next morning the baby is to be handed over for adoption; hence the urgency for the uncle to set down for his niece the stories he believes she will need when, far in the future, she goes in search of her own identity. Typing through the night, the nameless man unravels the past, knot by twisted knot. By daybreak, and the book's end, much stands revealed: areas of intimacy and pain; forbidden acts; quirks of fate; odd moments of happiness. And the most awesome secret of all.



This is quintessentially a novel of memory. For such a novel to work, certain ingredients need to be present. To begin with, it helps the reader to know whose memories are being summoned. Secondly, the memories need to be related, however tenuously, to the story that is being told. Thirdly, they should sustain a rising tension or atmosphere of suspense that carries the reader through momentary bafflement, compelling him or her to read on to the book's denouement.

Unfortunately, Jha makes compromises in each category. While most of the memories can be sourced, with some confidence, to the book's nameless protagonist, enabling a certain firmness of structure to take shape, the writer cannot stop himself letting the dead sister contribute her own soundings from the past. The results seem out of step with the body of the book, undermining its status as a soliloquy.

Memories, by definition, are random and ungoverned by considerations of linear time. That said, a novelist who places them at the centre of a narrative needs to arrange, select and prioritise, screening out passages that may represent self-indulgent use of collected material rather than a sensitive addition to character or plot. In Jha's case, one senses that the screening process has been nowhere rigorous enough. At one point, for example, the reader is led deep into the airconditioned ease of the American Centre Library in Calcutta. In descriptive terms, there is much to commend this passage. The vantage point is that of Calcutta's educated middle class, for whom the glossy building, with its facilities and textual references to totems of Western affluence, is a refuge from the hassle, the heat, the daily round of battles that is life in a modern Third World megapolis. There is surely a salutary message here for Western readers. But one fails to see how this piece of reportage relates to or enhances Jha's story. Nor does the author succeed

in using memory as means of tautening the plot or building tension. Given the book's title, one might have supposed that the blue bedspread – supposedly symbolic of childhood sanctuary from trauma, and also of activities beyond the pale of civilisational convention – would have been worked into the book as a recurring motif. In fact, the references to it are so sporadic and thin on the ground that it hovers as a device carrying little emotional or dramatic force.

All this disappoints because, in other respects, Jha reveals literary flair. He has an eye for the incongruities of human experience. how, for example, at moments of crisis our eye invariably fastens on some or other trivial or inconsequential detail. When told of his sister's death, the novel's protagonist looks out of the police station window to the passing trams and notes, with clinical accuracy, their cargo of black-and-yellow posters telling of a circus in the city: "Each poster has the same woman," notes the bereaved man, "a small woman in a tight-fitting shining dress balancing herself on a rhino's back. And a tiger smiling, its face ringed with fire."

At times Jha's prose takes on a rhythmic, musical quality that carries it to the borders of poetry. "When the city becomes a desert, hot and lonely," he writes, "when wherever you look, it all looks the same and the wind blows sand into your eyes, this building is an oasis. When the city becomes an ocean, wet and heavy, when the crowds are waves hammering your body, pulling you down, this building is an island." One can readily visualise this passage set as verse vertically down the page, calling to be read aloud.

There is also some pleasing imagery. At one point, Jha casts Calcutta as a solace to the lonely, an avuncular presence that seeks listeners to its stories, admirers of its faded and decaying grandeur. Such ideas gently subvert the received wisdom, still active in the West, regarding Calcutta and its putative 'black hole' character.

But all this does not a novel make. For all the colour, the musicality of the prose, the sincerity of the writer's efforts to explore forbidden zones of human experience, this is not a book to leave you moved. The muted aquatint tones achieved in the best of the writing suggest directions Jha might take as a creative writer: poetry might be one of them, the miniature canvas of short-story writing another. One hopes he explores such avenues before venturing into a second novel. ■

■ BOOKS

Modernity writ large

K.N. PANIKKAR

The Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories by Paul Zacharia; Penguin, 1999; pages 218, Rs.200.

THE short stories of Paul Zacharia, firmly embedded in the ethos of modernity in Kerala, are of an exceptional order. As the author has said in the preface to this collection – his second in English – they reflect the creative sensibility engendered by modernity in Malayalam literature.

Both in content and form the 22 stories collected in this volume, written over the last 30 years, comprehend the modern in a very striking fashion. Even among the modernists, Zacharia stands apart; in craft, in ideas and in commitment. Modernity for him is not merely a way of interrogating the reality, but an article of faith. This is stated unambiguously: "To me modernity is a password. It is the last straw – not the one that breaks the camel's back but the one a drowning nation clutches at. Instead, we are being offered, piously, the golden past."

The articulation of modernity in developing countries is often attributed to the influence of the West: a superimposition and replication of borrowed ideas. Many therefore hold that modernity in literature has an unreal ring about it. Such a view does not take adequate cognizance of the internal changes in society. For instance, modernity in Malayalam literature has its roots in the social transformation and ideological influences that besieged the Malayali mind in the twentieth century. How the creative minds in Kerala negotiated the impact of these changes is yet to be seriously addressed, considering the complexity of this intellectual process. The universe of Zacharia's short stories is this changing social and ideological world and the ambiguities, anxieties and uncertainties generated by it in individual life and social relations. While mapping the contours and contradictions of this universe with remarkable restraint on the use words, Zacharia assumes the role of both a narrator and a critic.



Malayalam literature has a healthy tradition in the art of story telling, going back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Short stories became a major and popular genre with the arrival of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer, P. Keshava Dev and S.K. Pottekkad in the second quarter of the century. M.T. Vasudevan Nair, T. Padmanabhan and Madhavikutty (Kamala Das) anticipated the modern, more in content than in form. They largely remained within the parameters of a 'conventional' narrative mode, comprehending within it a story or an event. Their ability to portray intense human emotions was remarkable, which produced some of the most powerful and moving stories ever penned in Malayalam literature. Yet they did so without substantially altering the form in vogue, although they reformed and refined it.

Zacharia's stories, like those of other practitioners of modernity – O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, M.P. Narayana Pillai, to mention a few – brought about a qualitative change in the art of the short story, in its form and meaning.

Zacharia appears to be constantly experimenting with the structure of his narrative. By doing so he has developed a mode in which the multiple meanings of the story are continually constructed and reconstructed within the structure of the narrative. In fact, Zacharia hardly tells a story, he only engages the reader to construct a story and its social meaning from what he has privileged as the significant moment.

Zacharia wrote several of his short stories while living outside Kerala. (Was it accidental that most of the progenitors of modernity in Malayalam

wrote in 'exile'?) Yet, Zacharia's preferred domain is the life in Kerala, that too of Christians, which he knows more intimately than of others. But he is not a *Christian* writer, as a contemporary recently described him. Through the experience of Christians he tries to arrive at the general and the universal. "Till You See the Looking Glass" and "A Day's Work" are good examples. The latter is a remarkable story, both in meaning and form. It is written in the form of a letter to a nurse about an old woman whose children are all living in different parts of the world.

The universe of Zacharia's short stories is the changing social and ideological world and the ambiguities, anxieties and uncertainties generated by it in individual life and social relations.

The family is extremely rich, possessing all modern amenities – cars, air-conditioners, digital cinema and the rest for the use of a woman who is almost in a state of coma. The children, despite their affluence, or because of that, are not able to spare any time to look after the mother. The account of the daily routine of the old woman that the nurse was required to maintain becomes a metaphor for the pathos and tragedy of the nature of modernity Kerala has embraced. The interface with tradition and modernity and the ambiguity and anxiety it has generated in society inform several other stories.

Zacharia is provocatively critical to the point of being irreverent. The disapproval arising therefrom is sharp and unmistakable, but couched in a style that is persuasive and convincing. "Some Mechanical Inventions for the Benefit of Mankind" is a delightful story, which is a commentary on what man has made out of technological progress. Some of the inventions achieved are the avenging lightning conductor, the lover's moonlighter machine, the bird-bashing machine, the machine to locate the truth in newspapers, the machine to identify revolutionaries in a crowd, etc. The moonlighter machine is intended, for instance, to create moonlight for the romantic bliss of lovers and the bird-bashing machine is to prevent bird droppings on the statues of political leaders!

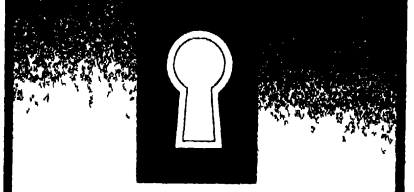
The ultimate among the inventions is the atom bomb, which has its uses as the advocates of deterrence would have us believe. "It is true that our side won the war by dropping the atom bomb, but it is also true that if it is dropped somewhere close to us the next time, in one moment, we will all become shadows on the scorched earth without even the time to die properly; mere apparition in burned silhouettes on the bathroom wall or on the court-building, etc. – that is if the walls are still standing. But how can we teach our enemies a lesson without the atom bomb? Do you honestly think that our enemies will listen to us if we don't drop our bomb over the street where their children play, over the hospitals where their sick lie, over the rooms where their lovers embrace? After all what are we if we don't love our country?"

Anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiments are also part of "My Military Memoirs" and "The Brick and the Mason". The former exposes the absurdity of war through the experience of person eager to participate in the war against the Chinese. He however, finds himself cheated of action, as the war gets over before he reaches the front. In the latter, the protagonist Babu, a petty criminal lodged in jail, is served a ladleful of *payasam* on May 12, 1998 to celebrate the happy day on which three atomic bombs were exploded. The superintendent of the jail announces "a meeting of all inmates in the evening... and readings from various scriptures" to express "gratitude to the nation". On hearing the announcement, Babu withdraws the hand that he had extended to receive the *payasam*. "The Brick and the Mason" and "Till You See the Looking Glass" are perhaps two outstanding stories in the collection.

To the outside world Indian literature is represented by what is written in English. Recently an anthology of Indian writings edited by Salman Rushdie has sought to legitimise and popularise this bias. In the present global ideological and cultural climate, it is not easy to correct or overcome this tendency. More and more translations from Indian languages, in which the literary creativity of our society is best expressed, are perhaps a remedy.

The publication of the short stories of Zacharia, an outstanding practitioner of this genre of literature, is therefore welcome. ■

An inside look at the world outside



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The real story. Every time

Pakistan's tragedy

A.G. NOORANI

Pakistan: A Modern History by Ian Talbot; Oxford University Press; pages 432, Rs.625.
The Pakistani Voter: Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour in the Punjab by Andrew R. Wilder; Oxford; pages 341, Rs.495.
Chief Justice Cornelius of Pakistan: An Analysis with Letters and Speeches by Ralph Braibanti; Oxford; pages 389, Rs.575.
A Journey to Disillusionment by Sherbaz Khan Mazari; Oxford; pages 646, Rs.795.
Pakistan – A Dream Gone Sour by Roedad Khan; Oxford; pages 263, price not stated.

THESE books help a lot to expose the latent forces beneath democratic government in Pakistan which asserted themselves on October 12 to subvert it. Ian Talbot is an academic who has written extensively on the history of Pakistan. His book is a dependable textbook, except for a few astonishing errors. Prime Minister I.I. Chundrigar was a Bombay lawyer, not a "businessman". The 1956 Constitution did embody "the Westminster model". The President's powers were defined in language identical to that used in the Indian Constitution. His resume ends at the nuclear tests of 1998. The biographical notes and copious footnotes make it a good work for reference. It does not end on a note of optimism.

The titles of the memoirs of Roedad Khan, a powerful bureaucrat who served successive regimes, and of Sherbaz Khan Mazari, one of the most upright politicians in the subcontinent, sum up their despair. Mazari, sirdar of one of the leading tribes of Baluchistan, ended his political career in 1988, predictably, in electoral defeat. He has won the respect of all who knew him for his uncompromising integrity, wide reading and affable dignity. His is one of the finest private libraries in our region.

Why has Pakistan come to such a [illegible]? The reason is that it inherited a [illegible]gal tradition" and its founding fathers did not give democracy a chance to flourish. As Governor-General, Mohammed Ali Jinnah presided over Cabinet meetings and even kept some portfolios to himself, flouting the basics of parliamentary democracy. He intrigued against his own Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, and got the Cabinet to resolve, on December 30, 1947, "that no question of policy or principle would be decided except at a Cabinet meeting presided over by the Quaid-i-Azam and that in the event of any difference of opinion between him and the Cabinet, the decision of the Quaid would be final and binding". An entry in his notebook, dated November 30, recorded: "Kashmir – no commitment – should be made – without *my approval of terms* of settlement. Mr. Liaquat has agreed and promised to abide by this understanding" (emphasis as in the original) (Hasan Zabeer, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951*; Oxford; pages 120-121).

Jinnah did not stop at that. In an address to the officers of the Staff College, Quetta, on June 14, 1948, he said that "the executive authority flows from the Head of the Government of Pakistan, who is the Governor-General and, therefore, any command or orders that may come to you cannot come without the sanction of the Executive Head".

This, he knew, was sheer nonsense. He was the constitutional head of state. The head of government, the chief executive, in a parliamentary system is the Prime Minister. He apparently believed in a one-party state. But Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan also said, in October 1950, that "the formation of new political parties in opposition to the Muslim League is against the interest of Pakistan".

During its agitation for Pakistan, the League had built up a culture of intolerance of dissent. "These attitudes were carried over into the independence era," Talbot notes. The Communist movement was crippled in the wake of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. The radical tradition in the League, represented by Mian Iftikharuddin in Punjab and Abul Hashim in East Pakistan, was crushed. "Four important inheritances from the freedom struggle can be identified as exercising a profound inheritance on post-colonial developments." Talbot lists them as "poor institutionalisation of the Muslim League"; the clash between regional and Pakistani identities; "the low level of political culture in the Muslim majority areas"; and the vagueness about "the nature of a future Pakistan state".

The services of the army and the bureaucracy were enlisted in the naked struggle for power between the League's factions. They too were very willing to help in order to acquire control of the levers of power through politicians. As Ayesha Jalal demonstrated in her fine work *The State of Martial Rule*, the army stepped in not because democracy had failed in Pakistan. The army and the bureaucracy had begun undermining democracy with the active help of the very people who were supposed to run democratic government – the politicians.

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Prime Minister U Nu of Burma (now Myanmar) on November 11, 1953, apropos U.S. military aid to Pakistan: "As its army develops, the military mentality will spread. As it is, the Pakistan army is a domineering influence there. The army officers have considerable contempt for the civil government and it is a possibility for military coups (sic in plural) to take place."

Remarkably insightful. But the very Volume 24 of *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (second series; page 421) which contains this also exposes how insincere he was in his accord of August 21, 1953 on a plebiscite in Kashmir. Rajiv Gandhi ratted on the Siachen agreement with the elected Government of Benazir Bhutto in June 1989. I.K. Gujral did likewise with Nawaz Sharif in May-July 1997. India's hardline policy impaired civilian governments and strengthened the army. The A.B. Vajpayee regime's intransigence in the talks in November 1998 led to the Kargil venture of Pervez Musharraf, the Chief of the Army Staff in Pakistan. Ayesha Jalal has established the fact of British and U.S. support in advance to those who carried out a coup in 1958. Not once has military rule succeeded in tackling the country's problems. Each military dictator – Ayub Khan (1958-

69), Yahya Khan (1969-71), and Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) – left the country in a worse shape than he found it, his family enormously enriched, bar possibly Yahya.

Samuel P. Huntington's seminal work *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) was extravagant in its praise of Ayub Khan. "More than any other political leader in a modernising country after World War II, Ayub came close to fulfilling the role of a Solon or Lycurgus, or "great Legislator" on the Platonic or Rousseauian model." Ayub Khan quit in disgrace in 1969.

Gen. Pervez Musharraf is mistaken if he imagines that the people of Pakistan do not love liberty. Its journalists fought Zia-ul-Haq's regime far more courageously than did many Indian journalists during Indira Gandhi's dictatorship.

Z.A. Bhutto was uniquely qualified to stamp out Bonapartism when he assumed power in December 1971. The Army had been disgraced in the Bangladesh war. Yahya Khan had failed miserably on the home front. But Bhutto's corruption and authoritarianism, which climaxed in the rigging of the March 1977 elections, led to a virtual revolt. Having failed to build up his Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as an institution with a life of its own, Bhutto sought the army's support. The army exacted its price and established martial law in July.

Not a few in the Opposition – *particularly* the darling of the Indian establishment, Wali Khan – collaborated with Zia and encouraged him to destroy Bhutto politically before he could fulfil his promise to hold elections. Leading lawyers and a good many journalists backed Zia. One reason why he struck so ruthlessly was Bhutto's attempt to politicise the corps commanders and divide the army. It was the army that tried to rig the 1988 elections in a desperate bid to rob Benazir Bhutto of victory, and rigged the polls again in 1990 to prevent her return to power. The beneficiary was Zia's creation, Nawaz Sharif.

Ian Talbot notes: "Election-rigging, like selective accountability, is a tradition deeply rooted in Pakistan's history." The distinguished scholar Mohammed Waseem wrote in an excellent study of the 1993 elections: "Rigging is now a part of the electoral contest in terms of the rival candidates' ability to cast bogus votes and get away with it." There was no concept of power-sharing. As during the Raj, the state ruled through feudal intermediaries, especially in west Punjab. Talbot's remarks on the 1997 crisis, which resulted in the departure of both President Farooq Leghari and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah is very perceptive: "The army, far from being excluded from national life by the now unchallenged political leadership of Nawaz Sharif, became closely involved in what might be considered routine civilian administrative tasks. The official explanation for this was to encourage a people-friendly army, but in reality it was a response to the serious institutional decay which, throughout Pakistan's history, had undermined democratic stability. The corruption and politicisation of the administrative services by successive governments had accelerated this process."

Gen. Pervez Musharraf is gravely mistaken if he imagines that the people of Pakistan do not love liberty. Its journalists fought Zia's regime far more courageously than did many Indian journalists during Indira Gandhi's dictatorship. In 1983 the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) shook Zia:

"Massive repression was required to crush the MRD agitations in the Sukkur, Larkana, Jacobabad and Khairpur districts. The Sindh Governor was forced to admit that in the opening three weeks of the struggle, 1,999 people had been arrested, 189 killed and 126 injured.

"Resistance took literary and cultural forms. Writers and poets like Rehmatullah Manjothi, Naseer Mirza, Tariq Alam and Adal Soomro challenged Zia's ideological state. Atiya Dawood opposed the oppression of women in her writings... Unlike the mass movement against Ayub in 1968-69 or against Bhutto in 1977, the 1983 agitation in Sindh was not just an affair of the urban middle class and workers. The rural population of such districts as Thatta, Dadu, Larkana, and Sanghar were heavily involved. Leadership was provided by the PPP and the 'peasant'-based Sindhi Awam Tehrik of Rasul Bux Palejo. The rural insurrection was only finally quelled following the deployment of three army divisions backed up with helicopter gunships."

ANDREW WILDER was born in Pakistan and lived, studied and worked there for more than 25 years. His study of electoral politics in the Punjab until the 1977 polls challenges the conventional wisdom that voting decisions are determined by social factors. He holds that "political rather than social factors are increasingly determining" voters' decisions. Policies matter. It is a very instructive work.

Pakistan's judiciary has been supine, but it has produced some outstandingly fearless judges such as Dorab Patel, Rustom S. Sidhwa, M.R. Kayani and A.R. Cornelius, who rose to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. His classic solitary dissent in 1955, when the majority led by Chief Justice M. Munir upheld the Governor-General's dissolution of the Constituent Assembly on October 24, 1954, merited reproduction in full. Braibanti's detailed "analysis" could have been much briefer without any loss to the reader who would have preferred more of Cornelius and much less of Braibanti.

Mazari rightly calls Munir "a blight on our legal system... If a man ever rightly deserved to be tried for contempt of court (for his blatant disrespect for the independence of the judicial system) it was former Chief Justice Munir." During the interregnum between President Iskandar Mirza's abrogation of the Constitution on October 7, 1958 and Ayub's ouster of Mirza three weeks later, the Chief Justice participated in a meeting at which "Prime Minister" Ayub Khan asked him "as to how he should go about getting a new Constitution approved by the people." Munir's reply – publish the draft and get it adopted at a public meeting – aroused derisive laughter. The Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force, Mohammed Asghar Khan, who was present, recorded in his memoirs, *Generals in Politics*, that "Ayub Khan laughed the loudest". Asghar Khan aptly remarked: "No wonder that Pakistan has found it difficult to shake off martial law ever since" (page 7).

Munir legitimised Ayub Khan's martial law after he had counselled thus. The Supreme Court legitimised Zia's coup as well. It is likely to repeat the performance now. Judges were not the only culprits. A.K. Brohi, a favourite of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the International Commission of Jurists, consistently lent his services to military dictators – Ayub, Yahya and Zia. So did

the lawyer Syed Sharfuddin Pirzada, now a member of the Pervez Musharraf regime.

Mazari remarks: "Both these legal peddlers (Brohi and Pirzada) made their 'high' reputations on advising the establishment on how to legally avoid their constitutional and lawful responsibilities. Most of our draconian amendments to the Constitution in recent times bear the finger-prints of one or both of them." In 1981, Zia made a Provisional Constitutional Order. "The prime movers behind this unprincipled and unparalleled piece of jiggery-pokery were none other than Messrs. A.K. Brohi and Sharfuddin Pirzada. These two men were later scathingly described by Gen. Chishti (a participant in Zia's coup) to be among Zia's most prominent 'sycophants'." Musharraf has followed suit with his PCO, on October 15, 1999, drafted presumably by Pirzada. Mazari's book is more than a memoir. It is well researched and has precise footnotes which make it invaluable for reference.

His disclosures on Wali Khan's lack of scruples should surprise none who followed his politics. He virtually prodded Zia to kill Bhutto.

A DEMOCRACY can be sustained only by a leadership – in all walks of life, but particularly among lawyers, journalists and intellectuals – which is committed to democratic values. It helps awaken the masses and mobilise their support for democratic governance. There are brave voices in Pakistan which have spoken up at this dark hour; I.A. Rehman, for instance. Pakistan's democracy came to grief because there were not many of his kind. Zamir Ansari's classic *Press in Chains* chronicles both the betrayal by many and the brave resistance by some. Politicians were the worst of the lot. Bhutto won power with the help of the army in 1971; Benazir, after an understanding with it in 1988; Nawaz Sharif in 1990, Benazir in 1993, and Sharif, again, in 1997, all owed power to the army's support.

Each dictator looted the state and left behind sons who bask in that ill-gotten wealth. Ayub's son, Gohar, was a captain in the army. He became a major business magnate when the General Motors car assembly plant was converted to Gandhara Motors, owned jointly by Gohar and his father-in-law, *General* Habibullah Khan Khattak.

Mazari records: "His other holdings included an investment company and a canning venture. The retired Army captain's wealth was estimated by foreign specialist, Dr. Franz Pick, a few years later, to be in the vicinity of U.S. $4 million. Dr. Pick also estimated the total wealth of Ayub Khan and his family to be in the range of U.S. $10 to $20 million. For a man who had, only a few years earlier, forced his way to power at gunpoint with the self-professed aim of eradicating the corrupt 'sharks and leeches', this was a savage indictment."

Mazari cites in support Franz Pick's *World Currency Report*, April 1969. He also records:

"Taking shelter behind his regular protestations of Islamic piety, Zia and his close companion General Abdur Akhtar Rehman managed to accumulate the most ill-gained wealth of all. The damning evidence of their corruption was revealed by none other than Akhtar Abdur Rehman's son, Humayun Akhtar. Shaheen Sehbai, then the Islamabad correspondent of *Dawn*, writing about General Akhtar Abdur Rehman, related a revealing incident. 'The riches remind me of a story told by (Humayun Akhtar Abdur Rehman) to me and other journalist friend in the early hours of one fine morning in the five star luxury hotel of Islamabad. All three of us were in good spirits and the General's son was speaking mostly against another son of a General, his one time friend but now deplored foe, Ejaz-ul-Haq.

"'What does he boast about? He thinks he has a lot of money. I have made him a politician. I called him from the Gulf to play politics. He knew nothing and had nothing. What if now he has 250 million dollars. Is that all? Look at me, God has given us everything. Everything I say, Ejaz just has peanuts', he said thumping his chest with a straight hand.

"When we had left the hotel, we were wonder-struck at the audacity of the claim, but the revelation that Ejaz-ul-Haq was such a rich man had been drowned with the thought of how big the booty would be that he described as 'everything'."

Sehbai repeated the story in his columns *on two occasions*. The references are *Dawn*, June 11 and October 16, 1993. This very Ejaz-ul-Haq, a Minister in Sharif's Cabinet, lost no time in making overtures to Musharraf. Zia "was said upon his death to have left a sum of $250 million behind for his family." Akhtar Abdur Rehman was more generous.

Roedad Khan's memoirs reproduce full texts of documents of Reference to the Accountability authorities against Benazir. She learnt the ropes from her father. "A U.S. investigation of PIA's purchase of DC 10 aircraft stated that 'prosecutors uncovered evidence that senior executives (of McDonnell Douglas Corporation) had paid bribes to a relative of former Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The bribes amounted to (U.S.) $500,000 for each aircraft purchased by Pakistan's national airline.' Persistent rumours over the years also maintain that Bhutto pocketed a large portion of the millions of dollars that Libya donated as earthquake relief funds for victims in the Northern Areas in the early 1970s. Undeniably, after Bhutto's execution, his family could neither have maintained their lifestyle nor their various residences in London, Avignon, Cannes and Damascus, Karachi and Larkana simply from the income derived from their small farm landholdings in Sindh." Trust Mazari to provide the supporting evidence – *Friends in High Places: The Rise and Fall of Clark Clifford* by Douglas Franz and David McKean (1995). One columnist who has maintained ceaseless vigil and written documented exposes fearlessly and impartially is Ardheshir Cowasjee, a weekly columnist with *Dawn*.

What of Mian Mohammed Nawaz Sharif? Listen to Mazari:

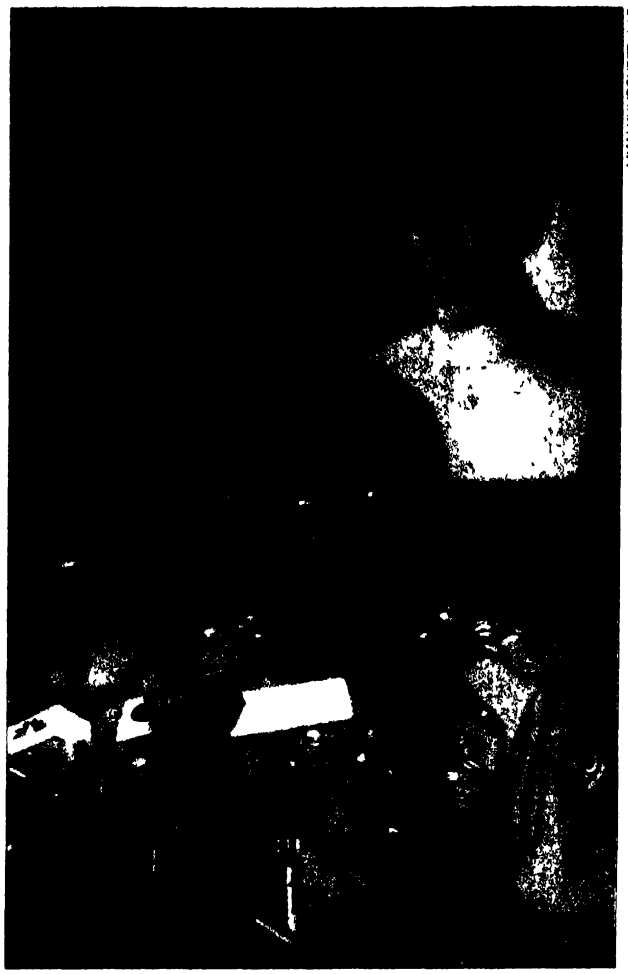
"Coming from a minor business family in Lahore, he had entered political affairs in 1982 when he was appointed a provincial minister by the martial law regime. Favoured by General Jilani, then Governor of Punjab, Nawaz Sharif rose to become the province's Chief Minister. Starting with only a seventh-share in a family-owned steel foundry, the Sharif family's business fortunes prospered at an electrifying speed and it soon became one of the wealthiest in the country. As *Dawn*'s weekly columnist Ardeshir Cowasjee commented: '... in the first place the Sharif family would not have been able to borrow even five per cent of what they did borrow had Nawaz Sharif not been firstly finance minister of Punjab, then its chief minister, and finally prime minister of the country, in all of which positions he misused his powers to borrow what was borrowed, to amass what was earned, and to issue SROs (government regulatory orders) for the particular benefit of his family's businesses.' General Zia's long period of rule began a binge of crony capitalism that would eventually lead to the creation of vast sums of newly created wealth among a

handful of families. It helped destroy Pakistan's banking system and later its economy.

"Unlike Benazir, Nawaz Sharif had little chance to acquire an understanding of the nature of democracy. At a relatively youthful age he had obtained power as a provincial minister and grew accustomed to using it. *While Benazir knowingly flouted virtually every precept of democracy, Nawaz Sharif knew little about them.*"

Pervez Musharraf would do well to recall the account of the events of those days by Roedad Khan, Secretary in the Ministry of Interior during the Zia regime. His memoirs record in authoritative detail the army's role in toppling Benazir on August 6, 1990 (page 109) and Nawaz Sharif on April 18, 1993 (page 123). Restored to office by the Supreme Court, he was forced to resign – by the army (page 132). Formally the action was taken by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in 1990 and 1993.

It is the 9 Corps Commanders who rule Pakistan. Zia saw to it that the collegium became his instrument. How Pervez Musharraf tackles them remains to be seen.



MIAN KHURSHEED / AP

General Pervez Musharraf addressing a press conference in Islamabad on November 1, with a portrait of Mohammed Ali Jinnah for backdrop.

Roedad Khan rose to become "Minister for Accountability" on August 11, 1997. His comments on the judiciary as also on the farce of accountability are scornful.

"So what lessons might be learnt from this experiment in accountability? First and foremost, that people have lost faith in the objectivity and impartiality of the two most important pillars of the state, the Presidency and the judiciary, the two watchdogs charged under the Constitution with the responsibility of keeping a strict watch on the excesses and arbitrariness of the executive and the conduct of the holders of public office. Secondly, accountability has been reduced to a farce. In the name of accountability, successive governments have hounded, harassed, and persecuted their political opponents with the connivance of a corrupt administration. On the other hand, acts of gross misconduct, abuse of office, betrayal of trust, rampant corruption, and violation of oath of office by holders of public office go unpunished. Nobody in this country, neither the Government, nor the opposition, nor the judiciary, is interested in accountability as it is understood in the West.

"*Thirdly, no matter how honest, upright and well-intentioned you may be, your chances of bringing the guilty – be they holders of public office or civil servants – to justice under the existing judicial system and in the prevailing political environment are almost nil. It is, therefore, an exercise in futility and a total waste of time, energy and public funds.*

"Fourthly, people have lost faith in the holders of public office and the institution of Parliament which no longer represents the general will or the hopes and aspirations of the people, and nobody sheds any tears when the Assembly is dissolved."

His resume ends with Sharif's return to power in February 1997. But, he wrote of the caretaker government: "The new government has publicly stated that it has not been able to gather enough evidence to act against top politicians, including Ms. Bhutto, her husband Asif Zardari, and the former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. I find this difficult to believe. Either they were not trying hard enough or, what is more likely, a political decision had been taken not to proceed against the mainstream political leaders. Be that as it may, the admission of Prime Minister Malik Meraj Khalid appears to mean that known corrupt people are being foisted upon our poor illiterate electorate and the general elections scheduled for February 3, 1997 will once again be a contest between two sets of corrupt politicians, representing Ms. Bhutto's People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League led by Nawaz Sharif. Many Pakistanis were hoping that both Ms. Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif and a large number of their corrupt partymen would be disqualified on grounds of corruption from participating in the elections."

One wonders whether the 'Chief Executive' of Pakistan will do any better. The Army is no custodian of democratic values or norms of rectitude. Not a few Corps Commanders in the past enriched themselves in the manner of politicians, especially by land-grabbing.

Pervez Musharraf is in a difficult situation. He cannot impose press censorship for fear of inviting world censure. The press will report public disquiet as it increases. If he prosecutes some, charges of harassment will be made. If he holds elections, the two best organised parties will contest – Benazir's and Sharif's. He cannot prevent that unless he destroys them politically and incurs the odium – unless, of course, his accountability process truly works fairly and impartially.

It is unlikely he will restore the 1973 Constitution without ensuring a constitutional role for the army – and thus warping democratic government.

Tailpiece: In land grabbing by Corps commanders, the corner plot was valued most. The story goes that one of the more enterprising Corps Commanders, while on a visit to New Delhi, was taken on the customary pilgrimage to Jinnah's magnificent bungalow at 10, Aurangzeb Road, where many an historic decision was taken. There, standing at the junction of Janpath and Aurangzeb Road, he burst out: "See! Even Quaid-i-Azam liked corner plots." ■

A quantum leap in remote-sensing

The advent of IKONOS, a remote-sensing U.S. satellite that can take one-metre resolution images, could affect India's supremacy in the commercial imaging data market.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

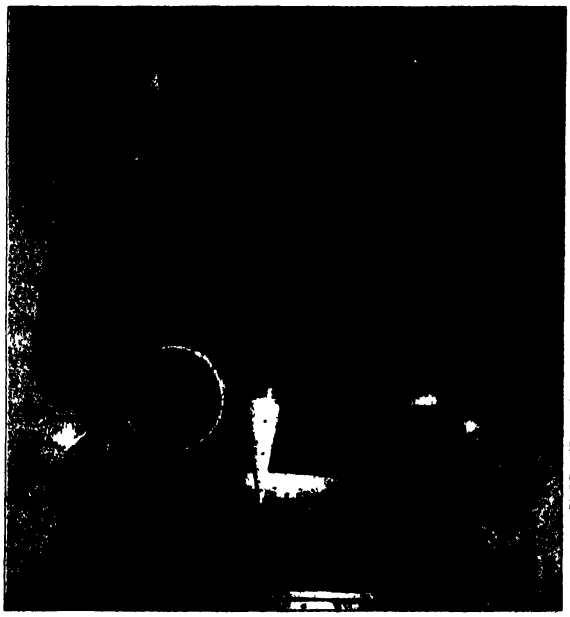
THE supremacy enjoyed by the high-resolution imagery of the Indian Remote Sensing satellites IRS-1C and IRS-1D in the world market in civilian earth observation data ended on October 12 when the first images from IKONOS, a remote-sensing satellite launched by the United States company Space Imaging, made their appearance. As compared to the 5.8-metre resolution of IRS (panchromatic or black and white) images, IKONOS (panchromatic) images have a resolution of one metre, a capability hitherto restricted to military reconnaissance satellites. Similarly, in the multispectral (or coloured, including near infra-red) images too, IKONOS' resolution capability of 4 m greatly surpasses the IRS' 23 m.

In commercial or business terms, it may even seem a bit ironical that the exclusive marketing rights for IRS images and other data products outside India rest with Space Imaging. It is a five-year-old company based in Denver, Colorado, dealing in space imagery, aerial photography, mapping services, and so on, with which the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) entered into a 10-year commercial contract on February 2, 1995, although it knew well that the company would very soon be its competitor in the high-resolution imagery market. "The agreement is indeed incomprehensible because you are selling away your advantage and at the same time losing your market share," a leading space analyst had said then.

According to the U.S. market survey agency Frost & Sullivan, the revenue in 1998 from the commercial imaging data was around $139 million. This, according to the agency, is expected to grow at the rate of 17 per cent through 2005, with the figure being around $420 million in 2005. The figures for IRS data sales abroad in the last financial year was a mere Rs. 276 lakhs. (Actually, this would include the lump sum paid to ISRO for the setting up of new IRS earth stations, besides 10 per cent royalty on data sales). Assuming that the entire amount is from royalties, the market share is just about 5 per cent. Now that IKONOS is in place (and several others with similar high-resolution capability are planned), the IRS' market share could shrink further. It would seem that Space Imaging has used IRS' data to create a user base of high-resolution images which it can now easily target with its own IKONOS data.

It is true, as ISRO officials say, that not all applications would require one-metre resolution data and it is unlikely that users of IRS data would shift to IKONOS data except for some specific applications. Moreover, the one-metre resolution data would be very expensive, they point out. However, when one-metre resolution data abounds – which will be when other satellites too go into orbit – prices are bound to come down, and ISRO's next IRS satellite, Cartosat, slated for launch in 2000, is designed to produce only 2.5-m resolution images. When IRS 1C/1D were in orbit, the time was ripe to exploit the market's unmet demand for high-resolution data on account of the failure of the U.S. satellite Landsat 6 in 1993 and the delay in the launch of the French SPOT 4. But without its own effective marketing arm, ISRO chose to rely on Earth Observation Satellite Company (EOSAT)/Space Imaging, which has not really generated a market share commensurate with the quality of IRS data.

According to Dr. K. Kasturirangan, Chairman, ISRO, this was mainly because, one, it took time for customers to become aware of the quality of IRS data and, two, having set up receiving stations for Landsat/SPOT data, it was not easy for countries to set up stations for IRS data as well. This was happening now only with stations coming up in Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the U.S. (Alaska) and Ecuador. But events seem to be overtaking ISRO's efforts at making inroads into the world market and the first signs of that are Space Imaging's IKONOS. How big the emerging market is going to be is unknown but the fact that companies like Space Imaging, Earth Watch and OrbImage (which are planning one-metre resolution satellites) were able to raise a total of over $500 million over the past few years, suggests that investors see substantial growth even in this specialised segment of remote-sensed data.



RUSS UNDERWOOD LOCKHEED MARTIN/COMMERCIAL SPACE SYSTEMS

The IKONOS satellite is the world's first and only commercial satellite to have made one-metre resolution images of specific areas of the earth.

SPACE IMAGING happens to be the first commercial remote-sensing organisation to launch its own satellite. It was founded in 1994 following the merger of EOSAT with Lockheed Martin. Besides marketing IRS data, Space Imaging also collects and disseminates data from Landsat, Canada's

Radarsat and the European Space Agency's ERS satellites. It also distributes the archived imagery of the Japanese JERS imaging system. The Clinton administration's March 1994 policy on deregulation of remote-sensing data and technologies enabled Space Imaging to apply for a licence to launch a one-metre resolution satellite. Once it procured the licence, it soon found new investors, such as Mitsubishi and Raytheon. This ensured that technologies required for launching IKONOS on its own were in its control.



SPACE IMAGING

A one-metre resolution black-and-white image of a spot in Washington D.C. made by IKONOS. It shows landmarks, including the Washington Monument and the Smithsonian Institution's American History Museum.

While the actual commercial sale and dissemination of one-metre resolution images are likely to commence sometime towards the end of 1999, the publicity image of Washington D.C., which was released on October 12, is indeed remarkable for the unprecedented details that can be discerned in a commercial imagery. For example, one can even make out vehicles on the roads and the windows of buildings. The sharpness is almost close to an image from an aircraft-borne camera. This image was taken on September 30, six days after IKONOS' launch aboard the Athena II launcher.

IKONOS was to be launched on April 27, 1999, but the launch (of IKONOS I) was unsuccessful because of a launch anomaly which resulted in loss of communication with the satellite. An investigation into the failed launch is currently on. The satellite (IKONOS II) that is currently beaming pictures was to have been launched next year but was readied in advance as a back-up satellite in the eventuality of a failed launch.

While the quality of the image is clearly indicative of the imaging capabilities of the satellite systems, particularly the optical imaging camera manufactured by Kodak, which is supposed to have 35 years of experience in building remote-sensing systems, it also shows that the satellite is in perfect working condition. The company has claimed that the sharpness of Kodak's telescoping device has never been achieved in any commercial satellite till date. In fact, this particular publicity image has apparently not even been processed to "map quality", according to Jeff Harris, the company's president. So the quality of processed images and value-added ones can be imagined. Space Imaging has already begun to accept orders for images, which will be marketed under the company's brand name CARTERRA.

THE name IKONOS is derived from the Greek word for "image" and the satellite, like the IRS satellites or any other earth observation satellite, is a sun-synchronous satellite, which passes over a given region of the earth at the same time of the day. The satellite weighs about 720 kg and its orbit is a near-polar circular one at a height of about 680 km. It orbits the earth once every 98 minutes; that is, it makes 14 orbits a day. Lockheed Martin was the prime contractor for the IKONOS satellite and the satellite was launched aboard its launcher Athena II. Raytheon built the communications and image-processing systems for the spacecraft; Kodak designed and built the customised camera for generating one-metre resolution images between 1995 and 1997.

One-metre resolution implies that the images can tell apart objects with dimensions of one metre and above. This means that cars and trucks, roads, pipelines, individual houses, large equipment, ships and boats, airplanes and so on can be distinguished and identified. Apart from the use of such high-resolution imagery in applications of national security, they have important civilian applications as well – in agriculture, cadastral surveys, forestry, planning, mapping urban areas for building and road construction and other such infrastructural activities, oil and gas utilities, emergency responses during disasters, telecommunications, transportation and so on. A revisit capability (that is, periodicity of imaging the same spot on the earth) of once every two or three days (as against every five days of IRS) enables quick updates of images needed for certain applications like agriculture, pollution monitoring, risk evaluation and disaster management.

Indeed, there may be a demand for such data even from India, particularly for high-resolution mapping, Geographical Information System (GIS) software-based planning, implementation of developmental projects and for early crop monitoring against pest attacks or diseases based on IR data. Even the National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) plans to use these to generate 1:5,000 scale maps of regions of India, which would be of a much larger scale than the 1:25,000 scale map that the Survey of India (SOI) distributes. According to Dr. D.P. Rao, Director, NRSA, maps with an absolute coordinate accuracy of 5 metres can be produced using data refining accuracies, as compared to a 20-metre accuracy using IRS data. There is, however, no clear-cut policy in India on the dissemination of such high-resolution data as of now.

The U.S., notwithstanding its capability in spy satellites (the Key Hole series of satellites), had not entered the commercial high-resolution imagery market until now. This was essentially because of domestic policies which, on grounds of national security, denied foreign parties access to high-resolution data, had restricted commercial distribution of images (of higher than 10-m resolution)

and relevant technologies. But with the advent of SPOT data in the mid-1980s, with 10-m resolution in the commercial arena and subsequent entry of the Soviet Union with 5-m resolution and later Russia with 2-m resolution images from the KVR-1000 camera altered the scene. Soon enough, in 1995, India too became a player in the high-resolution imagery market, with its 5.8-m data.

In March 1994, President Bill Clinton deregulated remote-sensing technologies and data – however, with several attendant conditions that ensured government control in the matter of sale and distribution of high-resolution imagery – so as to retain the technological superiority of U.S. remote-sensing in the commercial market. This did not really compromise on actual reconnaissance capabilities of the U.S. because that is in the region of 10-100-cm resolution. This allowed many U.S. companies to plan remote-sensing satellite programmes and bid for licences to launch satellites. By 1997, 11 companies had been granted licences and satellite plans of nine of them were already approved. IKONOS is the first to be launched. It will soon be followed by other one-metre resolution satellites, OrbView-3 and QuickBird.

Future high resolution remote-sensing satellites

Satellite	Source	Launch	Type	Resolution (m)
EROS-A1	West Indian Space Ltd.	1999	Panchromatic	1.5
QuickBird	Earth Watch, U.S.	1999	Multispectral	3.2
			Panchromatic	0.82
OrbView-3	Orbimage, U.S.	1999	Multispectral	4
			Panchromatic	1-2
IRS-P5 (Cartosat)	India	2000	Panchromatic	2.5
SPIN-2**	Russia	1999-2000 (various)	Panchromatic photography	2
LightSAR	U.S.	2000	SAR Radar	3-100
OrbView-4	Orbimage, U.S.	2000	Panchromatic	1
			Multispectral	4
			Hyperspectral	8
EROS-A2	West Indian Space Ltd.	2000	Panchromatic	1.5
EROS-B1	West Indian Space Ltd.	2001	Panchromatic	0.82
ALOS	Japan	2003	VSAR Radar	10
			Multispectral	10
			Panchromatic	2.5

** Russia has been continously operating SPIN-2 series of satellites producing remote-sensed images of 2-m resolution with its KVR-1000 panchromatic camera and marketing them as well from 1990 onwards. It just happens that at this point of time there is no SPIN-2 satellite in orbit.

While the accent of these high-resolution imaging satellites is on civilian applications – and indeed the demand of high-resolution images for these is projected to grow rapidly – the resolution is of military significance. In that situation, the dividing line between a commercial satellite and a military satellite becomes thin and high-resolution data become dual-use capable. Vipin Gupta, a remote-sensing specialist with the U.S. Sandia National Laboratories, who has used commercial remote-sensed data to monitor weapons proliferation activities as well as developments during the Gulf War, says: "In the short term, make no mistake, they are marketing for defence and intelligence applications."

Indeed, it is well known from the work of people like Bhupendra Jasani, a remote-sensing analyst based in the United Kingdom who has done extensive work on monitoring nuclear activities around the world using satellite images, that a great deal of intelligence activity can be carried out using commercial satellite imagery supplemented with other intelligence data. From this perspective, Gupta's remarks do make sense because most civilian applications do not require one-metre resolution data and a business cannot be sustained by a few specialised uses of these data. The sales volume has to come from regular purchases by countries which have adversary relations with their neighbours and are under constant threat of attack but with no access to superior space-based reconnaissance technologies. (Interestingly, the U.S. Government has committed itself to buying over the next five years $1 billion worth of high-resolution data from the licencees.)

India and Pakistan form a classic case. According to a recent newspaper report (*Indian Express*, September 27), the Defence Image Processing and Analysis Centre (DIPAC), the secret outfit of the armed services that does analysis of reconnaissance and satellite imagery, told the Subrahmanyam Committee (set up to examine the factors that led to the Kargil War) that India's satellite imagery (with 5.8-m resolution) was insufficient to provide tactical information. The Centre is reported to have said that synthetic aperture radars (SARs), unmanned aerial vehicles and a constellation of imaging satellites would be required to gather tactical information.

This actually points to DIPAC's incompetence at one level: with intelligent, careful and continuous analysis of 5.8-m resolution data, a great deal of information can be gathered. Also, it is known that India does purchase 2-m data from Russia. This should certainly suffice for the purpose. Notwithstanding these observations, the availability of one-metre resolution data is likely to be welcomed by intelligence forces on both sides of the border. Whether access to such data on a real-time basis could ease tension or escalate it is another matter. One could argue both ways.

But there is also a catch here. IKONOS does not have complete freedom to distribute all its data. There are eight restrictions with regard to the sale of high-resolution data in Clinton's 1994 policy. These restrictions, which have come to be called "shutter control", give total authority to the U.S. Government to prevent the sale of images or even the imaging of a certain region by U.S. commercial satellites for foreign policy and national security considerations. In fact, there is a separate policy that forbids imaging Israel. It is, therefore, not unimaginable that the U.S. Government may put a ban on data over India and Pakistan if in its perception it is not in the interests of the two countries to gain access to high-resolution data. Indeed, diplomatic moves have been afoot to get other countries with high-resolution remote-sensing capabilities, like Canada and Russia, to follow its policies. Canada has reportedly agreed but Russia has not.

In any case, commercial remote-sensing is likely to undergo a radical change once IKONOS images become available openly, notwithstanding their cost. However, given its security implications, it is perhaps necessary for the United Nations Committee for Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) to review its policies on remote-sensed data, formulated 13 years ago. It must, however, be remembered that its efforts all through the 1980s to put a cap on the resolution of commercially marketed remote-sensed images never succeeded. But one-metre resolution imagery is almost as good as airborne imagery and that would perhaps make nations and governments uneasy. But very soon one would know whether one-metre resolution is a bane or a boon.

Microsoft, the monopolist

In findings of fact that precede a final verdict following a year-long trial in the U.S. government's anti-trust case against Microsoft, a Judge concludes that the software maker is a monopolist that time and again bullied other companies in the industry, harming consumers and hindering innovation.

JOEL BRINKLEY

ON November 6, in the U.S. government's anti-trust trial against the Microsoft Corporation, a Judge issued a broad denunciation of the software giant as the first part of his verdict in the landmark case.

The Judge, Thomas Penfield Jackson of Federal District Court, Washington, said the company had used its monopoly power to stifle innovation, reduce competition and hurt consumers.

"Most harmful of all is the message that Microsoft's actions have conveyed to every enterprise with the potential to innovate in the computer industry," Judge Jackson wrote in his 207-page findings of fact.

"Through its conduct," he added, "Microsoft has demonstrated that it will use its prodigious market power and immense profits to harm any firm that insists on pursuing initiatives that could intensify competition against one of Microsoft's core products." The Judge's findings of fact are not a final verdict but a declaration of which side's version of events he believes. They clearly show that he found the government's case against Microsoft credible and rejected as "specious", as he stated in one part, virtually all the arguments Microsoft put up in its defence. The findings are the judge's conclusions about who presented the most compelling and believable case during the year-long trial that opened in his United States district courtroom on October 19, 1998. As such, they clearly signal how he will rule in his eventual verdict.

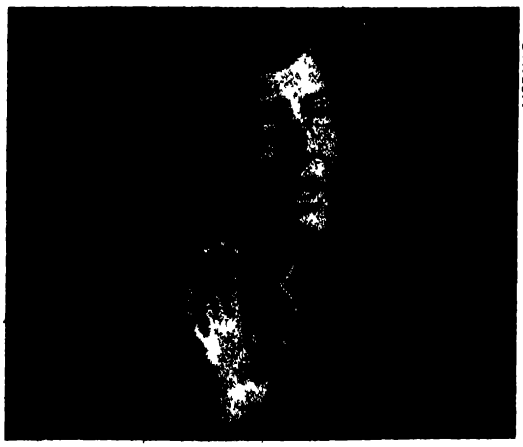
Microsoft and the government both reacted quickly after receiving the much-anticipated findings. The judge, who in years past wrote his decisions long-hand, transmitted the document to both sides by e-mail. It was made public at 6-30 p.m., after the stock markets had closed.

The Justice Department was jubilant. "This is a great day for American consumers," Attorney-General Janet Reno said. "This case is about the protection of innovation, competition and the consumers' right to choose the products they want." Microsoft, on the other hand, quickly issued a statement indicating that the company was already formulating its appeal.

"While we disagree with many of the findings," the statement said, "we are still confident that the law supports us on these points and that the American legal system will ultimately rule that Microsoft's actions were fair, legal and good for consumers."

Later, Microsoft's chairman, William H. Gates, said: "We respectfully disagree with the court's findings. Microsoft competes vigorously and fairly. Microsoft is committed to resolving this case in a fair and equitable manner." He added that his company "operates within the laws and operates in a way that is great for the people we develop software for."

Neither in Microsoft's statements nor those of the Justice Department was there much talk of settling the case. Joel I. Klein, head of the Justice Department's anti-trust division, said the government would consider a settlement, but only one that "fully and properly addresses" the issues raised in the judge's findings.



MCFALLS

At a press conference in Washington, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates responds to the findings of fact in the anti-trust trial.

Although the Judge's findings of fact are virtually impervious to appeal, Microsoft's leaders are expected to seek grounds for appeal, should Judge Jackson eventually rule against them. Under federal court rules, appeals courts must give great weight to the conclusions the trial judge draws from hearing the testimony and studying the witnesses as they offer their accounts. As a result, appeals courts are allowed to challenge findings of fact only if they are "clearly erroneous". And if the Judge's verdict is largely based on which witnesses he believed, the verdict stands a better chance of withstanding appeal.

At the outset of his findings, the Judge declared that Microsoft "enjoys monopoly power in the relevant market". This is a key assertion because under anti-trust laws monopolies cannot engage in practices that would be legal for other companies. The government's charges rested on the assumption that Microsoft has a monopoly in the operating systems market with its Windows operating systems.

In a key test for monopoly power, the Judge concluded that Microsoft could charge whatever it wanted for Windows without fear that price increases would reduce demand.

Microsoft expended considerable energy in court arguing that it was not a monopoly. It asserted that a host of small competitors– from the Be operating system to Palm Pilot personal organisers – were long-term threats. But the Judge dismissed those arguments, saying that competition from those competitors was, at the very least, a long way off. "Microsoft's monopoly power," he concluded, "is also evidenced by the fact that, over the course of several years, Microsoft took actions that only could have been advantageous

if they operated to reinforce monopoly power" From there, the Judge ran through each of the charges raised by the Justice Department and the 19 State Attorneys-General who joined in the suit In each case he endorsed the government's charge while rejecting Microsoft's rebuttals He found that Microsoft had tried to divide the market for Internet browsing software with the Netscape Communications Corporation in 1995 – a key charge in the government's case and a clearly illegal activity under anti-trust law He wrote that other companies had had similar encounters with Microsoft, and these interactions demonstrate that it is Microsoft's corporate practice to pressure other firms to halt software development that threatens Microsoft's dominance "or competes directly with Microsoft's most cherished software products"

He found that Microsoft's decision to bundle its Web browser with Windows and give it away free was not, as Microsoft asserted in court, simply an effort to add a desirable feature to Windows "Senior executives at Microsoft decided Microsoft needed to give its browser away in furtherance of the larger strategic goal of gaining market share," he wrote Microsoft, he added, 'viewed browser market share as the key to preserving its dominance" And in one of his most damning findings, Judge Jackson concluded that "Web browsers and operating systems are separate products' Microsoft's key argument was that its browser was simply a feature of Windows, not a separate product The Judge turned that argument around on Microsoft by finding that the company had actually harmed consumers by bundling the two products Consumer harm is a key test in antitrust cases Bundling the browser with Windows 'unjustifiably jeopardised the stability and security of the operating system , meaning that he believed the government's argument that including the browser had made the operating system more likely to crash and more vulnerable to break-ins by intruders "There is no technical justification for Microsoft's refusal to meet consumer demand for a browserless version of Windows 98," he added The Judge wrote that Microsoft had threatened and bullied Apple Computer, Intel, America Online and other companies that Microsoft perceived as competitors In the case of the International Business Machines Corporation, he wrote, "when IBM refused to abate the promotion of those of its own products that competed with Windows and Office," Microsoft's suite of business productivity software, "Microsoft punished the IBM PC Company with higher prices, a late licence for Windows 95 and the withholding of technical and marketing support"

The Judge concluded "Microsoft's past success in hurting such companies and stifling innovation deters investment in technologies and businesses that exhibit the potential to threaten Microsoft The ultimate result is that some innovations that would truly benefit consumers never occur for the sole reason that they do not coincide with Microsoft's self interest"

Anti-trust lawyers say they cannot recall another instance in which findings of fact in an anti-trust case have been issued ahead of the actual verdict Usually the findings are packaged with the conclusions of law – the legal precedents justifying a ruling – and the verdict But Judge Jackson's decision to separate the findings offers at last two benefits "It's potentially a very clever thing to do," said Robert Litan, a former senior official in the Justice Department's anti-trust division For one thing, it will allow Judge Jackson to modify his final ruling if written responses from the litigants suggest to him that he might be standing on weak ground

Publishing the findings ahead of the verdict also "prompts the parties to try to settle," said Andrew Gavil, a Professor of Law at Howard University "This is a lot brighter than tea leaves It tells the parties exactly where they stand" Judge Jackson has repeatedly urged Microsoft and the government to settle the case.

A Microsoft lawyer said that Microsoft's leaders stand willing to discuss a settlement Nevertheless, he said, they remain unified in their conviction that they will not accept any settlement that would jeopardise "our core value, the soul of our company, and that is the freedom to innovate and design products as we see fit." ■

New York Times Service

No room for ambiguity

STEVE LOHR

"IT'S a bad day for Microsoft," observed William Kovacic, a Professor at the George Washington University law school "The Judge relentlessly accepted the government's story of what happened."

Before the findings of fact were released, legal experts had expected that Judge Jackson would generally favour the government but also nod on occasion in Microsoft's direction. He had suggested in the past that he would prefer to broker an out-of-court settlement between Microsoft and the government. Such an outcome would relieve the federal courts of the burden of having to make fine-tuned decisions about products and business practices in the Internet economy.

A settlement is still a possibility – but only, it seems, if Gates and his top lieutenants decide that Judge Jackson has done what no [illegible] competitor ever accomplished: [illegible] Microsoft to its knee...

[illegible] with these findings, anti-trust [illegible] say it is more likely that [illegible] Microsoft will persevere, hoping that [illegible] Jackson's final ruling is not [illegible] a one-sided rout as the judgment might seem to portend. The company's next step might then be to appeal his decision to a federal appeals court and then perhaps the Supreme Court.

"If the Judge's goal was settlement, he would have to leave enough ambiguity in the findings of fact so that neither side sees it as in its self-interest to fight this to the bitter end," observed Herbert Hovenkamp, a Professor at the University of Iowa law school, who is a leading antitrust scholar and is advising the government.

There seems little that is ambiguous in Judge Jackson's document. "Having gone this far, I don't see Microsoft settling," said Andrew Gavil, a Professor at the Howard University law school.

The Judge's findings of fact are preliminary step, but they form the foundation and framework for the outcome of the case – either a legal judgment or a settlement. A court's legal judgment can be routinely overruled by a higher court on appeal. But findings of fact can be overturned only in the rare instance when the higher court finds a "blatant contradiction" between the witness' record of testimony and a judge's finding. ■

The Pope in India

In Delhi, Pope John Paul II reaffirms the Church's commitment to enter "ever more deeply" into dialogue with the other religions of the world.

V. VENKATESAN
in New Delhi

THE four-day visit of Pope John Paul II, the head of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Vatican City State, to New Delhi in the first week of November evoked keen interest among people of all religions and brought special cheer to India's Christian community. The Pope flew in on the evening of November 5 amidst tight security. He was given a simple official reception at the airport.

The 79-year-old pontiff, who is a head of state, stayed at the Holy See Apostolic Nunciature on Shanti Path in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave.

On the morning of November 6, the Pope was accorded an official reception in the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan. He met President K.R. Narayanan at Rashtrapati Bhavan and Vice-President Krishan Kant and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at Hyderabad House. A press note issued by the Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi, which organised the visit, described the meetings as cordial. The three leaders showed great respect for the Pope, it said.

During his meeting with the Pope, the President emphasised that the freedom of religion was the cornerstone of Indian democracy and that it was paramount despite the rise of late of some intolerant fringe groups. He recalled the Pope's earlier visit to India in 1986 and appreciated his call for friendly relations among peoples in his message for the third millennium. They spoke about Mother Teresa.

Vajpayee thanked the Pope for being in India on the happy occasion of Deepavali, the festival of lights which signifies the victory of good over evil. He observed that perhaps the papal visit added more light to the festival. Vajpayee underlined the fact that India is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nation that accords paramount importance to peace and cooperation.

Krishan Kant told the Pope that India would remain a haven for all religions because it believed that nation and religion are not synonymous.

As part of his official engagements, the Pope laid a wreath, one made up of yellow roses and carnations, at the samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat. He inscribed in the guest book a quote from the Mahatma – "A culture cannot survive if it attempts to be exclusive" – and signed Johnnes Paulus II



V SUDERSHAN

THE Pope's religious engagements began with a meeting with the bishops of the Asia Synod and the promulgation of the Asian Synod Document, "Ecclesia in Asia" (Church in Asia), at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi on the evening of November 6. The Asian Synod is the special assembly of the bishops of Asia.

The Asian Synod was convened in the Vatican from April 19 to May 14, 1998. It concluded on November 6, 1999 in New Delhi, when the Pope signed and issued an "Apostolic Exhortation" incorporating the recommendations of the bishops of the synod. Two hundred and fifty-two Church leaders attended the Asian Synod. The Indian delegation, the largest in terms of size, comprised 24 members. The second largest was the 20-member delegation from the Philippines. Also invited were three prelates from China (a cardinal, a bishop, and a coadjutor bishop); they, however, did not attend.

The 140-page document released by the Pope – "Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father"– analyses the social, political, cultural, developmental and moral

landscape at the turn of the millennium and charts the course for the Church. It calls upon the Church to proclaim the "Good News"(the message of Jesus Christ) "with loving respect and esteem". This is mischievously interpreted by the Church's critics as a call for conversions to Christianity.


V. SUDERSHAN

THE four-hour Holy Mass held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on November 7 to mark the conclusion of the Special Assembly of Asian Synod of Bishops, was considerably Indianised. The special altar, shaped like hands raised in prayer, was flanked by a portrait of Mother Teresa, drawn by a young artist, Adarsh Alphons, to the left and the Gospel to the right. A huge Indian brass lamp stood in the foreground, while bright *diyas* (earthern lamps) painted on the rising stage decorated the terraced sanctuary. A group of tribal men and women from Ranchi danced to folk tunes as they ushered in the procession of priests and bishops. Bishops of the Oriental rites lent a special colour to the solemn ranks of the clergy. Other Indian characteristics included the singing of a Tamil devotional song and an *aarti* ceremony.

Handing over the post-synodal document, the Pope hoped for a great harvest of Christian faith in Asia and bestowed the message of love and hope on the people of this continent. About 70,000 people thronged the stadium.

The Pope made a slow round of the stadium in his Popemobile, waving and

At a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan, President K.R. Narayanan and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with the Pope. (Facing page) Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi greets the Pope.

Notes on the fringe

V. VENKATESAN

THE Pope's visit to India was preceded by long-drawn, high-pitched campaigns by Hindu fundamentalists and Christian groups, albeit with different objectives.

A rath yatra from Goa, organised by the Sanskriti Raksha Manch (SRM), a Sangh Parivar organisation, reached Delhi on the morning of November 4. The rath, a converted van, was festooned with banners decrying Christianity and the alleged conversion of Hindus by Christian missionaries. "Ham [illegible] *Ram ko lana hai*" (We want Ram, we want [illegible]) declared one banner. The yatris dispersed after holding a public meeting at which they decried "forcible conversions".

The SRM held another public meeting the same afternoon near the Ram Lila ground at Kasturba Nagar. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and [illegible] leaders addressed the small gathering of people who did not seem to have much idea of the issues that were raised by the speakers, including VHP leader Ashok Singhal, Dharmendra [illegible] Parliament [illegible] Singh.

[illegible] claimed that the papal bull issued on May 4, 1593 by the then Pope to the King of Portugal regarding conversions was still valid. He claimed that it was only after the bull had been issued that [illegible] against Hindus occurred in Portuguese-ruled Goa.



V SUDERSHAN

smiling, instantly inviting hand-clapping, which did not stop for several minutes People burst into the rousing musical score of "God Bless our Pope! The Great, the Good" The Pope ascended the stage on an electrically operated platform, which was shielded by a huge banner to protect him from sunlight

After the Mass, the Pope administered the Holy Communion to 30 chosen people, who included the orphaned, the physically handicapped and the terminally ill The Pope also gave Holy Communion to a group of people representing a cross-section of Asian Catholics Among them was a 76-year-old woman, Moksha Pakiam, who had come from Bangalore At the end of the Holy Mass, the Pope held up his hand and said *"Bharat ko aashirwad, shanti!* God bless all "

The Pope, in his Homily, said that it was fitting that this document had been signed and issued in India, the home of many of Asia's time-honoured cultures, religions and spiritual traditions More than 300 bishops and 1,000 priests celebrated the Mass with the Pope

The Pope, an admirer of Mother Teresa, made a special reference to her "She loved India, She is with the people of India forever," he said He appealed to the Church not to forget her witness of evangelical love, specially towards the poorest of the poor

On the evening of November 7, the Pope participated in an inter-religious leaders' meeting, organised at Vigyan Bhavan by the Inter-Ritual Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and its sister organisations Those who welcomed the Pope included Shankaracharya Madhavananda Saraswati of Prayagpeeth, Dr Mufti Mohammed Mukkarram Ahmed, Bhai Manjit Singh Sahib, Acharya Mahaprajna, K Rajaratnam, Samdhong Rinpoche, Ervad Cawas Daraius Bagli, Ezekiel Isaac Malekar and Zena Sorabjee

No dialogue took place at the meeting, but the Pope reaffirmed the Church's commitment to enter "ever more deeply" into dialogue with the religions of the world The Church sees this dialogue as an act of love which has its roots in God himself He clarified however, that "dialogue is never an attempt to impose our own views upon others, since such dialogue would become a form of spiritual and cultural domination" He explained "Holding firmly to what we believe, we listen respectfully to others "

Giving credit to Indian historical figures such as Ashoka, Akbar, Shivaji, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dr S Radhakrishnan, the Pope underlined the importance of universal brotherhood and religious freedom, which he said, constituted 'the very heart of human rights' He emphasised that individuals must be recognised as having the right to change their religion, if their conscience so demanded – obliquely referring to the protests from Hindu fundamentalist groups against conversions to Christianity

The Pope held a Private Holy Mass in the chapel of the Vatican Embassy on the morning of November 8 He left for Georgia later ■

requests from some quarters of the BJP.

THE Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) held daily press briefings to provide information about [illegible] by the Catholic Church in India, including its empowerment of people in India. The [illegible]

[illegible] who studied in a mu[illegible] himself, however, seemed [illegible]. He alleged that con[illegible] in India after the [illegible]. He further alleged [illegible] and Mizoram were wir[illegible] movements primarily [illegible] the Christian pop[illegible]

[illegible] any chances [illegible] the Delhi police

tions). It pointed out that Christian missionaries run nearly 15,000 educational institutions in the country, besides more than 7,000 social welfare institutions. The CBCI claimed that these funds helped raise only a [illegible] expenses required to run these institutions.

sought to ensure foolproof security arrangements by making preventive arrests, including that of the Shiv Sena's local office-bearers. Despite this, three Shiv Sainiks attempted to stage a protest at Rajghat's main gate even as the Pope was paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi. They were rounded up by the police.

There were no other untoward incidents. The All India Christian Council said that despite the protests that preceded it, the Pope's visit went off well. It stated that the Pope had received a positive response from the people and the government. A spokesperson for the Council said that following the visit, dialogue and understanding at a new level had been put in place. ■

An activist Pope

JOHN CHERIAN

POPE JOHN PAUL II is an inveterate traveller. Although in frail health for the past several years, the pontiff has been keen to visit as many countries as possible. And he is not a man to shirk controversy, as his second visit to India showed. His visit to Cuba had come under strong criticism from influential sections of the Clinton administration and conservative groups in the United States.

Pope John Paul II has also been one of the most activist Popes of the millennium. His conservative agenda on social issues was evident from the very outset of his papacy. The accommodative worldview of his two immediate predecessors was noticeably absent in his initial statements and actions.

The campaign launched by John Paul II against the socialist countries of Eastern Europe contributed a great deal to the demise of the Eastern bloc. He was the inspiration for the Solidarity trade union movement, which eventually came to power in Poland. His overt and covert role in bringing about the downfall of the socialist government in Poland, his home country, is acknowledged today by the West.

The same Pope said in the late 1990s that the collapse of socialism was not entirely a good development and that unfettered capitalism had led to further deprivation for the poor of the world. In his encyclical, "Advent of the Third Millennium", the Pope made an impassioned plea to the international community to raise its voice for a substantial, if not an outright, cancellation of the international debt owed by poor nations to the developed world.

The Pope also took a tough stance against the proponents of Liberation Theology within the Catholic Church, who had sided with the peasants and the working class in Latin American and other Third World countries in their struggle against exploitation and authoritarian rule. The Pope's undisguised hostility towards the Sandinistas, who came to power in Nicaragua with considerable help from the radical sections of the Catholic Church, is an illustration.

[illegible] casting a shadow of [illegible] [illegible]

Radical priests and theologians have, on many occasions, been defrocked or sidelined because of their solidarity with the oppressed. This happened mostly in the 1970s and the 1980s when Latin America was in ferment.

After the end of the Cold War, the Pope mellowed considerably. In recent times the Vatican has been very critical of the U.S.-sponsored sanctions against countries such as Iraq and Cuba. The Pope, in fact, will be visiting Iraq before the year-end, much to the consternation of the Clinton administration.

UNLIKE the Pope's earlier visit to India in 1986, the shorter visit this time was clouded by controversy orchestrated by a tiny minority. In the last year and a half, Christian-bashing has become popular in many parts of India. Sections of the Sangh Parivar have been trying to equate Christianity with conversion. The campaign against churches and foreign missionaries in the tribal areas of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa seems to have brought the Bharatiya Janata Party temporary political dividends in the form of parliamentary seats.

Fundamentalist Christian groupings, mainly the U.S.-based ones, added fuel to the fire by issuing incendiary statements on the issue of conversions in India. The killing of Christian missionaries only fuelled their messianic zeal.

Hindu fundamentalist groups [illegible] joined in the Pope's visit and [illegible] threatened to disrupt the Pope's schedule in New Delhi. But a more [illegible] sense prevailed, with the Government taking a tough stance against them.

However, the best-handled way in which the Government initially [illegible] has left a bad taste. The Government saw it fit to convey to the Vatican only a week before the Pope's arrival that Vice-President Krishan Kant would not attend the inter-religious meeting that was to be held in Delhi on the last day of the visit. The reason given officially was that it was not in the fitness of things that the Vice-President of a secular republic participate in what was essentially a religious meet. Precedents and the fact that the Pope has the diplomatic status of a head of state were conveniently forgotten. Another reason being trotted out by officials is that the Dalai Lama could have attended the all-religion meet and this would have been embarrassing for the Indian Government.

Otherwise, the Pope was accorded all diplomatic courtesies. He met President K.R. Narayanan, Krishan Kant and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. According to a press release issued by the Information Bureau of the Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi, the "climate of the meetings was cordial and the three Indian leaders showed great respect for the Pope".

The President recalled the Pope's first visit to India in 1986. Both the President and the Pope remembered Mother Teresa. Narayanan nostalgically recalled



A manifestation of social reaction

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's challenge to Pope John Paul II's visit is a case of social reaction rising up in opposition to conservatism.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

THE visit of the Roman Catholic pontiff to India was an occasion for the saffron brotherhood to assert its claim to prominence as the principal vehicle for the articulation of an entire religious community's aspirations. But the propagandist effort to drum up a modicum of popular endorsement simply failed to get off the ground. As the extremist fringe rapidly faded away from public attention, a new strain of moderate mendicancy in the service of Hindutva came to the fore.

The run-up to the papal visit saw a proliferation of bodies constituted with the specific charter of defending the Hindu faith. Among them was the Dharma Rakshana Sammelan, which managed to recruit a number of individuals of middling eminence to its cause, to endorse a statement decrying the "evangelisation of Asia". That this body managed to put out a number of advertisements in prime spots in the national print media pointed to a high level of motivation and financial sustenance from quarters yet unknown.

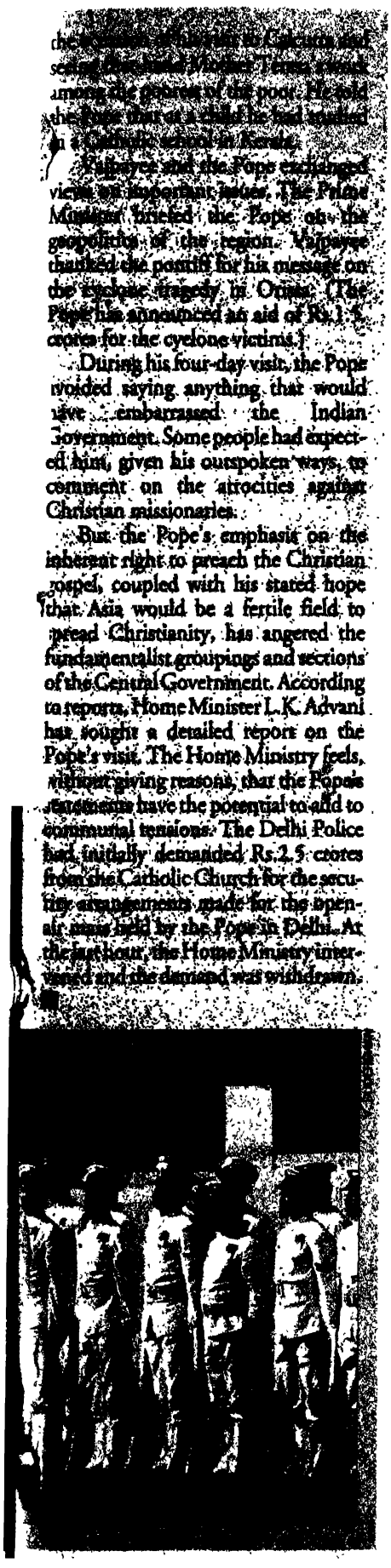
The Dharma Rakshana Sammelan may not have matched the crudity of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Giriraj Kishore, who denounced the Pope's arrival in India as something akin to a burglar's forced entry. But its hand-wringing expressions of anguish at continuing religious conversions under the aegis of the Church certainly did not seem any better conceived. Religious conversion, it argued, "is violence, pure and simple, particularly against the Hindu faith, which does not believe in conversion".

As a claim, this is quite remote from reality. The VHP, which it may be safely assumed, is the principal sponsor of the media advertisement which greeted the Pope in India, proudly declares its numerical achievements in conversions (or re-conversions as it is called, since every faith practised in India is considered alien to the original Hindu identity) in its annual publications. Further, religion is a personal choice and it is for those levelling the charge of violence to prove the fact of coercion or some form of illicit allurement to make it stick. Rather than the axiomatic violence of conversion, what is today evident is the surpassing brutality of the VHP's campaign to check the activities of Christian missionaries in India.

The right to practise, preach and propagate one's religion is guaranteed by the Constitution. There has been a ruling by the Supreme Court that conversions go beyond any legitimate construal of the term "propagation". But this is an ambiguous ruling. If restraints are to be imposed on these activities – whether of a legal or purely administrative nature – then the principle of symmetric treatment would necessitate similar curbs on the activities of the various godmen, spiritual healers and mystics that the country abounds in. Such powers, if institutionalised, could conceivably lead to a massive assault on fundamental freedoms.

Further, if there are grounds for legitimate grievances at the activities of Christian preachers, redress is available through legal processes. The Indian Penal Code has fairly strong provisions to deal with cases of offence to religious sentiments. Neither the VHP nor any of its affiliates will even consider this recourse for reasons which are fairly transparent – if the provisions of law are invoked against a minority community, there is equal if not greater reason to use them against the majority.

ANOTHER of the Sammelan's claims, about Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to religious conversions, is historically accurate. But what it fails to



take cognizance of is the Mahatma's consistently expressed disdain for the activities that would today go under the name of "reconversion". *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* abound with deprecatory references to Shuddhi and Sanghatan – which were Hindu communalism's effort to win back Muslims and Christians to what they construed as the true national faith.

Much has been made, again, about the Christian missionaries' supposed tendency to run down the basic tenets of Hinduism as part of their effort to win souls over to their faith. This overlooks the historical fact that the challenge to Hindu beliefs has more often come from within its own ranks. As part of their ideological challenge to the caste system, great social reformers like Jyotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar frequently used the most derogatory terms in reference to the Hindu pantheon. But as Gandhi recognised, this was not a challenge that could not be met by responding in kind, but by confronting the iniquities of the system that provided a breeding ground for these resentments.



S ARNEJA

Pope John Paul II paying homage at Rajghat, the samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi.

The VHP campaign finally is a manifestation of social reaction. Its fundamental procedure could be characterised in recently coined political terminology as one of "stigmatisation and emulation". A threat perception from an alien cultural influence is first fostered in the minds of the target population, who are then reclaimed by the supposedly indigenous religion through methods that in others' hands were decried as a mortal danger to the national culture.

Ever since it was founded in 1964, the VHP's strategy has been premised upon the emulation of the methods of medieval religious proselytisation. At its founding conference it was entrusted the tasks of "consolidation and strengthening of Hindu society", the "protection and dissemination of Hindu spiritual and ethical values" and the "establishment of links among Hindus living in different countries". The proposed method was to create an ecclesiastical order, complete with its own liturgy, scripture and institutional hierarchy. Individual priests manning shrines across the country were to be coopted into a network of VHP sponsorship. In another conscious reversion to the medieval model of religious organisations, VHP activists were designed as the lay order which would impart the necessary momentum for social consolidation along religious lines.

SINCE assuming the papacy in 1978, John Paul II has exerted a powerful political influence across the globe. A book which comes to the market on the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, complete with heavy recommendations from America's arch-conservative Heritage Foundation, names him as one of six "heroes" who changed the course of the world through the years of the Cold War. The book allegedly "shatters the perception that the Soviet Union collapsed either by accident or from its own internal problems". Instead, it documents the exertions of the six heroic individuals – among them Ronald Reagan, Winston Churchill and Harry Truman – that contributed to this very happy denouement.

Yet paradoxically, John Paul II is also credited in some quarters with having depoliticised the Church. His memorable visit to Latin America in 1983, for instance, is best remembered for having turned the clock back on evolving notions of an activist Church. Paul VI's 1967 encyclical "Popularum Progressio" had laid out the circumstances in which the Church could act in support and sustenance of popular rebellions against oppression. Following this, the Latin American Bishops Conference at Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, had imparted a strong momentum to the principles and practice of Liberation Theology.

John Paul II firmly shut the door on Liberation Theology, confining his agenda to raising the profile of the Church within civil society. His notion of evangelisation is conservative and dogmatic. For political structures that are aligned with the forces that today dominate the global economy, it is palpably an unthreatening notion. The VHP's challenge to the Pope's visit, in this sense, is a case of social reaction rising up in opposition to conservatism. Being devoid of a marked ideological polarity, it is a challenge that was always unlikely to gain significant momentum. ■

Agendas and appointments

A clutch of appointments by the Human Resource Development Ministry under Murli Manohar Joshi raises disturbing questions.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in New Delhi

MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI cleared two crucial appointments just two days into his renewed tenure as Union Minister for Human Resource Development. M.L. Sondhi, a former Professor at the School of International Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), was appointed Chairperson of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and B.R. Grover, who was nominated a member of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) in 1998, earned a promotion to the Chair.

Sondhi was a young and highly regarded official of the Indian Foreign Service when he dramatically quit for a career in politics. His best-remembered political feat still remains the shock defeat he inflicted on Congress(I) stalwart Mehr Chand Khanna in New Delhi in the 1967 Lok Sabha elections. Having served out a term as a Jan Sangh Member of Parliament, Sondhi sought a career in academia after being defeated in the 1971 elections.

Grover served for long as Director in the ICHR, although he achieved renown after a fashion only in his post-retirement advocacy of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) claim to the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. He was a leading member of the panel of historians constituted by the VHP at the Chandra Shekhar Government's suggestion, to establish the historical veracity of the case of the Ram Janmabhoomi. Post-Ayodhya demolition, Grover has remained an unrepentant votary of the view that vandalism in the distant past can be justification for acts of retribution today.

Grover and various other historians and archaeologists associated with the Ayodhya campaign of the VHP earned the censure of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC), when it held a session in New Delhi in 1994. His nomination as a member of the ICHR in June 1998 was, for this reason, occasion for a bitter controversy within the profession of historical research. His elevation as Chairman is unlikely to be any less acrimonious.

In contrast, Sondhi has not been conspicuously linked with any overt political campaigns in the domestic arena. He has been a courtly and soft-spoken participant in the seminar circuit in New Delhi, particularly those concerned with less popular causes such as the "liberation" of Tibet and friendship with Israel. His appointment to the apex position in ICSSR represents a quantum shift in the ethos of the institution.

Grover and Sondhi do not collectively match the absurdity of another nomination by the HRD Ministry. K.G. Rastogi, an obscure Professor from Delhi, has been appointed to the search committee for faculty appointments in the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Far from his academic credentials, Rastogi is best known for a lurid autobiographical account of Partition, in which he acknowledged that he shot dead a Muslim woman at close quarters to save her from a rampaging mob of Hindus. He subsequently took up a career in academia, though never with great distinction. In his participation in *shakhas* of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), though, he was very consistent.



AKHILESH KUMAR

Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi.

IT is learnt that these appointments had been decided well before their actual announcement – the delay being entirely on account of the intervening inconvenience of the model code of conduct for the electoral season. The HRD Minister, associated with the more extreme ideological fringes of the BJP, has once again been true to form. These apprehensions were reinforced when news emerged of the omission of Marxist theory from the political science syllabus in Central Board of Secondary Education-stream schools. Agitated members of the Left parties raised the matter in Parliament, accusing the Government of seeking to stop "the free flow of ideas" and bringing in a phase of "intellectual fascism".

While other major political theories of Liberalism, Socialism, Fascism and Gandhism were as usual present in the syllabus for "Concepts and Theories in Political Science", Marxism was conspicuously absent. But for an alert teacher from a school in Delhi, the supposed omission would perhaps not have been detected. The CBSE, for its part, held that the Hindi version of the printed syllabus contained Marxist theory, which made the omission in the English version at worst a printer's devil. Yet the faculty of education in the Delhi University is reluctant to accept this as an "inadvertent error'. There seems to be too strong a pattern evident in Joshi's decisions as HRD Minister to permit this kind of a casual reading.

The Minister, however, seems unfazed. Grover, he argues, has served as director of the ICHR for 12 years and has otherwise been associated with the organisation for over a decade. This alone should be adequate to establish his credentials for the Chairman's post.

While none of his critics dispute the fact that Grover's long stint in the ICHR as Director was relatively uncontroversial, they have chosen to question his unrelenting commitment, since 1986, in opposing any resolution relating to the preservation of cultural heritage in the Indian History Congress. His interventions have since shown a persistent bias. In 1992, at the Calcutta session of the IHC, the then Secretary, V. Ramakrishna, took cognizance of communal disturbances in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Grover objected, stating that it should not be part of the Secretary's speech.

Later, as a member of the Delhi session of the WAC in 1994, Grover opposed a resolution moved by liberal historians condemning the demolition of the Masjid. Further, in a conference of the WAC at Croatia in May 1998, he opposed a resolution condemning the "manipulation of archaeological evidence to justify destruction of historical structures". He led a group, including B.B. Lal and three others, out of the Congress, rather than be party to the adoption of the resolution.

In the IHC, Grover has chosen to oppose various important policy resolutions, including the defence of unbiased textbooks (Hyderabad session, December 30, 1978), the promotion of translations in Indian languages (Bombay session, December 28, 1980). In the Annamalainagar session in December 1984, he opposed a resolution against communal strife. At the Goa session in 1987, he voted against a resolution criticising the biased representation of legend and history on television.

Further, in comparison to previous incumbents in the ICHR, such as R.S. Sharma, Niharranjan Ray, Irfan Habib and Ravinder Kumar, Grover's academic credentials are far from impressive. He has to his credit two articles in the *Indian Economic and Social History Review* – one on the village community published in 1971 and the other on land rights in Mughal India, published in 1976. And while he served for long as Reader in History at Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, he has neither a Ph.D nor the title of Professor to his credit.

HISTORIANS of a liberal and secular persuasion are alarmed at the prospect of the nodal agency for sponsorship of historical research passing into the control of a person who has opposed every resolution condemning the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Delhi University historian Sumit Sarkar feels that the current practice of packing institutes with people conforming to the Hindutva ideology is qualitatively different from all that has been seen in the past.

Sarkar points out, for instance, that Irfan Habib was the ICHR Chairperson during the Rajiv Gandhi regime, although he is affiliated to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), a party that consistently opposed the Congress(I) during that period. There was no systematic packing of academic bodies, and people known to be RSS sympathisers too were appointed to positions of responsibility.

Again, there are questions of basic academic stature involved. Irfan Habib and R.S. Sharma were historians of international repute even before the ICHR was set up. If the Hindutva lobby has been unable to appoint persons amenable to it earlier, it has been due to a sheer paucity of serious scholarship within their ranks. Sarkar argues that since the 1992 demolition, a variety of historical thinking has gained ground that reinforces old and discredited stereotypes, reversing the progress achieved over the years in charting new vistas of scholarship. Joshi's appointments in the ICHR clearly are designed to deepen this regressive trend.

Illustrations are not lacking. The ICHR decided in July this year to publish all the titles of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan series on History and Culture of the Indian People, the General Editor of which was R.C. Majumdar, who is considered by Left historians to be a Hindu revivalist historian. Although this decision was taken during the tenure of former Chairperson S. Settar, there is little doubt that it may have been influenced by the BJP-led government in power.

The inclination towards fostering a democratic and secular mindset has been set aside in the recent appointments. As an observer put it, the BJP's slogan in education appears to be "forward to the primitive past."

Surpassing all this, however, is the nomination of K.G. Rastogi to the Selection Committee of the NCERT. In his 190-page autobiography published in 1998 and dedicated to the RSS, Rastogi devotes three chapters to his life in the RSS. Called *Aap Beeti* (My Life Experiences), the autobiography carries a foreword by RSS ideologue K.C. Sudarshan. In the section about the author, it is mentioned that Rastogi was an RSS *pracharak* for ten years. In one chapter, where he talks about his days with the RSS, he narrates how he learnt to use rifles, tommy guns, sten guns and hand grenades in the period following Partition. He was in Bharatpur at that time and was anointed the district security chief by the RSS – ostensibly to protect the lives of Hindus. Anti-socials and Kshatriyas were trained to take on the enemy.

Rastogi writes that in one such skirmish in a place called Puran Kaliyar near Hardwar, a beautiful woman was sighted in one particular house where killings were going on. Some of the attackers (read the Hindu mob) began to waver in their resolve and, unmindful of their objective, began to assert their rights over the woman. "Then an idea struck me. I threatened the attackers, even abused them and then shot dead the woman, who was the root cause behind the fight. I thought that I had killed two birds with one stone. Everyone was shocked at this extraordinary spectacle, but got back to their work." (page 46, *Aap Beeti* by K.G. Rastogi). Rastogi goes on to express his regret for having done this inhuman deed, but he does not stop to ponder why he could not have shot the attackers.

In another chapter, where he describes his first visit to the United States, he speaks glowingly of his late wife who "asked him to fulfil his needs in the period that he was away from her." This permission to act freely apparently helped him control his wayward senses. Sudarshan too highlights this particular statement by Rastogi's wife in his foreword to emphasise the sacrificing and noble character of Hindu women.

In another chapter titled "Professor Ho Hi Gaya" (I finally become a Professor), Rastogi records how one of his friends approached an expert in the selection panel to recommend his name for the post of a Hindi Professor. However, it appeared that the expert had already promised the post to another candidate. This was during the years Rastogi was at the NCERT. He served in the Council

between 1964 and 1988, and to that extent, he is no outsider.

After 1988, he went back to the RSS, apparently to serve as a full-time *pracharak*, only to resurface in 1999 as Joshi's nominee to the Selection Committee. Previous nominees include noted sociologist S.C. Dube and historian Bipan Chandra. As the Minister's nominee, he will have the clout to influence key appointments. His hand has apparently been detected in a number of top appointments, notably that of the Director, NCERT, and the Chairman, National Open School. Rastogi is also known to be the convener of the Akhil Bhartiya Vidya Bharati Shiksha Pratisthan, a self-proclaimed affiliate of the RSS in the field of education.

Rastogi's candid confessions have sent an expected tremor not only in the NCERT, but in other teaching and research institutions too. What academics within and outside the institution fear is that the Council's credentials would be used to push forth the very kind of curricula that were rejected by it in some States. It may be recalled that in early 1993, a National Steering Committee on textbook evaluation had, after considering the History, Hindi and Mathematics textbooks of Uttar Pradesh and those of the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan, found them full of inaccuracies, distortions and communal bias.

Ever since the new Director of the NCERT took over, there has been much talk about changes in the curriculum. A Curriculum Committee which has been set up received feedback from various departments in the Council, but has kept everybody ignorant about the nature of its deliberations. "It is not a confidential thing and does not call for this hush-hush attitude," said a senior faculty member.

Rastogi is reportedly advising the NCERT in designing a new curriculum. Academicians feel that he will, as a member of the vital Programme Advisory Committee, be able to push the Hindutva agenda in the field of education. The HRD Ministry plans to announce several new programmes over the next 100 days, including one on reviewing school curricula and making them "relevant to life".

Evidently, the criteria of competence has been set aside in Joshi's recent appointments, as also the inclination towards fostering a democratic and secular mindset. As a bemused observer puts it, the BJP's slogan in education, as in many other respects, appears to be "forward to the primitive past". ■

PROJECTS

An unfinished story

Started with high expectations by the Anthropological Survey of India in the mid-1980s, the People of India project would seem to be in need of a final push.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in New Delhi

THE first major survey of all the communities in India, The People of India project, conducted under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI), has become the subject of a controversy. The project, launched on October 2, 1985, was to have been completed in 1996 with the production of a corpus of 43 volumes. Under the terms of the agreement between the publishers and the ASI, the volumes should have been published between 1992 and 1996.

Sources in some quarters concerned said that the deadline had not been met owing to the play of various factional interests Work was slowed down deliberately, and the rising price of paper acted as a disincentive. The plan was to bring out first the volumes pertaining to the smaller States followed by the volumes on the larger ones Thirty volumes were published and 13 remained in various stages of completion. The two volumes, on Tamil Nadu and Chandigarh, were printed but were not released for two years because their prices had not been fixed.

However, according to Dr. K.S. Singh, former ASI Director-General and the architect of the POI project, at least five volumes went into multiple editions. He said that the publisher handling the volumes on western India reported that 300 copies of the volume on Rajasthan had been sold in one month. K.S. Singh told *Frontline* that several publishers went slow because of the uncertainty relating to the prices Work on three volumes, those on Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, were stopped because

S. MAHINSHA



The People of India project establishes the fact that there are few essential differences between Indian communities although they are divided on caste and religious lines.

there was no agreement with the publishers on prices. The volumes on Karnataka, Gujarat and Assam were in the final proof stage, and those on Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa were in the penultimate proof stage, while the volume on Madhya Pradesh was in an early proof stage, he said

K.S. Singh said that he had raised the problem of delays at the Advisory Committee meeting in June last year and moved a resolution stating that the publication process should be expedited. According to informed sources, the advisory committee has not met this year. It is learnt that the ASI headquarters in Calcutta is responsible for fixing prices. R.K. Bhattacharya, its Director, was unavailable for comment, but a source at the ASI headquarters told *Frontline* that the delay had occurred mostly because of an "overambitious editor" who was still looking for ethnographic material. He expressed fears that the data collected so far were becoming outdated because of the delays involved in editing and fieldwork. He said that the volume on Tamil Nadu was delayed because of the pricing policy; he held the particular editor responsible for the delay with regard to the other volumes.

The source said that the ASI was anxious about the delay and that the rising price of paper affected the pricing policy. The matter was being taken up with the Department of Culture, but he would not say how long it would take for a decision to come through. K.S. Singh, however, maintained that the ASI could decide the prices on its own and that the pricing agreement was between the ASI and the four publishers selected for the project. The Government had earned a good amount of money as royalty and there was no question of any resource crunch, he said, and added that the delay was entirely owing to the activities of vested interests.

THE POI was considered the most important of the 14 national projects identified by the ASI in 1985-86 as part of its seventh five-year plan. It identified 4,694 communities in terms of their cultural traits. Endogamy, occupation and perception defined a community. Each community derived its identity from its environment, resources, occupations and territory. K.S. Singh wrote: "This rootedness in the local eco-cultural system is an outstanding characteristic of our communities, no matter what religious label is attached to them."

The delay in publishing all the volumes amounted to a serious loss in sociological terms because of the intrinsic merit of the data which, among other things, show that the similarities among the various Indian communities are more prominent than the differences. The POI project is significant as it demystifies the diversity in the Indian context and establishes the fact that there are few essential differences between Indian communities although they are divided on caste and religious lines. It attempts to highlight the linkages among them and prove that there is a considerable level of homogenisation among communities in terms of morphological and genetic traits at the regional level.

As many as 775 traits concerning ecology, settlement, identity, food habits, social organisation, economy and occupation, linkages and the impact of change and development were studied. The percentage of traits shared by communities within a linguistic or cultural region was found to be high.

Within a region, barring tribal communities and certain localised occupational groups, there is remarkable homogeneity in physical types among other communities.

In Tamil Nadu, for instance, Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities share similar traits. A Tamil Brahmin has fewer traits in common with Brahmins in Western or Northern India. This marked a significant departure from H.H. Risley's classification of the upper castes into the Caucasoid type and the large sections of the population into the Proto-Australoid type.

The POI has estimated that Hindus form 76.4 per cent, Muslims 12.6 per cent, Christians 7.3 per cent, tribal religionists 8.3 per cent, Jains 2.2 per cent, Buddhists 2 per cent, Sikhs 2.8 per cent, Jews 0.2 per cent and Zoroastrians 0.19 per cent of the population.

The survey found that 87 communities followed Hinduism and Sikhism, 116 Hinduism and Christianity, 35 Hinduism and Islam, 21 Hinduism and Jainism, 29 Hinduism and Buddhism, and 94 Christianity and tribal religions. There were 16 communities that follow three religions. Forms of Hinduism include the worship of family and clan deities.

Significantly, the survey found that communities may be differentiated along religious lines but shared a very high percentage of traits. Hindus share 96.77 per cent of their traits with Muslims, 91.19 per cent with Buddhists, 88.99 per cent with Sikhs and 77.46 per cent with Jains. Muslims share 89.95 per cent traits with Sikhs and 91.18 per cent with Buddhists. The extent of Jain-Buddhist sharing of traits is 81.34 per cent.

K.S. Singh said: "When I wrote this seven years ago, no one believed it. The traits we share are far more than the traits we do not share. This large-scale sharing could be that most communities have emerged from the same ecological, ethnic, socio-cultural background, even though they later embraced different religions or other ways of life."

The POI project also found that only about 20 per cent of the communities in India follow a vegetarian diet. In 2,469 communities, men consume alcoholic drinks occasionally, while in 1,106 communities men consume alcohol regularly. In 1,037 communities, women consume alcohol occasionally. Smoking, tobacco-chewing and the use of snuff are widespread. The habit of betel-chewing is common to a large number of communities.

Rice is a more popular cereal than wheat. Except the Todas of the Nilgiris, the consumption of milk in tribal communities is a recent phenomenon. Bilingualism is widely prevalent. The survey revealed the existence of 12 new minor scripts.

The project engaged 470 scholars, of whom 245 were from outside the ASI. Twenty-six other institutions were involved. Investigators spent 24,880 days in the field and interviewed 21,536 people, including 5,353 women.

In a mood of optimism, K.S. Singh wrote: "By the end of the century, we should have a large corpus of material running into about 100 volumes covering the biological, linguistic and cultural profiles of the people of India." But today, the fate of the remaining volumes remains unknown.

Besides, "the diversities that have flourished in a state of relative cultural freedom" are threatened by the overemphasis of a homogenised, uniform and monolithic culture by certain obscurantist sections. Sociologist M.N. Srinivas wrote in the Foreword to the introductory volume of the POI project: "People are willing to accept different dance styles in different parts of the country, why cannot they accept different dietary habits?"

The findings of the POI project shatter several notions about differences among communities. It is important that the remaining volumes are published and the findings disseminated. ■

Between monetarism and Keynesianism

Robert Mundell and open economy macroeconomics.

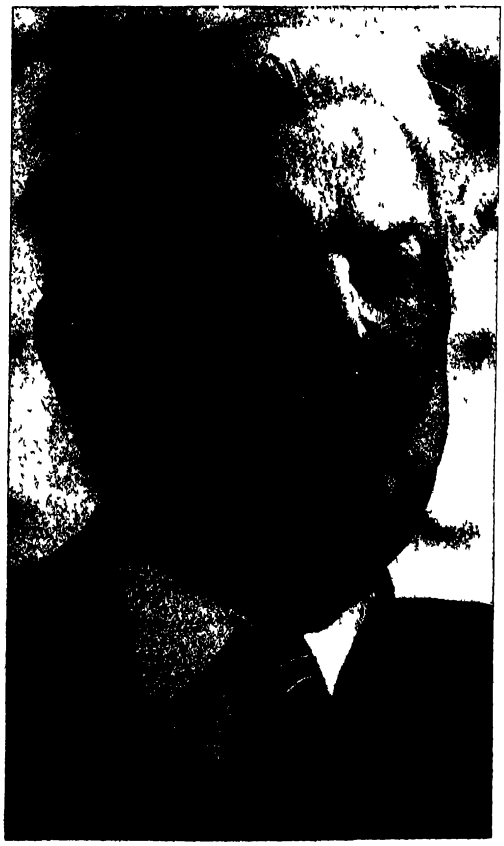
PRABHAT PATNAIK

ROBERT MUNDELL, this year's Nobel laureate in Economics, is best-known for his work on open economy macroeconomics in a world with capital mobility. One of his results, in particular, which was also arrived at by J. Marcus Fleming (hence the appellation "Mundell-Fleming model" under which this result has gained currency), was quite striking. This states that in a world with highly mobile capital flows and flexible exchange rates, fiscal policy becomes completely ineffective in influencing the level of activity in the economy. (Marcus Fleming is on the staff of the International Monetary Fund.)

The reasoning behind this result is simple and straightforward. If capital is highly mobile across countries, then no country can have an interest rate which is different from what prevails elsewhere. (Interest rate differentials were considered by him to be the major determinant of capital flows.) For any country, then, the interest rate is in effect given "from outside". Now the ratio of money income to money supply (or what is called the income velocity of circulation of money) usually varies with the interest rate, so that if the latter is given "from outside", then money income in the country must depend entirely on the level of money supply. At any given level of money wages, this level of money income implies a unique level of employment and output. It follows then that as long as money supply and money wages are given, output and employment get automatically fixed in a world where capital is highly mobile, and no amount of fiscal stimulus can possibly alter it.

Suppose, however, a government insists on expanding its fiscal deficit with the objective of increasing employment. Then, since any employment increase (necessarily associated with a rise in money income) would, with given money supply, create a shortage of money and a rise in interest rate, capital would flow in from outside, leading to an exchange rate appreciation, and a reduction in net exports. The reduction in net exports (that is, exports minus imports) in equilibrium would exactly match the rise in fiscal deficit; the effects of the two would cancel one another and employment would remain exactly where it was despite the rise in the fiscal deficit.

Mundell is located in the grey area between monetarism and Keynesianism... but even this degree of deviation from orthodoxy is anathema to the Nobel Committee.



ALASTAIR GRANT / AP

Robert Mundell.

Putting the result another way, in a world with high capital mobility and flexible exchange rates, there is no scope for an effective fiscal policy. Likewise, Mundell showed that in a world with fixed exchange rates and high capital mobility, there is no scope for an effective monetary policy: the interest rate is given "from outside" and money supply must adjust to the demand for money, for, if it did not, then the pressure on interest rate would bring in capital inflows, which, under a fixed exchange rate, would boost exchange reserves and make the requisite addition to money supply.

Such a high degree of capital mobility (an infinitely elastic supply of capital at the going interest rate) is of course an extreme case. If capital inflows are more sluggish, then there would be scope for using both fiscal and monetary policy, and it becomes possible to use the two in such a way that each tries to meet a particular objective: fiscal policy, for instance, can be used to achieve a particular level of activity and monetary policy to achieve a particular exchange rate.

Mundell wrote many more articles in this broad area, though none as startling as the Mundell-Fleming model. In addition, he wrote on optimum currency areas, that is, on the question: when should a set of currencies be linked to one another as one united currency (such as the "Euro")? One of his conclusions that is of some interest is that the currency area should be one over which there is free labour mobility, for, otherwise, unemployment in a particular region would be impossible to get rid of.

Even though the contemporary world, characterised by capital mobility, does represent the universe that Mundell was approximating, his open economy macroeconomics is too limited to shed much light upon it. It is limited in two ways: first, in all his models, whether capital flows respond sluggishly or with infinite elasticity to interest rate changes, they are a determinate function of the interest rate (and of other additional

variables that one might add). There is no scope, in other words, for the volatility of capital flows. Secondly, the role of expectations, in particular of expectations regarding exchange rate (or asset price) movements, is ignored. Two major features of the contemporary world which give rise to disequilibria do not figure therefore in Mundell's analysis (or indeed in any subsequent "mainstream" work that took off from Mundell). But he was one of the pioneers in this field, and no matter what assessment one makes of the significance of his work, the Mundell-Fleming model would certainly continue to be taught in any course on open economy macroeconomics.

ROBERT MUNDELL, however, was not an unalloyed monetarist, such as is the fashion these days, despite his location in Chicago. His analysis used the IS-LM curves (known to every undergraduate) which were devised by John Hicks as an exposition of Keynesianism in its relationship with the pre-Keynesian "Classics".

More important, Mundell's work, especially in the short-run context, recognised the possibility of involuntary unemployment (even though he put it down to wage-rigidity). In short, he can be intellectually located in the grey area between monetarism and Keynesianism, which is what one would expect a Canadian economist writing in 1963 (the date of the Mundell-Fleming model) to be. However, it is noteworthy that even this degree of deviation from orthodoxy is anathema to the Nobel Committee.

In the Nobel Prize citation for Robert Mundell, the committee refers to his assumption of "price rigidity" (which yields involuntary unemployment) as a "limitation" that was corrected by later writers. It uses his argument to set different objectives for monetary and fiscal policies as a justification to make the central bank free of government control (even though he was not arguing this). And its talk of the difficulties faced by temporarily-fixed, but adjustable, exchange rate regimes in a world with capital mobility, carries the suggestion that flexible rates are the answer, even though restrictions on capital mobility could overcome the problem equally well. Whether it honours an Amartya Sen or a Robert Mundell, the Nobel Committee is not without its own agenda. ■

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ACROSS BORDERS FOR A CAUSE: Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), a Brussels-based humanitarian group, has won this year's Nobel Peace Prize. The organisation, established in 1971, differs from many other organisations of its kind in that it acts independently of governments and often speaks out for the people who suffer. The Nobel Committee said that it selected the group from among 136 nominees. In making the choice, it cited the group's "pioneering work on several continents" and its outspokenness. Over the years, the organisation has assisted, among others, earthquake victims in Nicaragua, refugees in Cambodia and famine-affected people in Somalia. Recently, its volunteers served in Kosovo and East Timor. Medecins Sans Frontieres has [illegible] members working in local networks and 1,500 others, [illegible] factors, working in 80 countries. More than 20 of these countries are in zones of conflict. Here, volunteers of the organisation in Liberia.

The politics of reservations

The BJP-led Government's decision to include the Jats of Rajasthan in the backward classes list has caused the first breach in the covenant that the enumeration arrived at by the Mandal Commission and various States would not be seriously modified.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

FROM the moment the Mandal Commission recommendations were implemented it was foretold that an immediate consequence would be an unseemly rush among various communities for the appellation of backwardness. Clearly, all sections that might have feared being left behind in the race for status and power had reason to covet the relative privileges assured to those who met the criteria of social and educational backwardness.

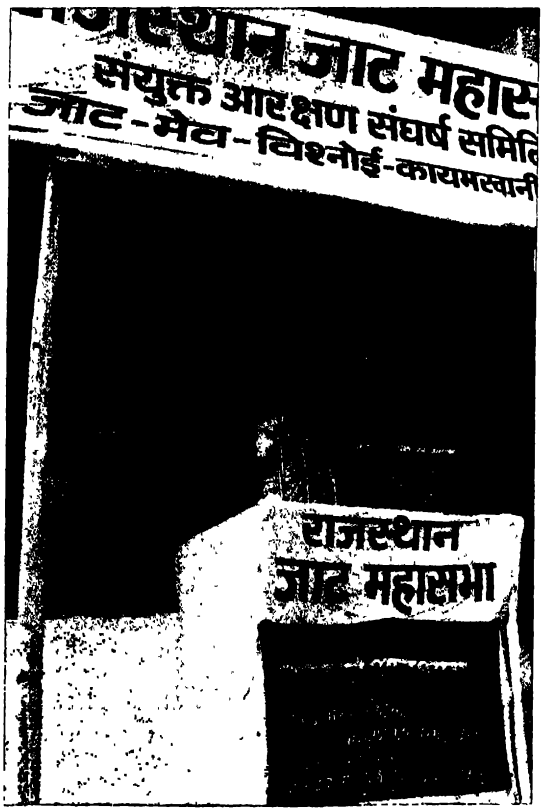
Part of the challenge of running an effective programme of affirmative action lay in resisting sectional pressure for the benefits that are associated with the tag of backwardness. There was, in other words, a tacit premise of restraint underlying the programme – a political compact that the enumeration of backward classes arrived at by the Mandal Commission and the periodically updated lists of the State governments would not be seriously modified.

Shortly after taking office on October 13, the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government committed the first breach in this covenant. Although a formal notification is yet to be issued, it is reliably learnt that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government has delivered with extreme alacrity on its campaign pledge to confer the backward class status on the Jats of Rajasthan. It was a demand that had loomed large over the election campaign, though its precise impact is still debatable.

Indications are that the BJP did succeed in winning over a large section of the Jat community from their traditional allegiance to the Congress(I) by assuring them that the demand for backward class status would be met. Yet, despite a substantial desertion of a traditional constituency, the Congress(I) did not really suffer a serious erosion in its share of the popular vote. Evidently, the defection of the Jat vote was made good by an accretion of other social constituencies to the ranks of the Congress(I). The BJP's sweeping triumph in Rajasthan is in this reckoning attributable less to the Jat factor than to the recruitment to its cause of voters who had remained uncommitted in the 1998 Assembly elections.

In the moment of its triumph, though, the BJP did not stop to ponder over these subtleties. It had under consideration a report by the National Commission on Backward Classes (NCBC), dating back to November 1997, which had recommended that the Jats of Rajasthan did merit the benefits of the special protections available under the Mandal Commission recommendations. This was one among the many advisories submitted by the NCBC, recommending the inclusion of 372 distinct communities in the backward classes list. Since the political motivation behind accepting the recommendation on the Rajasthan Jats alone would have been obvious, the Government, it is reliably learnt, has decided to ratify the NCBC findings in respect of 130 communities. As for the rest, they are understood to be still "under consideration".

Section 9(2) of the Act of Parliament setting up the NCBC stipulates that the recommendations of the Commission shall "ordinarily" be binding on the Central Government. This effectively removes the scope for selective implementation of the NCBC's recommendations, though it does still allow for delays. The pace of the Government's deliberations could in each case be carefully calibrated to a calculation of the political dividend that could be earned from cultivating a particular community.



G. L. SUNGER

At a rally of the Jat Mahasabha in Jaipur in August.

Obviously unnerved by the election outcome and the Central Government's alacrity, the Rajasthan State Government led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot lost little time in announcing its intention to bring Jats into the State list of backward classes. This really is the more substantive achievement for the sustained campaign that the community has run for the last one year. The Mandal Commission recommendations only pertain to the stagnant pool of employment opportunities in the Central Government sector. But the State Government list has a bearing on the crucial area of reservations in local bodies.

Panchayat institutions were once an important locus for the projection of Jat power. But once reservations for the backward classes became an

element of official policy, Jats found themselves isolated from the positions of dominance in local bodies. More than access to public employment, this was the crucial factor impelling the Rajasthan Jats towards the path of militancy in their quest for the backward status.

In quickly giving in to the demand after an adverse electoral outcome, the Congress(I) may have undermined its own longer-term strategy of cultivating other social constituencies to substitute for the Jat desertions. The capitulation also serves notice that the policy of affirmative action is susceptible to lobbying pressures and power politics. The Central Government had the shroud of legitimacy for its decision in the recommendation of the NCBC, while the State Government had none. In fact, the growing politicisation of a judicial function recently had a casualty in the resignation of the Chairman of the Rajasthan State Backward Classes Commission, Justice R.S. Verma. His grievance was simple: when he was engaged in the elaborate process of adjudication over the Jats' claim for inclusion in the backward classes list, Prime Minister Vajpayee had during election campaign in Sikar, Rajasthan, seemingly already settled the question in favour of the petitioners.



R V MOORTHY

Justice P.K. Shyam Sundar, Chairman of the National Commission on Backward Classes.

The situation in Rajasthan today is replete with anomalies. The State Backward Classes Commission is considering applications from a diversity of communities, including Bishnois, Meos, Kayamkanis and Sindhi Muslims. In their agitational phase, Jats had sought to make common cause with these other communities that seemed to have a somewhat better case for inclusion in the list of backward classes. But political volubility ensured that the Jat case gained acceptance, while all the others languish in neglect. When asked about this situation, Gehlot reaffirmed his resolve to have a speedy consideration of these cases by the Backward Classes Commission. Of course, this required at the minimum that the Chairman of the Commission would withdraw his resignation. Failing that, a new chairman would have to be minated and the work of the commissio begun all over again.

ustice P.K. Shyam Sundar, Ch man of the NCBC, insists on retaining he confidentiality of his advisory opinions until they are actually implemented. This, he says, is a minimum requirement of administrative propriety. And since his advice on the Jats has not yet been formally implemented, the premises and assumptions on which it has been based are yet unknown. Shyam Sundar did reveal, though, that the relative social inequities that the Jats of Rajasthan confronted were a decisive factor in moulding his opinion. It is not so much the actual condition of the community that was critical, but its relative social position in relation to dominant communities such as Brahmins and Rajputs.

This is one among many criteria that have been used in the past to determine the degree of social debility that a community faces. The reality of affirmative action in India today is of a multiplicity of concepts contending for influence in the categorisation of social classes. The four southern States and Maharashtra have adopted a taxonomic pattern that is rather expansive in its coverage. Further, since backward class movements and compensatory reservations have a relatively long genealogy in these States, they all have fairly stable and well-accepted enumerations of the beneficiary groups.



GOPAL SUNGER

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot.

In stark contrast are the Hindi-speaking States in the west, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and the eastern States of West Bengal and Orissa – where the term "backward classes" has had no significant role in state policy. The Mandal Commission brought this category to the forefront, but its taxonomy of classes was unfortunately based on the economic conditions of households as reported in the 1931 Census. This was a rather dubious recourse that the Commission had to take, because the Central Government effectively outlawed caste as a census category in 1951. Though the census enumeration in 1951 did collect data on caste and its social and economic correlates, it was not analysed in terms of these parameters on account of an aversion to caste in the early Nehruvian years.

The first Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar confronted this rather ambivalent situation with an excess of bravery: "In the absence of reliable facts and figures, the only course open to us was to rely on the statistics available from the various Governments and the previous census reports, and to go by the general impressions of Government officers, leaders of public opinion and social workers." In certain cases, the Commission had no data at all and was compelled to take a decision on "the strength of the name of the community only, on the principle of giving the benefit of the doubt". And though the Kalelkar Commission shared prevalent reservations about utilising caste and community as markers of social distinctions, it was absolutely clear that it would be "difficult to avoid caste in the present prevailing conditions".

The Kalelkar report was tabled in Parliament in 1956 and it was accompanied by a scathing official note from the

Government deprecating the use of caste as a category. The Government noted that caste was "the greatest hindrance in the way of our progress toward an egalitarian society" and warned that the recognition of specified castes as backward may serve to maintain and perpetuate the existing distinctions on the basis of caste". The Government said that the criteria evolved by the Commission, when they were not exclusively dependent on caste, were "obviously vague".

The Kalelkar report was summarily thrown out of court with the observation that "further investigations will have to be undertaken so that the deficiencies that have been noticed in the findings of the Commission are made good and the problem is solved..." There was, in other words, a tacit recognition that a problem existed which called for solution.

The Mandal Commission, which submitted its report in 1980, was the next attempt at the Central level to address this problem. But the data base that it used was as infirm and uncertain as ever. In clearing the way for the implementation of the Mandal recommendations in 1992, the Supreme Court ruled in the historic case of *Indira Sawhney versus the Union of India*, that the Central government and all State governments should set up permanent commissions to review the list of beneficiaries continually. As Justice T.K. Thommen put it: "Identification of backwardness is an ever-continuing process of inclusion and exclusion. Classes of citizens entitled to the constitutional protection of reservations must be constantly and periodically identified for their inclusion and for the exclusion of those who do not qualify. To allow the undeserved to benefit by reservation is to deny protection to those who are meant to be protected."

The proposed commissions were envisaged as quasi-judicial bodies which would conduct their deliberations in an environment free of political influence – a condition unlikely to be met in the best of circumstances. Further, the Supreme Court did not seem to give much attention to the possibility of a conflict between Central- and State-level assessments. This is an infirmity which has been reinforced by the default of successive Ministries at the Centre on the fundamental obligation to define norms for identifying backward classes. The recent decisions of the BJP-led Government show how in the growing crisis of ambiguity that shrouds reservations policy, expediency is likely to triumph finally. ■

■ RESERVATIONS

A denial of rights

A committee set up by the Tamil Nadu government to study the working of the reservation system for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes finds that these oppressed people have by and large been denied the benefits of the statutory provision.

S. VISWANATHAN

EVEN 50 years after its introduction, the statutory reservation for the Scheduled Castes (S.Cs) and the Scheduled Tribes (S.Ts) in government service has not improved to any significant extent the status of these oppressed sections of Indian society. The experience of Tamil Nadu, which has a history of struggles since pre-Independence days against caste-based discrimination, is a case in point. Dalit organisations in the State often complain that the provision is implemented in a half-hearted manner and that the representation of the S.Cs and the S.Ts in government service falls short of the levels (18 per cent and 1 per cent respectively) fixed on the basis of their share in the State's population.

For the first time, a committee appointed by the State government has gone into various aspects of reservation for the S.Cs and the S.Ts. After a detailed study of the data it collected, the committee concluded that the S.Cs and the S.Ts did not have due representation in government services. The committee has identified the reasons for this and recommended measures for the effective implementation of the reservation provision.

Dalit organisations complain that the representation of the S.Cs and the S.Ts in government service falls short of the levels fixed on the basis of their share in the population.

THE study has brought into focus the indifference of successive administrations to the task of ensuring that the benefits of the statutory provision reached the underprivileged. For instance, although the Constitution provides for "due" representation for the S.Cs and the S.Ts in government services, it took years to determine the quotas for the two sections. In the bureaucracy's reckoning, the interests of the existing administrative pattern and the existing staff take precedence over the constitutional right of the S.Cs and the S.Ts. No department has evolved a foolproof system for the proper implementation of reservation. No study has been made on whether, in a multi-stage administrative system, reservation at the entry point alone can ensure due representation for these sections in subsequent stages as well.

According to the study, the 1989 and 1993 Government Orders for special appointments in an attempt to clear the backlog of vacancies reserved for the S.Cs and the S.Ts have not been enforced in a fair manner. At least three State G.Os and two Central Government directives on the subject have been ignored by the majority of departments. Of these, State G.O. 1352, dated July 27, 1989, prohibited the administration from shifting unfilled vacancies that were allotted to the S.Cs and the S.Ts to the "open competition" pool; it ordered a special recruitment drive to fill these vacancies. While G.O. 167, dated July 20, 1993, called for a special recruitment drive a second time around in order to clear the backlog, the G.O. dated November 3, 1993 directed heads of departments, chief executive officers of public undertakings and heads of universities to send annual reports to the Department of Adi Dravida and Tribal People's Welfare on the implementation of the S.C.-S.T. reservation system. The administration also ignored two Central G.Os, one of which dates back to 1952 and relates to vacancies that come under the

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"single posts" category and vacancies that are small in number. The order suggested that in such cases, vacancies of similar grades be grouped together for the purpose of reservation. A 1984 G.O. directed that if qualified hands were not available among the S.C. and S.T. candidates, some of the prescribed qualifications may be relaxed if the candidates were otherwise found suitable. This too was ignored.

The study has found no justification for the general impression that the posts reserved for the S.Cs and the S.Ts remain unfilled for want of qualified candidates.

The study has identified more than 15 departments and posts reserved for the S.Cs and the S.Ts that remain unfilled. The departments include Collegiate Education (posts of principal, professor and lecturer), Technical Education (principal, heads of departments and lecturers), Social Welfare (civil assistant surgeons, Siddha practitioners), the State Secretariat (secretaries of different categories, personal assistants, private secretaries), Revenue (deputy collectors) and universities (professors and readers).

Even the G.O. that requires each department to furnish to the Director of Adi Dravida and Tribal People's Welfare particulars pertaining to S.C. and S.T. employees every year has often been flouted. A reminder from the Chief Secretary and the appointment of a monitoring committee by the government, however, improved the situation.

The level of representation of the S.Cs falls much short of their quota in Category A, the highest in terms of salary and perks, and is, unsurprisingly, slightly above the 18 per cent mark in Category D, the lowest. In the case of the S.Ts, the situation is still worse – their representation is less than the stipulated 1 per cent.

THE study has been hampered by the failure of certain departments, such as the Department of Education and institutions such as aided schools and colleges and local bodies, which together account for over seven lakh posts representing about 50 per cent of the total number of jobs in public services, to send in particulars. Of the 141 government departments, 36 did not provide particulars.

The study reveals how the provision that reservation is applicable only to direct appointment could rob Dalits of their legitimate share in government services. The administration either finds ingenious ways to circumvent existing rules or frames new rules to manipulate direct appointments by limiting them to "substantive vacancies". Even in the case of posts meant for direct appointment, vacancies are sometimes filled through promotion. The appointment of temporary or daily-wage employees and the regularisation of their services later has been a way to by-pass reservation. Filling vacancies with personnel on deputation is yet another means. All this shows how constitutional rights and Directive Principles are sabotaged by using flimsy service rules and regulations.

The study has found no justification for the general impression that the posts reserved for the S.Cs and the S.Ts remain unfilled for want of qualified candidates, except perhaps in the case of some high-level posts. For instance, there are 2,459 engineering graduates belonging to the S.Cs on the live registers of the State's employment exchanges. Nothing could be farther from the truth than the claim that there were no S.C. applicants for the posts of police constables, for which the minimum qualification is a pass in the 10th standard. No proper study has been made of the availability or otherwise of suitable candidates.

Special recruitment drives, detailed advertisements for jobs, reservation in the matter of promotions, direct appointment to additional posts, and an amendment to the provision that reservation is applicable only to groups of 10 vacancies are some of the suggestions that have emerged from the study to clear the backlog of unfilled vacancies. Other suggestions are direct appointment for a minimum of 50 per cent of the posts and continued monitoring of the reservation system.

What the exhaustive exercise undertaken by the government-appointed committee has sought to drive home is the fact that no amount of legislative measures and executive orders can put an end to discrimination against the weaker sections and correct centuries-old distortions and imbalances unless they are backed by the political will to beat back resistance from vested interests in an upper-caste dominated bureaucracy. ■

The terms of trade

The battle lines over the agenda in Seattle become clearer, but India's position on many specific issues is

THOMAS ABRAHAM
recently in Lausanne

A TWO-DAY meeting of Trade Ministers from 25 countries including India in the last week of October in Lausanne, Switzerland, failed to agree on an agenda for the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle. From the outset it was clear that the arguments on the scope of the negotiations would not be resolved at short order, and the Ministers themselves did little to disguise the fact that they had not succeeded in narrowing their differences.

As WTO members prepare for Seattle, there are numerous differences within the developing countries as well as between the developed and developing countries. The immediately evident disagreement is between the United States, backed by the Cairns group of agricultural produce-exporting countries on the one hand, and Europe and Japan on the other, over the extent to which trade in agriculture should be liberalised.

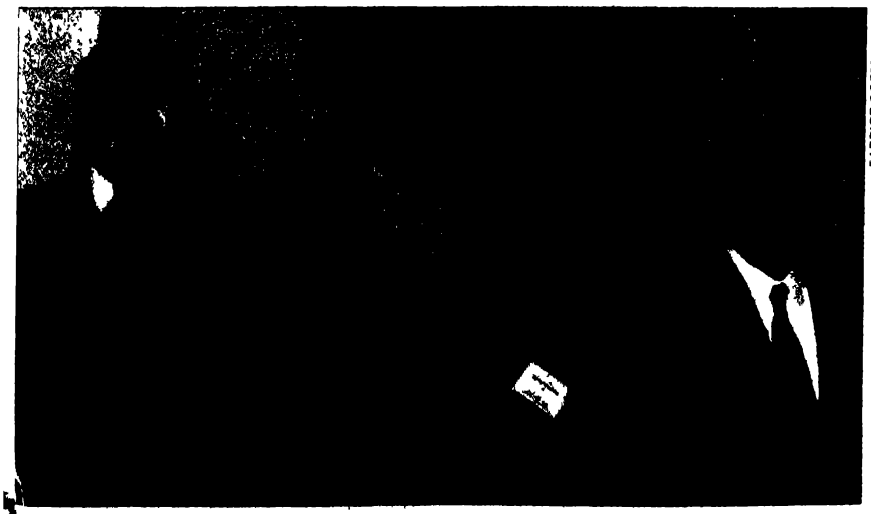
Earlier this year the U.S. made it clear that it regarded the removal of barriers to its agricultural exports a major goal. Agriculture is one of the most export-dependent sectors of the U.S. economy, and according to one U.S. government estimate, the produce from one out of every three acres is exported. The U.S. is keen to see tariffs on agricultural imports reduced, or even eliminated, worldwide, and wants to negotiate an end to export subsidies and agricultural support programmes in other countries, particularly in the countries of the European Union (E.U.). As U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky told a press conference in Washington, during the new round of negotiations the U.S. will seek "very aggressive reform".

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The U.S. argues that subsidised exports from the countries of the E.U. make it difficult for U.S. farm produce to find markets overseas, and that the subsidies and financial support that E.U. farmers enjoy make it difficult for U.S. agricultural produce to compete in Europe. The E.U., on the other hand, is reluctant to negotiate on the kind of radical changes that the U.S. demands. Agriculture is a sensitive subject in the E.U. countries, where farmers are heavily subsidised. They have been strident in their protest whenever subsidies have been under threat. Although the E.U. is committed to the long-term reform of its agricultural price support and subsidy regime, it feels that it cannot make any radical changes within the time-frame that the U.S. expects.

Japan, which also has a protected agricultural system, is unhappy about opening itself up to imports, and is with the E.U. in opposing the U.S. on the issue. The U.S. would like commitments for radical reform to be written into the agenda of Seattle, while the E.U. has said that the extent of liberalisation in agriculture is something to be negotiated there.

Another point of disagreement between the U.S. and the E.U. is over the inclusion of issues such as foreign investment in the agenda. While the E.U. and Japan are keen on having the WTO formulate minimum rules for investment, the U.S. has refused to agree to this. With attempts to negotiate a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) having failed, the E.U. and Japan are keen to use the WTO as a forum to negotiate rules to govern investment.



FABRICE COFFRINI / AP

European Union Commissioner for Trade Pascal Lamy, Swiss Federal Council and Minister for Economic Affairs Pascal Couchepin, U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky and Japan's Minister for International Trade and Industry Takeshi Fukaya in Lausanne, Switzerland, on October 25.

BUT there are two crucial non-trade areas on which the U.S. and the E.U. agree, which the developing countries have unitedly opposed: labour standards and the environment. The U.S. and the E.U. are keen to make labour and the environment an integral part of the WTO agenda. They wish to see that countries respect "minimum labour standards" for the goods they export. The U.S. has presented this concern for labour standards as part of its desire to see that the benefits of trade are shared by all, and to ensure that free trade does not lead to the exploitation of labour.

The developing countries, on the other hand, see this concern for the poor as nothing more than an attempt to deprive them of the one area in which they enjoy an advantage over the developed

world – cheap labour. They fear that the West will use this issue as an excuse to erect barriers to their exports. The developing countries have said that labour standards were a matter for the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and that the WTO should have nothing to do with it.

Similarly, on the matter of the environment, the U.S. and the E.U. have said that they wish to bring in rules to ensure that the expansion of trade does not lead to environmental degradation. But the developing countries see this as yet another attempt to bring in protectionism through the back door. Both the U.S. and the E.U. are desperate to include these two non-trade issues on the agenda in some form or another, and it is clear that Seattle will see a major clash on this issue.



RAMESH SHARMA

Commerce and Industry Minister Murasoli Maran.

THE Lausanne meeting enabled India to spell out its own position. Commerce Minister Murasoli Maran, making a foray into the world of multilateral trade, made it clear that India's main objective in Seattle would be to set right the inequities that had become apparent in the implementation of the Uruguay Round.

Maran said: "Some of the Uruguay Round agreements carry built-in imbalances that have come to light even more dramatically during their implementation. Far from favouring the developing countries, they have imposed even more onerous obligations on them." He pointed out that exports from developing countries faced barriers in the form of anti-dumping and subsidy investigations. "Whenever we show competitiveness in some products, trade defence measures, including anti-dumping and subsidy investigations are initiated, effectively crippling our export effort." Maran also spoke of the limited success textile exporting countries had received in their efforts to get the developed countries to lower import restrictions.

India has suggested a number of amendments and changes to the rules with regard to anti-dumping and subsidies as well as an immediate end to barriers to textile exports. The U.S., which has been less than favourable to these proposals, has said that some of them amount to a renegotiation of the Uruguay Round agreements, which it was opposed to. But the E.U. and Japan, whose Trade Ministers Maran met in Lausanne, were more positive with regard to India's concerns. Maran referred to this difference in attitude when he said that India had been "encouraged by the positive response of some countries", but "extremely concerned by the apparently negative attitude taken by others".

The other issue that Maran repeatedly stressed was that India was not going to be "bulldozed" into accepting discussions on labour standards and the environment, or on any issue not directly linked to trade. "We are strongly opposed to non-trade issues which only have tenuous links with trade being brought into the agenda of the WTO."

While the broad thrust of India's position has been set out, it is clear that there are many areas that the government has yet to make up its mind on. For example, the U.S. is keen to put e-commerce on the agenda of the new round in order to ensure that the current practice of having no tariff or other barriers on transactions through the Internet, continues. The U.S. is also keen to extend the existing Information Technology Agreement (ITA).

India has not expressed any strong opposition with regard to these issues, and will in all likelihood use them as bargaining chips in the run-up to Seattle. It is possible to foresee a situation where India agrees to support these issues in the negotiations, in return for U.S. support on matters of implementation. Similarly, India has hinted that it is willing to negotiate reductions on industrial tariffs in return for favourable changes with regard to anti-dumping measures and so on.

Unlike in the case of previous trade negotiations, New Delhi seems determined to seek a political consensus on the issues and also go in for consultations with industry representatives and others concerned before reaching a final decision on its approach to issues in Seattle. As Maran told Indian journalists after the conference, the Government did not want a repeat of what happened during the Uruguay round, when there was little consultation within the country on the issues at stake, and Parliament was presented the final package as a *fait accompli*. ■

■ TRADE ISSUES

BIPLAB DASGUPTA

SOME time in the early 1980s President Ronald Reagan, the champion of a "world without trade barriers", faced a serious dilemma. The U.S. automobile industry, facing severe competition from Japanese car manufacturers and making huge losses, urged the President to impose controls on the import of Japanese cars. If Reagan acceded to the demand it would have meant going against his avowed stand, while a rejection of the demand was certain to ruin the U.S. car manufacturers who were his staunchest political allies and biggest source of funding.

He conferred with his Cabinet colleagues and sought a formula that would help avoid imposing import barriers and at the same time save the domestic car industry from losses. Vice-President George Bush told the President: "We're all for free enterprise, but would any of us find fault if Japan announced, without any request from us, that they were going to *voluntarily* reduce their export of autos to America?" "What a great idea!" everyone in the room chorused. The President was impressed.

Reagan shot off a letter to the Japanese Foreign Minister: "Our Republican administration firmly opposed import quotas but strong sentiment was building in Congress among Democrats to impose them. I don't know whether I would be able to stop them," he said, reflecting the mood of despondency of U.S. car manufacturers. Then followed the great idea: "But I think if you *voluntarily* set a limit on your automobile exports to this country, it would probably head off the bills pending in Congress and there wouldn't be any mandatory quotas."

This was followed by intense diplomatic pressure, at the end of which was born a new type of non-tariff barrier (NTB) which eventually came to be known as the Voluntary Export Restraint (VER) agreement. Japan "voluntarily" agreed not to sell more than a certain number of cars in the U.S. market. On its part, the U.S. refrained from imposing import controls on Japanese cars as the threat of competition and extinction disappeared and controls were no longer felt necessary.[1]

Apparently, the U.S. administration found no conflict between preaching free

1. Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1990, pp. 253-55.

Control through coercion

The rich Western countries may propose non-tariff barriers and other protectionist measures in various guises at the Seattle meeting in order to save their domestic industry from competition.

market competition and practising protectionism, and audaciously describing as voluntary the action taken by its competitors in order to protect its own domestic producers.[2]

BY 1989, 236 VERs had been identified by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), of which 134 were directed against East Asian countries which were busy "creating comparative advantage" for themselves in sunrise industries – electronics and consumer durables. Sixty of these VERs were in food and agricultural products, 27 in electronic goods and components and 50 in steel produced by competitors.[3] Although the Marrakesh agreement of 1994 is formally opposed to VER, this is a grey area. Fear has been expressed, even by international organisations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), that such formal de-recognition would drive VERs underground and informal market-sharing arrangements, which are part of the culture of multinational companies (MNCs), would take their place.[4]

Voluntary Export Restraint is but one example of the kind of trade restriction rich Western countries practise against their competitors. As this brief account shows, trade restrictions aimed at keeping the exports of Japan and Third World countries away from European and U.S. markets took various forms. While GATT argued for a reduction in tariffs, one NTB after another came to be erected in the West, along with heavy doses of subsidies where necessary, which allowed their non-competitive agriculture and textile and other industries to survive.

One such much-talked-about NTB is the multi-fibre arrangement (MFA), which imposes country-wise quota restrictions on Japanese and Third World textile and garment exports. Its origins, as in the case of VER, lie in the fear of Japanese competition: Japan's admission to GATT in 1960 led to a serious threat to the West's out-of-date and inefficient garment and textiles industry. The formal justification for such trade barriers was the fear of disruption of the well-ordered global market (presumably under the hegemony of Westerns MNCs) by cheap sources of supply. The MFA was renewed every three or four years. Beginning with textiles, the MFA extended in due course

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to synthetics, silk blends, vegetable fibres and to almost all kinds of fibre. [5]

While the Marrakesh agreement provides for the winding up of the MFA, such withdrawal, to use GATT/World Trade Organisation (WTO) jargon, has been "back-loaded". That is, unlike the phasing out of withdrawal of restrictions in the case of other commodities, for textiles the pace set would be rather slow as the interests of the rich Western nations are at stake. While 51 per cent of textile imports would be liberalised in three phases in a period of seven years, the liberalisation of the remaining 49 per cent would be postponed until the very last phase, between 2002 and 2005.[6] Further, although five years have passed since the Marrakesh agreement, there has been little visible liberalisation in this area; in fact, in the name of "transitional safeguards" more obstacles have been put in the way of Third World exports. There is widespread fear that at the end of the 10-year period in 2005, the MFA might be extended, given the intensity of lobbying in the U.S. and Europe by their own textile interests.[7]

Even if this fear turns out to be unnecessary and a large slice of the Western textile market does indeed become open to Third World exports, it is not clear how such gain from trade would be distributed among them. It is not known whether India would gain or lose from the disbanding of the MFA. While some people, particularly political figures who represented India at the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations, are prone to suggest astronomical figures for potential textile exports after 2005, no one has done any respectable econometric study of the possible distribution of gains, particularly the proportion that would accrue to India. Some people even fear that in a no-quota regime India would be worse off as its exports will have to compete with cheaper exports from sources such as Bangladesh and with high-quality products from East Asia and South-East Asia.

While the VER agreement and the MFA were prompted by the desire to protect old and decrepit Western industries that would not survive free global competition, measures such as Voluntary Import Enhancement (VIE) coerced the countries concerned to agree "voluntarily" to provide U.S. and European multinationals access to their markets in diverse fields such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and telecommunications. The country concerned pledged to leave a share of the domestic market in those fields to Western MNCs. In the case of Japan, such market reservations were agreed upon following what came to be known as Structural Impediments Initiative (SII) talks with the U.S.[8] For instance, one-fifth of the Japanese market for semi-conductors was assured for U.S. MNCs. [9]

The U.S. found yet another way of gaining access to the Japanese market, which it could never have achieved by following the logic of free competition. In a desperate bid to reduce its trade deficit with Japan of around $50 billion, the U.S. forced Japan to sign the Plaza Accord in 1985 and the Louvre Accord the following year. These required Japan to overvalue the yen and hence the prices of its

2 Patrick Low, *Trading Free – The GATT and the U.S Trade Policy*, A Twentieth Century Fund Book, New York, 1995, p 117
3 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
4 UNCTAD, *The Outcome of the Uruguay Round. An Initial Assessment*, UNCTAD, Geneva, 1994, p. 63
5 Ibid. pp. 107-108.
6 Ibid., pp. 117-118; Development Committee, 1994, op.cit, p. 75.
7 Jeffrey J. Schott, *The Global Trade Negotiations: What Can Be Achieved?* Institute of International Economics, Washington D C , 1990, pp. 56-57; UNCTAD, 1994., op.cit., p. 127.
8. Low, op.cit., p. 92; Jagdish Bhagwati, *Political Economy and International Economics*, edited by Douglas A. Irwin, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, p. 179.
9. Kazuhiko Okuda, "Japan's Perception of NAFTA", pp. 171-183, in Jayant Lele & Kwasi Ofori-Yeboah (eds.), *Unravelling the Asian Miracle: Explorations in Development Strategies, Geopolitics and Regionalism*, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1996.

exports. [10]

OTHER trade control measures were taken either to restrain imports or to gain access to the markets of other countries. For instance, Japan was threatened with an anti-dumping suit in 1985; the move was, however, withdrawn when Japan agreed to give 20 per cent of the semi-conductor market to U.S. MNCs.[11] In several cases Super 301 – Section 301 of the U S. Trade Act – was used to pressure the trading partner to agree to a VER. 'Safeguards' against alleged damage to the country's economy caused by imports, which form part of the GATT framework, have been used to evade from GATT obligations.[12] Up to 1993, 151 such safeguard actions were taken, of which 136 were taken by the rich countries [13] Anti-dumping measures have been repeatedly used as protectionist action against cheaper and more efficiently produced foreign articles in the case of steel, automobiles and semi-conductors, or to coerce them to enter into VERs.[14]

One major unintended consequence of VIE and the Plaza Accord was the economic transformation of South-East Asia, particularly Thailand and Malaysia, to which a large amount of Japanese capital moved now. To avoid the quota under the MFA, South Korean capital moved into Bangladesh and established a modern garment industry, which in a short time became the highest foreign exchange earner for that country after direct remittances. In all these cases, control remained firmly in the hands of the East-Asian MNCs; machinery, raw material, technology and management were supplied by them, while the host country contributed its name and supplied unskilled labour.[15]

Super 301 gives the U.S. President the authority to retaliate against a country that harms U.S. commercial interests through "unreasonable" and "unjustifiable" trade practices. What exactly is "unreasonable" or "unjustifiable" is determined by the U.S. The procedure followed resembles the functioning of a criminal court where the government acts as the prosecutor, the judge and the jury, while the 'guilty' party is summoned by declaring their names in a "hit list" prepared under this section. Once the name of a country appears on the "hit list", the former is expected to rectify the offences that form the basis of such summons within a stipulated period of time.[16] Although one major justification for the establishment of the WTO was that such unilateral actions would be forgone and disputes settled multilaterally through the new body, this has not happened. The unilateral Super 301 continues along with the multilateral Dispute Settlement Board of the WTO, the former overriding the latter. The U.S. has passed a law that states explicitly that in case of a conflict between the WTO and U.S. laws, the latter would prevail.[17]

The rich countries of the West are for free trade and competition as long as the outcome is in their favour, but in case of a conflict between the ideals of free trade and their domestic interests they will resort to protectionist measures. Further, they manipulate several GATT and WTO provisions that are ostensibly intended to protect the weak countries, in order to make these provisions work in their favour.

WHAT this shows is that the rich countries of the West are for free trade and competition as long as the outcome is in their favour, but in case of a conflict between the ideals of free trade and their domestic interests they will resort to protectionist measures. Further, they skilfully manipulate several GATT and WTO provisions that are there ostensibly to protect the weak countries, in order to make these provisions work in their favour and against Third World exports. The anti-dumping measures & safeguards constitute an example. In recent years, marine exports from India have been banned in Europe on the grounds of hygiene while the *ghagras* (skirts) of Jaipur have been banned in the U.S. as the fabric is considered inflammable. Rules to decide what is not environment-friendly, what is justified trade restriction, what is fair trade, which subsidies are production- and trade-distorting and so on, are framed with the interests of Western producers in mind. While developed countries are keen to reduce tariff levels for understandable reasons, a similar interest is missing in the case of non-trade barriers that they themselves operate. Even taking tariff alone into account, one finds that while the average level of tariff has been brought down in developed countries, the "peak" tariff rates have remained, particularly in areas in which poor countries are likely to benefit, such as textiles, leather and agro-industrial products.

The rich countries are now asking for a new, millennium round of trade negotiations, in which they are keen to introduce several new topics, such as those relating to the universalisation of investment and competition policies in electronic commerce and government procurement, and of labour and environment standards. Some of these are likely to be discussed at the four-day WTO ministerial-level meeting beginning on November 30 in Seattle. The rich countries are likely to propose NTBs and other protectionist measures in various guises, keeping in view the lack of cohesion and political will among Third World nations. ■

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10 Ibid , pp 176-78
11. Ibid , pp 176-78
12. UNCTAD, op cit., p 41, John H Jackson, "Safeguards and Adjustment Policies", pp 183-232, Chapter 8, in Robert M Stern (ed.), *The Multilateral Trading System Analysis and Options for Change*, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, New York, 1993, pp 183-191
13. UNCTAD, op cit , p 59-60
14. UNCTAD, op cit , p.65, Low, op cit , pp 78-86
15. Development Committee, Report of the 46th meeting, 1993, World Bank, Washington, p 92,, Robert Wade, "Selective Industrial Policies in East Asia: Is the Asian Miracle Right?" in Albert Fishlow, Catherine Gwin, Stephen Haggard, Dani Rodrik & Robert Wade (eds.), *Miracle or Design: Lessons from the East Asian Experience*, Overseas Development Council, Policy Essays No. 11, Washington D C , 1994, Chapter 2, pp 55-80, p. 67
16. Low, op.cit., p. 61
17. Low, op cit , pp. 63-64, 89-91.

Winding down to Seattle

Although no agreement on an agenda incorporating a new round of negotiations could be arrived at in Lausanne, the idea of such an agenda is winning support even among some developing countries. Will the transition from opposition to acquiescence which led up to the inequities in the Uruguay Round be repeated in Seattle?

C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

AS the debate on the agenda of the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle nears resolution, the discussions appear to be following a course similar to the negotiations which led up to the Uruguay Round agreement. The debate began with most developing countries opposed to an agenda proposing a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. But it is likely to end with a consensus which incorporates such a proposal.

The grounds for developing country opposition to a new round were clear. Agreeing to such a round amounts to transforming the mandated review and renegotiation of the agreements in the contentious areas of agriculture and services into a set of wholly new negotiations with a wholly new agenda.

The developing countries did want the review to be expanded to include an appraisal of the impact of the Uruguay Round on their trade performance and prospects, in order to assess whether the benefits promised from agreements in that round were being realised.

But going beyond this proposal for an extended review to a full-fledged new round does have important implications. To start with, it implies that the fundamental thrust of the next set of negotiations should be further liberalisation in chosen areas, with no review and roll-back of past agreements. Secondly, it signals to the world that what is at stake are not marginal adjustments around Uruguay Round benchmarks, but significant advances in the direction of further liberalisation. Third, it opens the door to the introduction of new areas of negotiation involving linkages between trade and environment issues, trade and labour questions and finally a multilateral agreement on investment.

For the developed countries as a group this offers substantial gains. Principally, it would shift the focus away from the need to redress the obvious imbalances in the Uruguay Round agreement with regard to market access. The evidence is clear (see charts) that the concessions received by

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developing countries in terms of the share of imports over which tariff concessions apply and the depth of the tariff cut they benefited from was lower than that which applied to the developed countries. That is, starting from a position of subordination, developing countries appeared to have offered more in the nature of concessions with regard to market access than the developed countries did.

But even this picture is partial, inasmuch as it does not capture the actual extent of trade liberalisation and the commodity composition of the areas in which the concessions were offered by the two sides. In fact, as a result of the enforced or voluntary pursuit of liberalisation strategies, developing countries have proceeded much further in doing away with non-tariff barriers and reducing tariffs than warranted by the commitments in the Uruguay Round. In the event, the evidence is now overwhelming that both across and within product groups, the developing countries began to *give* virtually immediately after the Uruguay round negotiations were complete, but they are yet to begin to *receive* much by way of benefits in areas that matter to them from an export point of view.

Nothing epitomises this more than the agreement relating to textiles. From the point of view of the developing countries, the most visible and "multilaterally" accepted non-tariff barrier regime prior to the Uruguay Round was the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA). That arrangement was the end-result of a series of negotiated agreements starting in the 1960s, all of which sought to provide the developed countries with the time needed to restructure their industries so that competitive textile exports from lower-cost developing countries do not "disrupt" their markets. Despite three decades of agreement on that principle and periodic revisions of the deadline to end import restrictions, textiles still were by the late-1980s not permitted free entry into developed-country markets. The case for an immediate end to such restrictions, under a new multilateral trade regime, was therefore strong. However,

Chart 1

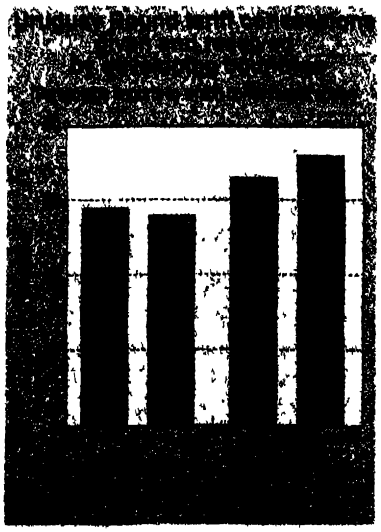
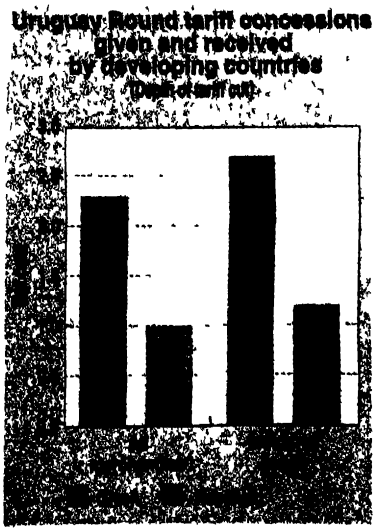


Chart 2



though the Uruguay Round agreement on textiles and clothing provided for the phasing out of restraints stemming from the MFA, it once again diluted and delayed the process of liberalisation. To start with, the agreement was made applicable to all textile imports into developed countries rather than those on which quotas applied at that time. Further, the process which was designed to occur in four stages over a ten-year period was heavily "back-loaded", in the sense that most of the liberalisation was to occur during the final stages. Thus, more than five years after the agreement has been in place, only 33 per cent of imports of four categories of textiles and clothing in 1990 (tops and yarns, fabrics, made-up textile products and clothing) have been rendered quota-free. Quotas on another 18 per cent are to be removed after another two years and on the remaining 49 per cent in 2004.

This prolonged and back-loaded agreement in a labour-intensive area in which the developed countries had agreed to open up markets more than three decades back, points both to the relative positions of power of developed and developing countries in the Uruguay Round negotiations as well as to the extent of commitment of the latter to offer greater market access as a *quid pro quo* for the rapid liberalisation of trade and investment rules in the developing countries.

What is more revealing is the evidence on the progress on this front. With two stages of the phase-out process being complete out of the quotas under MFA that had been notified by the United States, the European Union (E.U.) and Canada, only 1, 7 and 14 per cent respectively have been withdrawn. Much of the phase-out thus far has covered commodities which were not even in consideration. Further, most of these are textile products which do not dominate the developing countries' export basket. Above all, the extent of tariff concessions, both in terms of tariff reduction and the share of the relevant imports subject to cuts, provided by the developing countries have been higher than that provided by the developed countries in industrial products in general and in the textile area in particular. That is, years after the completion of the Round and at a time when talk is already on with regard to initiating a new round, developing-country, market-access "gains" in an area most crucial to them have been minimal.

THE implication of this is obvious enough. Even in an area as basic as market access, what is called for now is a review of the Uruguay Round aimed at redressing the inequalities it carried through in its fine print, rather than an extension of the Round either in the form of more intensive liberalisation or in the form of extending the multilateral framework into new areas. This view would be strengthened if an appraisal is made of the differential impact of agreements on trade-related investment measures and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. Evidence of this kind has been marshalled by the developing countries in their submissions to the WTO. By demanding that the next phase of multilateral engagement should not be restricted to a review but extended into a wholly new round, the developed countries are seeking to shift the focus away from these glaring inequalities that have surfaced since the Marrakesh agreement of 1994, and wrest new concessions in wholly new areas.

But that is not all. If the next stage of multilateral engagement is restricted to a review, the focus would be on agriculture, wherein the U.S. and the E.U., particularly the latter, have in practice made minor concessions in the Uruguay Round. By providing their farmers concessions through alternative routes, they have been able to keep the actual average measure of support (AMS) to agriculture above what would be normally permissible under the Uruguay Round. This is the reason why unlike many of the agricultural exporters who are members of the Cairns group, who want more far-reaching liberalisation in agricultural trade, the U.S. and E.U. want non-agricultural commodities brought into the discussion in order to make it more diffused.

What is more, by bringing in environmental issues, labour standards and social clauses into the negotiations on trade, these developed countries are seeking to win for themselves new protectionist devices which, like the anti-dumping clause under the Uruguay Round, can be used as protectionist devices when and wherever required. Since the standards, if any, set under these heads can never improve upon the current standards in the developed industrial countries, the possibility that such agreements could be used by the developing countries as well does not arise.

Thus, for the developing countries, giving up on the slogan of "standstill, review and, if necessary, roll-back" would be extremely damaging. What is surprising, therefore, is the fact that, though no agreement on an agenda incorporating a new round could be arrived at the pre-Seattle, Lausanne meet, the idea of such an agenda is winning support even among some vocal developing countries. India, for example, has not merely toned down its language and spoken of the need to discuss "implementation issues", but has reportedly turned around to the view that it should not resort to "opposition for opposition's sake". If things take such a turn, the transition from opposition to acquiescence which led up to the inequities in the Uruguay Round would be repeated this time around as well.

On the surface there appears to be no need for the developing countries to succumb to developed country pressures since constitutionally the WTO is an organisation where each member has a vote. The power that the threat of exercising that vote carries was seen in the recent split between the developed and the developing countries over the Director-Generalship of the organisation. The final compromise involves a term of three years each for the two candidates backed by the developed and the developing countries.

Despite this power, the developing countries have gone along with the principle that the contracting parties should

Chart 3

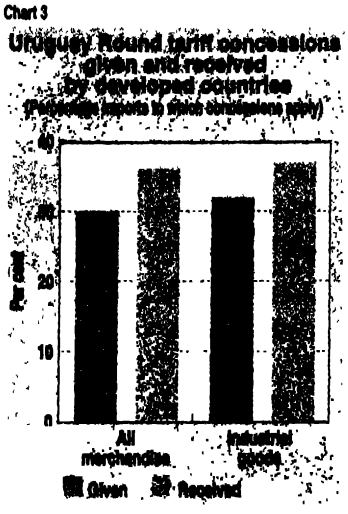
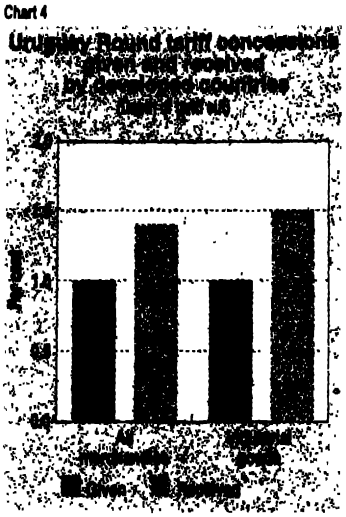


Chart 4



idopt a consensus procedure.

This is partly because decisions rrived at any other way could encourage ndividual developed nations to opt out of the GATT or WTO, and such a devel- pment result in a virtual dismember- ent of that body. Given the dominance of the developed countries over the world trading system and the dependence of the developing countries on the markets of the developed, having the developed countries in was, and remains, crucial for the developing countries. This in itself puts pressure on the developing nations to accept much of what the developed countries propose, in return for small concessions in other areas.

But what matters more is the fact that in the wake of liberalisation in the developing world, most developing countries are keen to attract larger capital flows from the developed countries in the form of aid, debt and foreign investment. This has substantially increased the implicit and explicit cross-conditionality enforced by the developed countries.

Cooperation and support with regard to capital flows requires acceptance of a specific form of trading arrangement. Such cross-conditionality has helped ensure that the developed countries would have their way that much more often. Even when disputes arise, inequality implies that settlement would follow what has been identified as a "power-oriented approach," in which the relative strengths of the parties rather than a set of predefined rules determine the nature of the settlement.

This has one important implication. If developing countries are to prevent the almost continuous erosion of their economic space through formal institutional arrangements at the global level, without receiving much in return by way of trade concessions, they need to rethink their development strategies as well. Only then would they have the manoeuvrability to exercise a right that the voting principle enshrined in the WTO's constitution guarantees. Unfortunately, a change in the trajectory of development is not a possibility by the time of the Seattle Summit. This could influence the outcome of that summit. But a change in strategy is definitely a prospect that could be explored soon during the prolonged negotiations that the Millennium Round would entail, if it is initiated. A change that is significant enough to ensure an outcome from that round which is better than the failed promises of the agreement signed in Marrakesh. ■

■ COLUMN

India and the world

India's declining influence as a leader of developing countries may reflect not only national and international political economy forces, but also the

THERE was a time – not all that long ago – when India's standing in the international community of nations was very high. This stemmed not only from the obvious reasons such as the size of the population and of the economy and the country's geopolitical significance in Asia. It also reflected the respect India commanded among other developing countries, by virtue of strong and principled stands on a number of international issues as well as what was widely perceived as a genuine desire to forge unity among developing nations as a group. India thus became an important voice for the aspirations of developing countries in general, and a major spokesman in international forums.

This perception was probably strongest during the early and heady days of the Non-Aligned Movement, which reflected the dreams of some remarkable men and women (such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Josip Tito) as much as those of the governments they led. But even in the 1970s and much of the 1980s, when the political leadership did not display much in terms of an inspiring vision domestically, the foreign policy remained a source of some pride to many Indians and a source of much hope to many in the developing world.

This attribute was perhaps already beginning to unravel by the late 1980s, but in the 1990s it seems to have disappeared altogether. The collapse of the Eastern bloc may have rendered non-alignment meaningless, but it is still difficult to understand why it should also have put paid to attempts by India to forge a common position with other developing countries to protect at least some of their own interests, and made it so completely determined to curry favour with the Western powers.

Since 1998, after the first Bharatiya Janata Party-led government came to power, matters have worsened considerably in this regard, and the combination of going nuclear with the slavish subjugation to the West in matters economic, has meant that India has lost all of that earlier luminosity. Many developing countries are saddened and repelled by what now appears to be a wholly cynical attitude towards nuclear weapons and their control, and the earlier principled positions on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and other issues now sound very hollow. Similarly, the eagerness with which the government has rushed to satisfy the economic interests of the United States in particular, even when they work against the needs of Indian citizens, has reduced any credibility with other developing country governments searching for an alternative path.

Even so, there is still a sense of surprise at the Indian government's reluctance to raise issues at international forums and multilateral negotiations, and also its inability to lobby and gain international support for itself on the rare occasions when it does choose to raise any such issues. Those of us who are outside officialdom and the actual negotiating process have tended to see this as a reflection of either the specific positions held or the result of international political economy forces. But there may be a case for supposing that there is also a negative role played by the way in which our government's representatives conduct themselves at such negotiations.

PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH

Such reflections emerge from only one particular instance, and may not be generalisable. But if it is part of a more widespread pattern of behaviour, then it may not be surprising that India finds itself so unpopular at international gatherings of nations.

The occasion in question was a meeting in Bangkok called by some United Nations agencies, to review the progress (if any) in the condition of women

across Asia and the Pacific after the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 Governments of the region were represented (often as in India's case quite heavily) as were other independent academics and activists and members of what are now loosely called civil society organisations The meeting was concerned with various macro issues which have affected the condition of women, as well as the effectiveness of specific measures directed at improving these conditions

As in many such meetings, a statement was proposed to be brought out at the end of the deliberations summarising the discussions and setting forth the main agenda for the future in terms of the measures required of governments and other agents And again as in many other meetings, the statement itself tended to absorb a huge amount of time and effort on the part of a drafting committee" which contained members of all the official delegations This group took the better part of two days and a night to reach a consensus draft report on the proceedings

When the draft – a lengthy 35 page document – was finally presented, at a late hour to a tired plenary group, it was found to cover much ground, ranging from issues of women's employment poverty and illiteracy to violence and political participation There was the recognition that attempts to improve the condition of women through specific legislation and schemes could be and were being undermined by macroeconomic processes (essentially capital mobility which reduces the bargaining power of all workers and creates unstable economic conditions in individual countries) which work in the opposite direction

By then it would seem as if differences would have been ironed out in the long process of discussion in the drafting committee But at the final plenary session the Indian delegation decided to start raising objections These objections did not relate to some of the more pressing concerns of the Indian people – or Indian women which various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals had specifically requested the delegation to take up Thus, the issue that was raised did not relate to the more problematic implications of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) document for the Indian people, or the food security issues which impact directly on women, or any such vital matter.

Instead, the Indian delegation chose to hold up proceedings for a considerable length of time – and in the process alienate almost everyone else present – on the following sentence: "The right of self-determination of all peoples as enunciated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action should be considered, and where appropriate, accelerated" The Indian delegation demanded that the last phrase be removed, others pointed out that they had already agreed to it in the drafting committee, they then responded by suggesting that the proceedings of the drafting committee had not been conducted properly and they were not aware of this sentence Despite the evident resentment their statements caused, there was no attempt at gracefully withdrawing at any point, nor did they seem to recognise that any potential problem with the formulation (as in the possible implications for Kashmir) was taken care of by the safety clause where appropriate"

For someone new to such proceedings, what was especially disturbing was not just the ham-handed manner in which the official Indian responses were expressed, but also the reactions of other country delegations and independent observers These ranged from irritation and resentment over the fact that the proceedings were held up on such a matter to amusement Apparently, according to the representatives of several other countries, such behaviour on the part of Indian delegations is nothing new and in fact they are well-known for their ability to filibuster and fuss over what are relatively minor issues in the broader context of such meetings

What was the message that got sent out to all the delegations representing 43 countries in Asia and the Pacific, including the many small countries and island-states for whom the issue of self-determination has been and continues to be a major element in their current struggle against imperialism? The message that certainly came across to them – and was discussed all over in the hall – is that the only thing which seems to get the Indian official delegation excited is the need to prevent the right to self-determination of peoples

In conferences like this one, the emphasis should surely be on the important issues at hand, and the interventions should reflect a certain expertise and concern, rather than focus entirely on knee-jerk reactions on matters which are at best marginal to the substantive matter under discussion All this may not be so important given the host of other issues which plague our government and people today But this insignificant episode does point to an official failure to do the proper homework, define priorities according to the state of the national debate, and conduct oneself in a manner which evokes respect and sympathy rather than unnecessary hostility and ridicule. ■

■ COLUMN

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

As more details come in of the terrible human tragedy and extensive devastation wreaked by the "super cyclone" on coastal Orissa, it becomes apparent that what we have on our hands is not just a natural calamity, but a *social catastrophe* compounded by administrative failure and political ineptitude coupled with callousness The catastrophe has reduced human existence to hellish conditions, sending man and beast alike foraging for food, and often to the same funeral pyre Thousands of people perished not just because nature vented its fury in an exceptionally savage way, but because society failed to heed the warnings, and then to prepare itself through preventive, remedial and ameliorative action There are many lessons for public policy in the cyclone and its aftermath But just consider this

★ Meteorologists had warned four days earlier of the build-up of cyclonic circulation east of the Andamans, which was gathering monstrous energy But the authorities just sat and watched rather than prepare and implement preventive and evacuation plans Meanwhile, with each day, the cyclone system picked up lethal momentum before hitting the coast.

★ All India Radio and Doordarshan did broadcast cyclone warnings, but these were delivered in such technology-overdosed, obscure, and Sanskrit-laden language that they were not understood by the most vulnerable people and those at greatest risk. fisherfolk and port workers, and those living in shantytowns and flimsy houses.

★ The first casualty of the cyclone was the official disaster management and relief system itself. The telephone lines of all the high officials went dead. Orissa's capital

Not by high-tech alone

An obsession with high technology gadgets and failure to ensure popular involvement in disaster management prevented the officialdom from really helping the cyclone victims.

was cut off Even 48 hours later, only two telephone lines were working – in the Chief Minister's house, and hence of little use to the outside world

★ The authorities' first response was to procure and rely on high-technology gadgets, such as satellite phones, helicopters and remote-sensing imagery Most of these entirely failed – for instance, due to inclement" weather (what else did they expect?) – or caused long delays, without yielding good results What worked was good-old Hams or amateur radio communicators, robust Second World War vintage walkie-talkies and old-style high clearance trucks and heavy vehicles

★ The Army's eastern infantry units were in a state of readiness since October 25 to provide alternative communication (especially road) links and relief But they got their movement orders only after disaster struck on October 29 Their mobility was cramped

★ One of the biggest failures was that of the very agency that is meant to manage catastrophes and coordinate relief operations, namely, the National Disaster Management Division, a full-fledged cell of the Ministry of Agriculture. It first proved totally clueless, then panicked, and later became totally incommunicado Its control room complained all lines are down, there are no satellite pictures owing to heavy cloud cover, there is no power, we are helpless This compounds an already tainted record A recent report from the Comptroller and Auditor-General documents that as much as Rs 670 crores of the Calamity Relief Fund was misused during 1995-98

AS the officialdom bungled, and Ministers and politicians whirred around (seemingly importantly but really without any purpose) in helicopters, people drowned and choked to death, cattle were swept away by 260-kmph winds, boats capsized, the port of Paradeep – one of India s five busiest ports, which handles 25 million tonnes a year – went under, over 15 million people became homeless and many more had to go without drinking water, even food Chaos and mayhem raged in the ghost towns of Orissa Order collapsed amidst widespread looting of food by the starving people The official relief operation was shamefully meagre in scale, painfully slow in starting, callous and inconsiderate in its planning, and badly targeted, and blind to the needs of the poor Four days into the disaster, nothing betrayed official ineptitude more than the fact that the first relief train was dispatched not from Orissa, or any of the States bordering it, but from Delhi!

IT would not do to plead that the catastrophe in Orissa was unavoidable because it was caused by a natural calamity beyond control, or that the eastern coast is especially vulnerable to cyclones about which nothing can be done This argument misses two points India, or South Asia, is not uniquely susceptible to natural calamities Nor are natural disasters socially neutral in their effects They pick on the poor and the weak To take the first point, the United States and Europe are also prone to disasters such as earthquakes And yet, according to the environmental research group Earthscan earthquakes killing more than 10,000 people have only occurred in the Third World Similar hurricanes regularly hit the east coast of the U S , but their toll is infinitesimally smaller than in India, Bangladesh or the Philippines

For instance, the average Japanese disaster kills 63 people But in Peru the average toll is 2,900 At the same time as the Latur earthquake in Maharashtra, California experienced a quake of magnitude 7 4 (Richter scale), which was 100 times more powerful than the Indian event While entire families were wiped out in Maharashtra, only one person died in California When Hurricane Elena hit the U S in 1985, only five people died But when a cyclone slammed Bangladesh in 1991, half a million people were killed

The U.S. is as susceptible to severe cyclones as India's eastern coast. Each year, 10 major tropical storms (of which six become hurricanes) develop over the Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico An average of five strike the U S coastline



SUSI ANTA PATRONOB SH

Victims of the cyclone trudging their way to safety.

every three years. Of these five, two hurricanes are major ones. But government agencies, rescue and relief organisations, and the news media launch a huge warning and preparedness effort. The airwaves are flooded with detailed advice on how to face impending emergencies.

Information is frequently updated and people are asked to stock provisions and medicines, and given emergency service numbers. In the global South, information about emergency plans is withheld from the public.

The vast majority who die in "natural" disasters are the Third World's poor. They perish not because of the intrinsically deadlier nature of the calamity, but because they are socially and physically vulnerable.

The vast majority who die in "natural" disasters are the Third World's poor. They perish not because of the intrinsically deadlier nature of the calamity itself, but because they are socially and physically vulnerable – being forced to live in congested, overcrowded and unsafe conditions in dangerous areas. Their suffering is avoidably greater because the medical and relief infrastructure is hopelessly inadequate and usually the first to crumble under the impact of a calamity. Above all, the authorities' planning of emergency relief provision – especially of absolute necessities such as shelter, food and water – is appallingly bad. It is this, rather than the absolute, intrinsic, severity of a cyclone or earthquake or a tidal wave that explains why human life is wantonly lost, why the poor suffer the most. The scale of damage, whether social, physical or environmental, is *socially* determined.

IN the case of India, the magnitude of such devastation has increased roughly three- to eight-fold over the past three decades. This increase has little to do with growing population or congestion. Rather, it is explained by other *social* phenomena, especially three factors: the tampering with and erosion of natural or physical protective "barriers"; the growing search for, and obsession with, high-technology quick-fixes to social problems; and the increasing inefficiency of relief provision amidst social callousness and apathy.

First, excessive human activity right along the coastline has led to the destruction of mangroves and hardy natural vegetation, including shrubs, that could slow down hurricane-speed winds and bind the soil. This is especially true where predatory activity is promoted, often in breach of the Coastal Zone Regulations – for example, commercial-scale prawn cultivation. At another level, there is the growing phenomenon of dam-induced seismicity, which too makes us more earthquake-prone.

Second, rather than rely on simple, easy-to-use, commonsense-oriented and accessible methods and devices, our administrators have developed a peculiar fascination for sophisticated, electronics-dependent, complicated systems that need expertise and special attention.

Thus, the India Meteorological Department got everything right with sophisticated weather satellites and computer weather modelling. But its much-neglected land communication lines simply did not work. These are vital to its ability to transmit data to the regional units where the action is. Our scientocrats have evidently paid little attention to the simple, the terrestrial, the down-to-earth, the familiar, the easy – as distinct from the sophisticated, the ethereal, the celestial, the exotic. After the Kandla cyclone last year, the government commissioned a report for disaster preparedness, which emphasised satellite phones, high-resolution satellite imagery, expensive big cranes. (Many of our highways and culverts are not wide or strong enough to transport heavy equipment.) These would be welcome if they can be relied upon. That rarely happens. In any case, they cannot be a *substitute* for something far simpler.

An example is cyclone shelters: rugged, simple, two- or three-storeyed structures that can withstand 300 kmph winds and tidal waves, where people can take refuge, and where emergency food and water rations can be stored. These inexpensive shelters have saved tens of thousands of lives in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh since the 1980s, and many more even in Bangladesh in the last few years. Orissa has hardly any of these. Nor has the government invested in simple, cheap AM or FM radio sets – to be provided at a nominal cost to fisherfolk. Providing each sub-divisional tehsil/taluk town with decent fire-engines and rugged all-weather high-clearance vehicles will probably be far more cost-effective, and in absolute terms much cheaper, than buying a $5-million helicopter.

People are the most crucial input in relief provision and in disaster planning and management. If the local population is allowed and encouraged to participate in such programmes, their success rate would rise dramatically. Indeed, their inputs in planning and in actual implementation are ultimately vital. But that is where the third factor comes in: the officialdom would much rather bypass the people in whose name and for whose benefit it is supposed to work. Having inherited and fully internalised hierarchical and casteist attitudes, it is fundamentally hostile to popular involvement, participation and ownership of disaster management programmes.

Nor are our political leaders and bureaucrats, especially the latter, answerable to the public in a transparent way which really pins responsibility on them and punishes them for non-performance, while rewarding helpful conduct. This, coupled with our generally poor culture of safety, which too absolves the guilty of responsibility, makes for high levels of inefficiency and poor performance.

If there is one undeniable fact about our officialdom, it is that it has got corrupted to a point where its sense of obligation and duty to the public stands seriously compromised. Such people cannot be asked or expected to be sensitive, genuinely empathetic and compassionate to ordinary, poor, citizens, especially those in acute distress. It would be far-fetched to imagine their being sensitive to such things as the need for psychological counselling and kind behaviour – something that is now part of what is considered normal relief provision even in a relatively callous Western society like the U.S.

The forms of behaviour involved here too are socially determined. They directly affect the extent of damage and distress that people suffer. It is futile to indulge in breast-beating about whether the Orissa cyclone was grade seven or eight in intensity. Rather, we must treat it as a national emergency at least on a par with, if not greater than, the Kargil War, and mobilise an all-out effort to help the cyclone-affected. The primary focus must be on *public action*, on getting the government to deliver relief, to learn, to reform its conduct, to involve people, and to perform a socially useful function which is basically irreplaceable. If we succeed even to a small extent in this, the suffering of the people of Orissa will not have been in vain. ■

Silent on initiatives

The President's address on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance Government largely reiterates the economic policy positions common to the governments of the 1990s.

VENKATESH ATHREYA

PRESIDENT K.R. Narayanan's address to the joint session of Parliament on October 25 on behalf of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, while running along predictable lines, fails to address crucial economic issues confronting the nation. It smacks of complacency in relation to several elements of the economic crisis facing the country, and where it announces policy initiatives, it appears to be extremely anxious to please global financial interests and their domestic counterparts.

Consider, for example, the references to the rate of inflation and the level of foreign exchange reserves. The President's address states, with an obvious air of satisfaction: "Inflation, as measured by the wholesale price index, is around two per cent, which is the lowest in the last two decades." This is a misleading statement. First, a point-to-point measure of inflation is amenable to of easy manipulation through appropriate choice of points in time. Secondly, for the financial year 1998-99, while the wholesale price index (WPI) rose by 6.8 per cent (and *not* 2 per cent), the consumer price index (CPI) rose by 13.2 per cent in the case of industrial workers and by 11 per cent in the case of agricultural workers. If one takes the 1990s as a whole, the annual rate of inflation as measured by the WPI itself is around 9 per cent, and with increasing dissonance between the WPI and the CPI, the annual rate of increase of the CPI has been in double digits. Further, as a result of the recent price increases, the rate of inflation is bound to increase sharply in the coming months. The President's address glosses over the looming threat of rapid inflation with a complacent reference to a point-to-point figure of increase in the WPI.

With reference to foreign exchange reserves, the President's address states how, despite "...an adverse global economic environment last year, our balance of payments position has remained comfortable and our foreign exchange reserves are at a record level of nearly $33 billion." This "achievement", as the address refers to it, needs to be seen in the proper perspective. A substantial proportion of this consists of portfolio investments, which can be withdrawn at short notice in response to changes in the stock markets and prospects of financial gain elsewhere in the world.

Another portion consists of external debt, including money held in foreign currency accounts in India by non-resident Indians. In fact, as Arun Ghosh pointed out, as of March 1999, India's total "vulnerable external liabilities" (as per the classification of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) amounted to a total of $35.8 billion as against the reserves then of $30 billion ("The Macroeconomic Scenario" in *The Indian Economy 1998-99: An Alternative Survey*, Delhi Science Forum, New Delhi, 1999).

Given the fragile and footloose nature of both foreign portfolio investment flows and NRI deposits, as also the uncertainties of private transfers from expatriate Indian workers abroad, the underlying fundamentals of our balance of payments situation hardly provide room for self-congratulation or complacency. On the contrary, given that for all but two years in the 1990s, imports have grown faster than exports, our trade deficit has been steadily widening. In such a scenario, the policy implication is the opposite of trade liberalisation and financial integration into the global economy.

What is really at issue is the presumed "consensus" on economic issues – essentially a consensus manufactured with considerable and generous assistance from the print and electronic media. This "consensus" argues that India's economy will thrive only through rapid implementation of a so-called second generation of reforms beginning with a further opening up and privatisation of the financial sector, including the insurance industry, and across-the-board disinvestment and privatisation of public sector undertakings (PSUs). It is predicated upon the "mantra" of a target inflow of $10 billion of foreign investment every year. It envisages a major presence of foreign capital in key sectors of the Indian economy, such as oil, power, telecommunications, banking and insurance. It takes as incontestable



V SUDERSHAN

President K.R. Narayanan, along with Vice-President Krishan Kant, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, Lok Sabha Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan, on his way to the Central Hall of Parliament where he addressed the joint session on October 25.

a considerably diminished role for the government in the economy and implies (although this would be explicitly denied for obvious political reasons) further decline in public provisioning, whether in health and education or through the public distribution system

The President's address states "Generation transmission and distribution of electricity will be unbundled as separate activities, tariff reform, privatisation of transmission and distribution of power, and setting up of state electricity regulatory commissions will be accelerated"

The experience with independent power producers in the private sector throughout the 1990s, starting with Enron, demonstrates what a disastrous course this is As Probir Purkayastha, an expert on the power industry, had pointed out, this route will lead not only to inordinately high costs of power, but also to industry opting for captive power generation, making power even more expensive for those using state-supplied power – mainly domestic and agricultural consumers

The President's address talks of "speedier restructuring and disinvestment of public sector undertakings, including strategic sales" The logic of PSU disinvestment is nowhere spelt out In fact, the economic agents most likely to pick up PSU shares will be cash-rich multinational corporations Thus, apart from the fact that in the current state the stock market is in, PSU disinvestment would imply sales of equity at unconscionably low prices, the process will also lead to strategic sectors of our economy being controlled by large foreign capital

Further, the sale of public sector equity has been used mainly to show a lower figure for that IMF-World Bank sacred cow, the fiscal deficit A policy framework characterised by a refusal to tax the well-to-do, and by the financing of government expenditures increasingly through market borrowings, naturally leads to a steady increase in committed expenditure by way of interest payments on past debt Selling public sector equity is hardly the solution to this problem. By seeking speedier disinvestment of PSUs, the government is surely barking up the wrong tree.

At a broader level of argument, as C.P Chandrasekhar has pointed out, the policy framework of "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation", or LPG for short, assumes that LPG automatically improves growth performance, an assumption decisively disproved by the experience of the Indian economy during the 1990s, as well as by the experience of several Latin American countries during the period since the 1980s Such a view is not only a throwback to pre-Keynesian ideology which ignores the role of demand, but "completely forgets the importance of state investment and production, especially in the infrastructure industries in affecting the conditions of supply (C P Chandrasekhar, "Industry", in *The Indian Economy 1998-99 An Alternative Survey*)

A PARTICULARLY disastrous policy initiative of the NDA Government is the decision to push through the opening up of the insurance industry in the name of competition This approach ignores the important role the nationalised insurance industry has played in building a self-reliant economy and bringing together for purposeful public deployment vast sums of widely scattered small savings, while providing small savers an important service Interestingly, in 1995, the Rajya Sabha Petitions Committee, chaired by the then Bharatiya Janata Party Member of Parliament Sushma Swaraj, recommended that the General Insurance Corporation be not privatised The committees made this recommendation after examining the experiences with private insurance business and the performance of the public sector insurance industry The move to privatise the insurance industry, which is not warranted even in terms of World Trade Organisation obligations, is being pushed mainly by foreign capital and domestic policymakers who argue falsely that such an opening up will bring in considerable amounts of capital which can be utilised for infrastructure investment

The orchestrated demand for the privatisation of nationalised banks – indirectly alluded to in the President's address in terms of "Reform of banks and financial institutions" – is similarly misplaced The factors leading to the present crisis in terms of non-performing assets of the banking system are not discussed in a transparent manner at all. Several years ago, under pressure from the Left parties, the then Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, promised in Parliament to make public a comprehensive list of defaulters responsible for the burden of bad debt. The list – which is rumoured to include several luminaries of the corporate world – has not been made public. Pursuance of the Narasimham Committee recommendations – mercifully thwarted partially by the might of the bank officers' and employees' unions – has meant a decline in priority lending and creeping de nationalisation (in the twin sense of both *private* and *foreign*) Thus, not many people are aware that India's largest bank, State Bank of India, has 45 per cent of its shares owned privately, of which a quarter is with foreign owners

The President's address states that "the new Telecom Policy – 1999 shall be expeditiously implemented to achieve the objective of providing universal access to world-class telecom services at the lowest possible price to the public" But this is hardly likely to be achieved, given the nature of the policy which aims at providing a much larger space for private players, and given the role of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which seems hell-bent on stifling government and public sector telecom entities such as the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) Ironically, the address talks of strengthening TRAI to "create a level-playing field between public and private operators by suitably amending the TRAI Act' This sounds truly ominous, given the TRAI's tender concern for private telecom operators to the point where lower charges proposed by telecom PSUs for cellular telephony are seen as attempts to eliminate competition through cross-subsidisation

FINALLY, there is the obsession with foreign direct investment (FDI) The President's address repeats the P Chidambaram-Murasoli Maran-Yashwant Sinha mantra of creating "an enabling policy to ensure FDI inflow of at least $10 billion annually" What has been the record since 1991? Between 1991-92 and 1997-98, the total inflow of FDI was just $9 8 billion, as against inflow of portfolio investment of $15 3 billion. According to the 1999 World Investment Report (WIR), FDI inflows to India declined in 1998 to $2 26 billion. During the current year, the figure is expected to touch $3 5 billion. Thus, talk of $10 billion FDI per annum sounds like a lot of hot air More important, we need to have clear priorities on where and why we need FDI. Globally, the dominant mode of capital flows today is that of footloose finance capital constantly in search of high short-term returns. If India really needs to attract FDI on a large scale, we need national policies to increase social sector investments and ensure basic health,

nutrition and education through public provisioning.

When the decision to go in for structural adjustment *a la* the World Bank was taken in 1991, the reasons cited were the fiscal crisis and the balance of payments crisis. Nearly a decade later, neither crisis seems to have been fundamentally resolved. Behind the apparently comfortable foreign exchange reserves position lies a widening trade deficit, compensated mostly by capital inflows of a volatile nature. The fiscal crisis shows no signs of abating, with revenue deficits being even higher than at the start of the reforms – an unsurprising outcome, given the huge tax concessions given to the rich, and the mounting interest burden caused by government borrowing in lieu of taxation. On this count alone the "reforms" can be called into question. But the President's address complacently assumed the validity of the reforms process. An equally disastrous aspect of performance during the reform period pertains to agriculture. Despite 10 successive good monsoons, agricultural growth has been dismal. The annual compound rate of growth of foodgrains output has fallen behind the rate of growth of population, resulting in a decline in per capita foodgrain output, and portending an emerging crisis of food security. But this issue does not even find a serious mention in the President's address.

While the President's address has thus largely reiterated the economic policy positions that are unfortunately common to the Congress(I), BJP and United Front governments of the 1990s so far, it has been silent on badly needed initiatives. With considerable food stocks – itself a reflection, in part, of widespread rural impoverishment – and a large surplus pool of labour in the rural economy, one can make a strong case for public works executed with transparency through elected local bodies. If appropriately designed, such a programme can help build valuable productive assets for the rural economy. Together with genuine land reforms, it can help expand the home market and stimulate growth. Strengthening infrastructure – industrial and social – through public investment financed by taxing the well-to-do, is a far more important priority than is currently perceived by policymakers. Finally, policymakers must re-strategise India's response to the pressures and processes of the international economy, and develop an agenda for the WTO meet in Seattle, around which the broadest coalition of developing countries can be united. ■

Tariff trouble

The Delhi High Court stays TRAI's 'calling party pays' regime as petitioners object to its revenue-sharing arrangement.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

THE 'calling party pays' (CPP) regime, which seeks to make the fixed-line subscriber cross-subsidise the mobile phone system every time he or she calls a cellular number, failed to take off on November 1, as the Delhi High Court stayed its implementation. In a desperate, last-minute attempt to enforce the regime, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) petitioned Chief Justice A.S. Anand of the Supreme Court to vacate the stay. The court refused to entertain the prayer. Further hearings by the Delhi High Court on two petitions, one by the public sector Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) and the other, a public interest petition moved by Telecom Watchdog, a consumer organisation, will take place on November 16.

The stay, granted on the plea of Telecom Watchdog, appears to have created some confusion as to whether another order of TRAI, on the downward revision of rental and call charges from November 1 for cellular phone subscribers consequent on the migration to the revenue-sharing regime, was also put on hold.

S. Rajagopalan, Chairman and Managing Director of MTNL, told *Frontline* that only the operation of the Telecommunications Interconnection (charges and revenue-sharing – First Amendment) Regulation, 1999, dealing with the CPP regime and the interconnection arrangements of such a regime, had been stayed. The Telecommunications Tariff (Fifth Amendment) Order of 1999, which dealt with the revision of rentals and call charges for cellular phone subscribers, however, took effect on November 1. Telecom industry sources say that the confusion may not be all that innocuous. Clubbing the two issues was likely to turn the anger of cellular subscribers against MTNL.

The CPP regime was patently iniquitous. It not only sought to provide free incoming calls to cellular subscribers, but went on to propose that the resultant loss of revenue to the cellular operator be compensated by the fixed-line users calling cellular numbers. Had the CPP regime come into force, fixed line subscribers calling cellular numbers would have paid tariffs ranging from 200 to 400 per cent of ordinary call charges, depending on the duration of the call. This is iniquitous in itself since cellular phone subscribers are generally affluent and in many cases their bills are picked up by their businesses. Worse still, the CPP made it incumbent upon the fixed-line operator to collect the tariffs from its subscribers calling cellular phones and pass on as much as 72.7 per cent of them to the cellular operator in whose network the call terminated. Compare this with the maximum of 23 per cent of revenues passed on to the fixed-line operator by a cellular phone operator when a cellular call terminates in a fixed line. In fact, this share is further reduced to 9 per cent in the case of calls lasting more than 120 seconds, but up to 180 seconds.

The foremost casualty of such asymmetry would have been the Department of Telecom Services (DoTS) which provides basic telephony throughout the country and MTNL, which provides basic telephony in Delhi and Mumbai. It is estimated that DoTS and MTNL will together lose around Rs.320 crores annually. A substantial chunk of the loss would have gone to private cellular phone operators.

Even so, MTNL would not have taken the extreme step of approaching the courts, Rajagopalan said. "In principle, we are not against the CPP regime. What we object to is the skewed revenue-sharing arrangement," he said. In its petition, MTNL alleges that the telecom regulator exhibited extraordinary haste in announcing the scheme, even without considering the objections raised by it. Pointing out the asymmetry in the revenue-sharing arrangement, it has stated that under the TRAI Act it is illegal to impose on MTNL the obligation to collect revenues from its subscribers who make calls to cellular phones and share them with cellular operators. The petition says: "The respondent is seeking to bind the Petitioner with legal

obligations, *inter alia*, of collecting the revenues from their consumers and passing the same to the said Cellular Service Providers. It is further submitted that such legal obligations could not have been imposed by the Respondent in exercise of its powers under Sections 11(2) of the Act. Assuming it could be done, the same should have been done only after considering the objections/comments of the Petitioner and also after complying with the principle of natural justice by hearing the Petitioner."

The CPP regime was patently iniquitous, and the foremost casualty of the asymmetry it would have entailed would have been the Department of Telecom Services and MTNL.

Rajagopalan further said that under the CPP regime, when MTNL subscribers who made calls to cellular numbers defaulted on their payments, the company would have to pay the cellular operators' share.

The MTNL petition has drawn the High Court's attention to the fact that it has enormous social and universal service obligations and therefore cannot be compelled function as collectors of revenue on behalf of cellular service providers at the cost of basic service consumers and of the tax-paying public. If the CPP regime comes into being, MTNL will have to invest in revamping its metering and billing infrastructure and additionally provide barring facility to those subscribers who do not wish to avail themselves of the facility to call a cellular phone. It will have to invest in area such as upgradation of exchanges, installation of new switches in exchanges that cannot be upgraded, and upgradation of systems software.

Rajagopalan said that many of MTNL's subscribers, who limited their calls to the minimum free calls available to them, also called cellular numbers. "The current rental does not even meet our fixed costs but still we provide them a certain minimum number of free calls. The CPP will force us to pay cellular operators for calls made by this category of subscribers. This is not such a small number," he said. In such cases, although MTNL collected no tariff, it would still have to pay the cellular operators' share. This, he said, would result in substantial transfer of MTNL's resources to private cellular operators.

The petition also points out that charging hefty tariffs for calls made from Packet Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) lines to cellular phones will not encourage the use of telephone services. (In its consultation paper on Telecom policy, TRAI had justified the CPP regime on the ground that it would improve cellular phone use.) The MTNL's petition said that while announcing the introduction of the CPP regime, TRAI had failed to take into account the revenue-sharing arrangement for the following types of calls: a) Cellular to cellular local call in the same service area via MTNL; b) Cellular to cellular long-distance call via MTNL; c) PSTN long-distance call to cellular phones; d) Local and long-distance PSTN calls from Private Basic Service Operator to Cellular Network via MTNL; e) Incoming international calls to cellular phones via MTNL; and f) GMPCS calls to the cellular network via MTNL. The petition also points out that these account for substantial segments of the terminating traffic to the cellular network and will affect the revenues of MTNL if they are not worked out properly. It further says callers using coinbox phones will not be able to access cellular phones if the CPP regime comes into being.

Telecom Watchdog had prayed for an *ex-parte* stay on the implementation of the CPP regime on the grounds that the CPP tariffs were arbitrary and that they entailed a loss of Rs.320 crores a year to the exchequer. The petitioner also pointed out that the CPP tariffs differed from those proposed in the consultation paper, to the detriment of the basic phone subscriber and operator. The petitioner also alleged that the open house session held by TRAI on the CPP issue did not offer adequate opportunity for consumers to air their viewpoints and that TRAI had failed to educate consumers about the implications of the CPP regime. It has alleged that TRAI showed undue haste in announcing the CPP regime, which has implications for more than two crore basic telephone subscribers, and that the decision lacked transparency. The petitioner also pointed out that the CPP regime militates against National Telecom Policy (NTP) 1994 and NTP 1999, which promise increased teledensity at affordable rates. ■

Pakistan

This has reference to the Cover Story "Back in business" (November 19). Foreign powers such as the U.S. and Britain and the Commonwealth have brought pressure on the military regime in Pakistan to reintroduce democratic rule. But they forget the fact that such pressure amounts to interference in Pakistan's internal affairs.

After all, democracy is not an end in itself. Democracy could also fail when corrupt, self-serving and incompetent politicians come to wield power and create an urge in the people for a "spell of non-democratic rule" that could correct the evils of misgovernance. The fact that the coup in Pakistan was "bloodless" could be an indication of such a desire. What people want is good governance and to them it does not matter whether power is wielded by politicians or generals.

K. Kumara Sekhar
Eluru, Andhra Pradesh

Diesel price

"The burden of diesel price" (November 19) is certainly going to be felt for a long time. While any increase in oil prices takes effect quickly, the customer hardly hears about prices being reduced.

What is surprising is the lack of interest or initiative to conserve petroleum products, which are scarce. With better coordination between rail and road transport services, the need for trucks can be eliminated except in regions without a rail link. Diesel is also wasted when buses are operated between towns that have a rail link. If the frequency of train services is increased, the number of bus services can be reduced.

D.B.N. Murthy
Bangalore

Courts and freedoms

Anupam Gupta has objected to the terminology 'courts of inquiry' ("Of courts and freedoms", November 19). When an inquiry is carried out by a single officer, it is called formal investigation under a set procedure. It is documented and is different from an informal investigation. A court of inquiry is a fact-finding mission and does not pronounce a judgment. It is an administrative procedure, not a court of law. There is no relation between a court of inquiry and a court-martial. The word 'court' is a misnomer in 'court of inquiry'.

At the command headquarters, the officer who examines such proceedings from a lower formation fills a vacancy, "judge advocate general"; he is neither a judge nor an advocate nor a general.

A court of inquiry starts its function on the 'terms of reference' as instructed by the convening authority. After examining witnesses it gives its 'findings' and 'recommendations'. The authority may or may not accept these. If the authority is not satisfied it may reject the whole proceedings of the court of inquiry and ask it to investigate further.

A court of inquiry is unique to the Indian armed forces and there is no comparable civilian body under the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Penal Code. Civilian witnesses are summoned very rarely – normally on occasions when a court of inquiry is constituted to go into accidents involving military vehicles and civilians or civilian property. It cannot compel civilians to appear as witnesses. A journalist summoned before it need not disclose the source of information.

An incomplete court of inquiry is a blot on the administrative facet of any commander. To avoid this possibility, the terms of reference are carefully worded. Not every convening authority gets the correct advice.

The Army Act, the Navy Act and the Air Force Act mention court of inquiry only briefly. Rules made under these Acts too do not deal with them at length. Regulations governing the three arms of the Services, which are enacted by Parliament, amplify some aspects.

A look at the powers of a Summary General Court Martial (SGCM) will be relevant to this discussion. A field commander of a relatively junior rank can convene an SGCM. A convicted individual can be awarded a "death sentence". And there is no provision for mercy petition to the Governor or the President. But an SGCM is convened very rarely.

Sqn. Ldr. B.G. Prakash

Bangalore

Silent Valley

Any story on the Silent Valley inevitably brings to one's mind the great war waged through the media for its conservation ("The Silent Valley story", November 5). Let us now hope that the plea for the establishment of a gene sanctuary for the wild strains of pepper found in the valley will be heeded. It is a matter of solace to all who love nature that the valley's animal population has thrived in the years since it was notified as a national park. One also remembers the pivotal role played by *The Hindu* in upholding the cause of the Silent Valley.

K.M. Ajir Kutty

Edava, Kerala

Indonesia

The November 5 issue carried an article titled "Towards democracy" regarding political and related developments in Indonesia. The article referred to Australia's policy on East Timor, including its involvement in the multinational force to restore security there, and to the so-called "Howard doctrine" under which the Australian Prime Minister supposedly claimed that Australia would act in a deputy peacekeeping capacity to the United States in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is quite wrong to suggest as some have done that Australia has adopted a policy stance which runs counter to Indonesian policy on East Timor. The decision to request the United Nations to organise a referendum in East Timor to choose between autonomy and separation was not part of Australian policy. It was Indonesian policy, and Australia supported it.

Australia's interests are best served by a strong, prosperous and unified Indonesia, and a constructive relationship between the two countries. Australia deeply values its bilateral relationship with Indonesia. There are undeniably some sensitivities in the relationship at present. Australia believes, however, that common interests will reassert over time, and we will work constructively and persistently to achieve this.

Media reports about the so-called "Howard doctrine" have not accurately represented the expressions used or the position taken by the Australian Prime Minister. What John Howard said was: "You have Australia as a medium-sized, economically strong regional power leading a peacekeeping operation which is largely, but not totally, regional with strong... lender of last resort support from the United States... I don't think it is necessary for America to lead every peacekeeping operation."

Howard added: "We've shouldered the burden that we should carry. And we are a relatively wealthy, economically strong country. We have a particular responsibility to do things 'above and beyond' in this part of the world."

This is what Australia has done with its regional colleagues under the umbrella of the United Nations in the case of East Timor. Australia was asked by the United Nations to take a lead in forming a multinational force to restore security in East Timor. The violence and destruction in East Timor required an urgent response. Australia felt the responsibility, and had the capacity, to take on a central role in providing this, with the express agreement of the Indonesian Government.

Rob Laurie

Australian High Commissioner

New Delhi

Monsanto

This refers to the report "Monsanto's retreat" (Update, November 5).

I must, most regrettably, lodge a very strong protest with you – not on the views expressed in the report, but on the baseless and unsubstantiated allegations made by the president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha who has publicly taken a political and ideological stand against the company.

Monsanto has been in India for 50 years and never once has it done anything that would blemish its track record in this country. It has always respected and operated within the laws and regulations in force.

It has been a part of India's efforts to boost agricultural productivity, providing farmers with products and technology that have contributed positively to agricultural production and management. It is unfortunate that a magazine of your standing should have published such unsubstantiated remarks against a company which enjoys the trust and confidence of millions of farmers because they know from experience that it will not do anything that goes against their interests.

The suggestion of sterile seeds being smuggled in is preposterous. In the first place, sterile seeds do not exist. The technology is in the conceptual stage. Nothing more.

Further, Monsanto has publicly pledged that it will not carry the technology forward to commercialisation. It is sad that *Frontline* should have provided a platform for innuendo and unsubstantiated and baseless allegations based on myths rather than reality.

I trust you will print this letter in full and guard against *Frontline* being misused in future by anyone to malign Monsanto with preposterous allegations.

Meena Vaidyanathan,
Communications Manager,
Agricultural Sector,
Monsanto Enterprises Ltd

Mumbai



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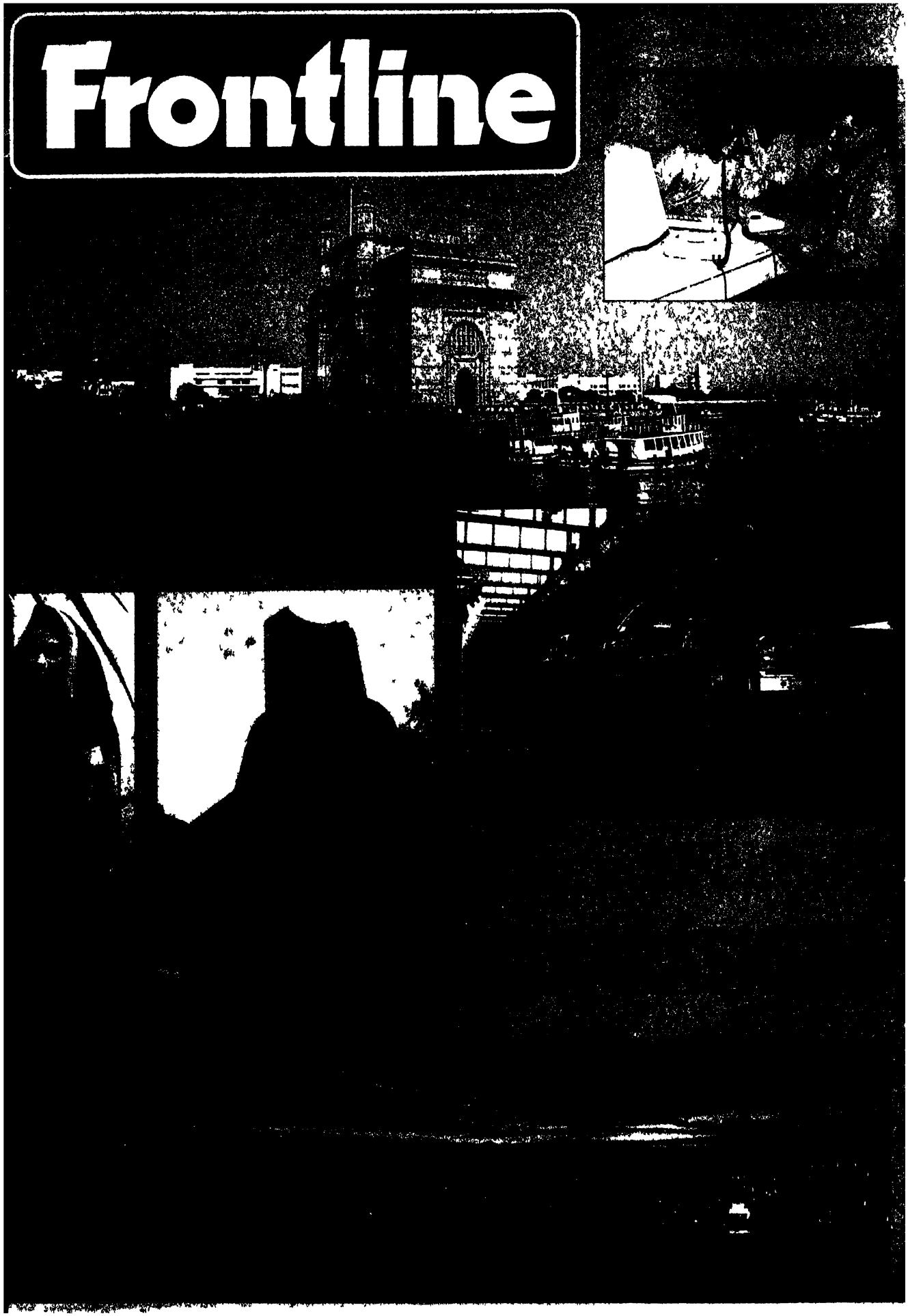
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Engines of growth

Maharashtra's emergence as India's principal industrial State is organically linked with the fortunes of its capital, Mumbai.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Mumbai

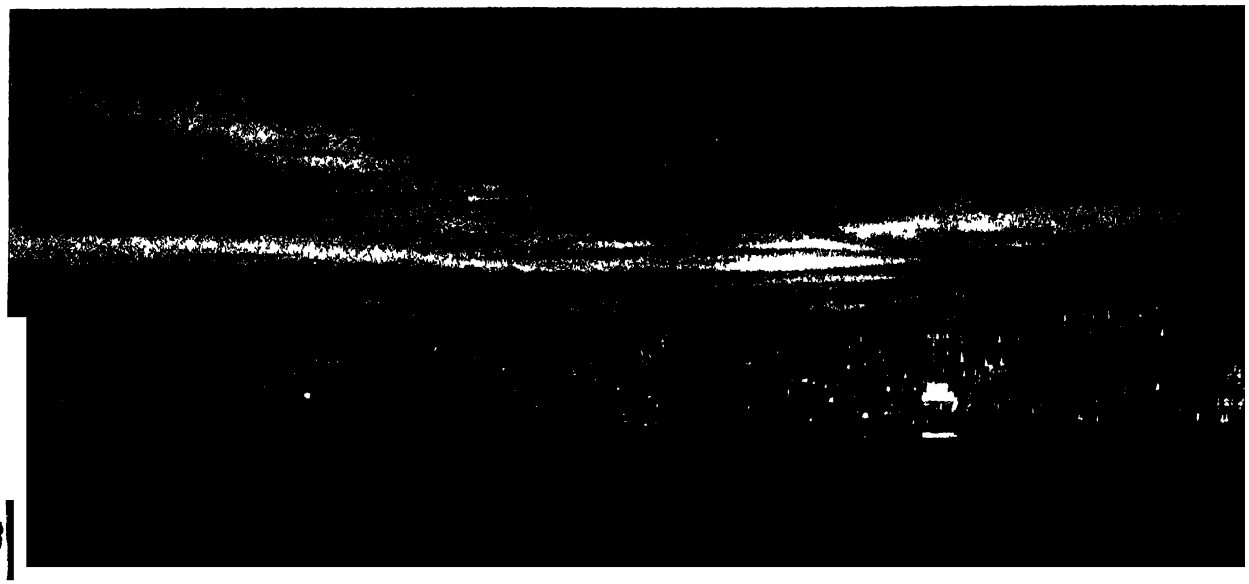
A 17TH CENTURY visitor to what is now Mumbai would have seen little more than small fishing villages and farming hamlets spread across an 18-square-mile island. Coconut trees, date palms and palmyra trees grew along the rice fields in the northern and central parts of the island, and interspersed between these were a few salt pans. The roads that now lead to the hinterland did not exist, and what communications there were collapsed during the monsoon. When the East India Company bought the island from the British Crown in 1668, Surat was the main trading base on India's western seaboard.

How did this nondescript island come to be transformed into a city that would contribute to Maharashtra's emergence as India's principal industrial State? And why is Mumbai, more than any other Indian city, linked to the international economy? The answers lie in its colonial past. The Gateway of India on the city's southern tip is not just a monument but a metaphor, for Mumbai was indeed the door through which imperial domination was secured.

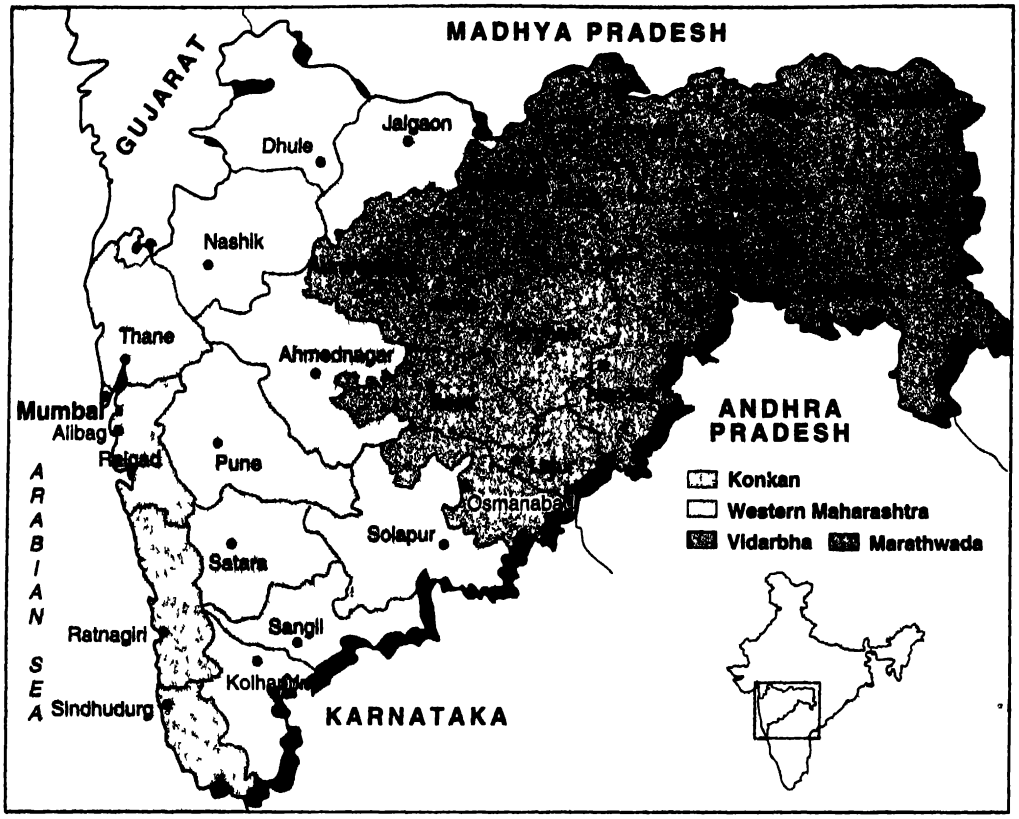
Expansion in the 19th century gave Mumbai a colonial hinterland, the fundamental pre-requisite of an important colonial port city. The annexation of Gujarat between 1800 and 1803, and of the Maratha Empire after the third Anglo-Maratha War of 1819, secured British rule in India, with Mumbai at its centre. But, although Mumbai had by then displaced Surat as the principal western port, it was yet to become a great economic centre. According to economists, the reasons for this lie in the fact that economic conditions in China, the main market for Mumbai's products, were in a depressed state until the 1820s.

Calcutta continued to retain its position as India's main industrial city. In 1820, Mumbai's exports were just a quarter of that generated by its eastern counterpart, and imports just half as much in value. But Mumbai was nonetheless growing. By then, artisans and workers from the Deccan and Konkan regions had, along with financiers and merchants from Gujarat, settled down in the city. However, its importance in the imperial scheme of things was still limited: the inhabitants of its European quarter numbered no more than 1 per cent of its population. (Today, the European quarter or the Fort area is at the centre of corporate Mumbai.)

The revival of trade with China in the 1830s gave Mumbai its first real economic opportunity. The demand for opium was growing in the East, and poppy grew in Malwa. For several reasons, traders preferred Mumbai to the Portuguese-controlled ports along the western coast. When the East India Company lost its trade monopoly to China in 1883, further opportunities opened up for Mumbai's traders. (In 1842, Britain brutally took control of the opium trade in China.) Claude Markovits has recorded that the share of opium in the export trade rose from 25 per cent in 1830-1831 to an incredible 42 per cent in 1860-1861. For Mumbai's merchants, the China war opened the doors to unimagined wealth. Claude Markovits has pointed out that before coming to be known as the Manchester of India, Bombay became India's Medellin: Mumbai drug lords, if they can be called that, were responsible



The Mumbai skyline. The city's growth, from a nondescript island in the 17th century to the financial, commercial and corporate capital of the country, has been monumental.



for the city's 19th century boom

However, this was not the only business that was growing. The newly-opened up agricultural hinterland was also providing cotton. Mumbai's opium boom coincided with a sharp increase in the demand for cotton in Lancashire, which, along with Manchester, was at the centre of the Imperial economy. The owners of Lancashire textile mills found American cotton too expensive and began looking East. By 1861, cotton accounted for 44 per cent of the export trade through Mumbai.

None of these would have been possible if it were not for colonialism at work to the west. In the latter half of the 19th century, a regular sea service to England was established through Alexandria, using the newly built Suez Canal. The service was meant to give Mumbai an advantage over Calcutta – the distance to England from Mumbai was shorter than that from Calcutta. The new route helped offset in part Mumbai's disadvantage as a less-developed rural reservoir of labour and companies by providing it with good links to London finance. A booming export trade brought with it the beginnings of a road network. By the end of the 19th century, the cross-country rail network was in place.

If Mumbai failed to displace Calcutta comprehensively in the colonial period, it was at least for two reasons. The first was the collapse of the cotton trade. Calcutta, which had a more diversified pattern of trade, survived the shock better. Secondly, the eastern port city remained the capital of the Empire in India until 1911.

However, Mumbai had other competitive advantages over Calcutta. Mumbai's cotton textile industries were less labour-intensive than Calcutta's jute factories. The pattern of railway development also helped Mumbai, allowing it to encroach on Calcutta's share of trade with the United Provinces and the Hyderabad state.

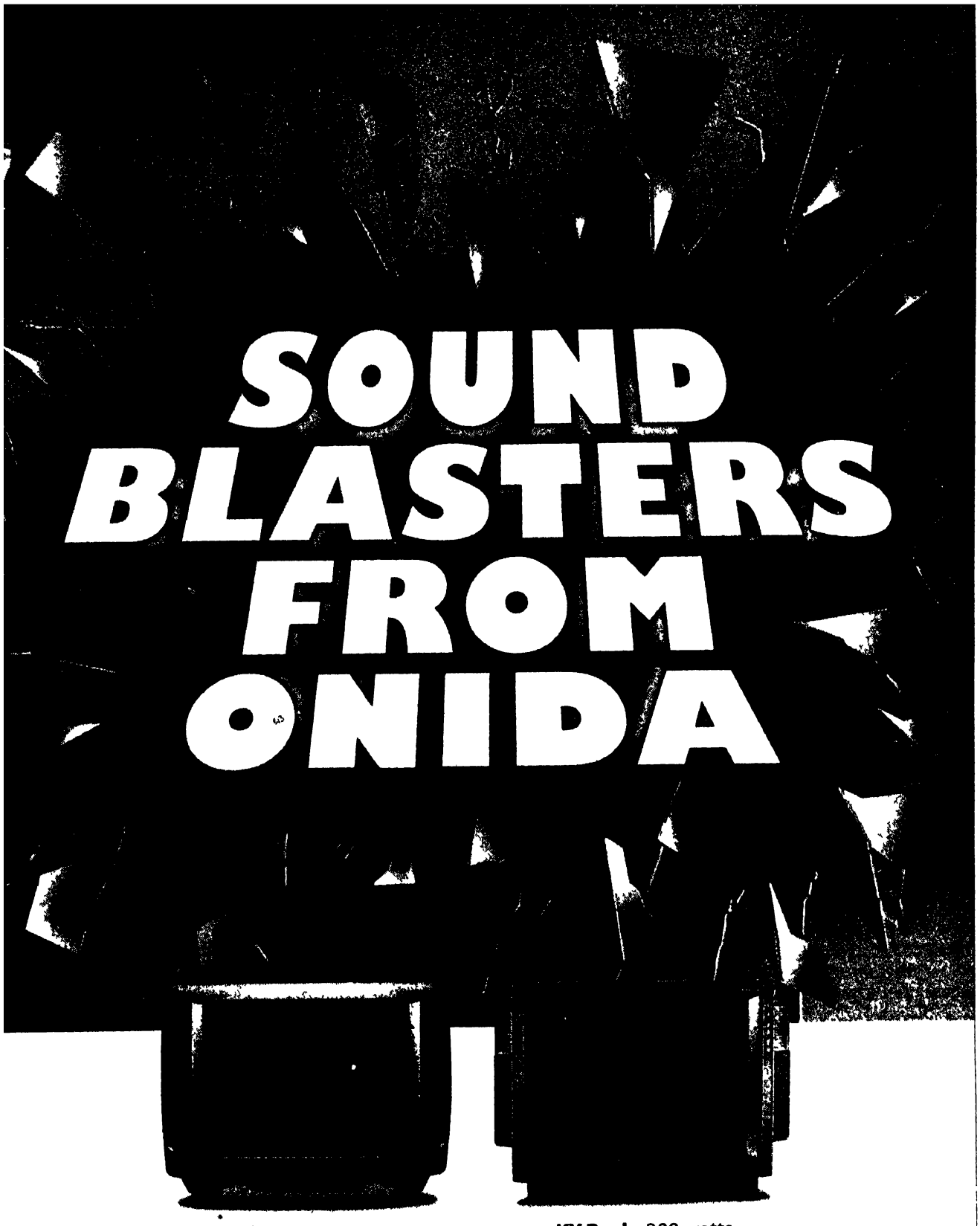
The onset of the Great Depression in 1926 decisively altered the balance of industrial power in Mumbai's favour. With the decline of overseas markets and the invention of jute substitutes, Calcutta's premier industry began to decline. By contrast, Mumbai's business proved to be far more responsive to increased competition from Japan and China. Playing on the sentiments awakened by the Swadeshi movement, textile industries oriented their production towards Indian consumers. From the 1930s onwards, Mumbai's industrialists rapidly captured positions of dominance in the emerging growth areas of iron, steel and cement.

In some senses, businessmen of the 1930s were building on a long tradition of innovation. India's first modern textile mill – Cowasjee Davar's Oriental Spinning – came up in Mumbai in 1854. While the Tatas introduced the ring spindle in India at their Empress Mills in Nagpur, cement production was first started by the Khataus, and the high-technology automobile and aviation industries were brought to India by Walchand Hirachand. During the same time, India's first large hydro-electric projects came up in the Western Ghats. By 1875, Mumbai had a rudimentary stock exchange. (Calcutta got its stock exchange only in 1908.)

WHY did such an innovative tradition thrive only in Mumbai and not elsewhere in the country? Some economists suggest that the answers lie in the fact that race relations in the city were sharply different from those elsewhere. The Scottish domination of industry in Calcutta, underpinned by the racial arrogance of the Imperial bureaucracy, ensured that there never was a level playing field in that city. By contrast, British business did not succeed in establishing an oligopoly in Mumbai. During the Second World War, the largest business house in Mumbai was Indian, that of the Tatas. Ten of the city's 16 largest business houses were Indian-owned, while one was owned by an Indian, with a British partner. By contrast, in Calcutta, 20 of the 24 largest firms were British-owned, and only one, that of the Birlas, was owned exclusively by an Indian.

After Independence, Mumbai's emergence as India's premier industrial city was assured: Calcutta's struggle to retain its position was shattered not only by the Bengal famine and the Second World War but also by the trauma of Partition.

The emergence of Maharashtra as



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India's principal financial centre and its affluence fuelled development throughout the State. Although manufacturing output in Greater Mumbai declined through the 1980s, that in the hinterland shot up. During this period, the share of Thane and Raigad in employment in the manufacturing sector increased dramatically, and peripheral areas such as the Mira Road-Bhayander stretch and Kalyan also grew rapidly.

However, just how Maharashtra in general and Mumbai in particular will shape up in the years to come is unclear. Increased competition from cities such as New Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai, as well as the dramatic industrial expansion of Gujarat, have hurt Maharashtra.

At the same time, the State's industrialists are finding new areas of opportunity. Pune is set to emerge as a major centre for high-technology enterprises, including computers. Work is in progress to link Mumbai and Pune with an information superhighway, made up of optic fibre cables running alongside a new express highway. Farmers in several traditional sugarcane-growing areas have sought to diversify and expand into grapes and other crops that have high export value.

However, Mumbai has to galvanise itself into action in order to rid itself of the sleaze that has permeated the city. The securities scandal, the communal pogroms of 1992-1993, and the rise of the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance to power affected the liberal social ethos that was at the centre of its economic development a century ago. Besides, it immediately needs to deal with a well-entrenched underworld with its interests ranging from the real estate business to the film industry, if it wants to retain investors.

Just how the newly installed Congress(I)-Nationalist Congress Party coalition government tackles Maharashtra's problems remains to be seen. Mumbai's chronic infrastructure problems and the State's alarming level of debt could bog down its economy unless serious action is taken soon. History illustrates the fact that Maharashtra's economy as a whole is, in important senses, driven by developments in Mumbai. If Mumbai's problems worsen, Maharashtra could find itself reliving Mumbai's historic battle with Calcutta. But this time around, the competition will be from new, innovative industrial centres. ■

Leading the field

Maharashtra regains the position of being the State that attracts the largest amount of industrial investment in the country.



PAL NOPOR

The assembly line at the Mercedes-Benz India plant in Pune. Maharashtra is way ahead of other States in the matter of proven capacity to attract foreign direct investment.

R. PADMANABHAN

THE fiscal year 1998-1999 was a memorable one for Maharashtra, a leading industrialised State. That year, it established a record in terms of the volume of private sector industrial investment approved by the Union Government in a State in a single fiscal year. In the process it recaptured the position of being the country's number one haven of industrial investment, a position it had lost to Gujarat between 1994-95 and 1997-98.

According to data from the Secretariat of Industrial Approvals (SIA), published by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), the Centre approved in 1998-99 proposals involving an estimated investment of Rs.42,468 crores in Maharashtra. The proposals, for investment in large- and medium-sized industries, were in the form of industrial entrepreneurs' memoranda or applications for letters of intent (LoI) or leave to set up wholly owned export-oriented units.

The previous record for the highest volume of industrial investment approved by the Centre in a State in one fiscal year was held by Gujarat, which, in 1994-95, secured approval for proposals involving an investment of Rs.33,639 crores. By the end of that year, Gujarat had overtaken Maharashtra in the cumulative volume of industrial investment approved by the Centre since August 1991 (when the era of liberalisation of the Indian economy may be deemed to have begun), establishing a lead of Rs.2,799 crores over the latter. This lead increased to Rs.19,269 crores by the end of 1997-98. However, Maharashtra staged a comeback in no uncertain manner: by the end of 1998-99 it had established a lead of Rs.14,883 crores over Gujarat.

Between August 1991 and June 1999, the Centre approved 8,199 proposals for industrial investment in Maharashtra, involving a total estimated investment of Rs.1,72,558 crores – Rs.18,890 crores ahead of the figure for Gujarat – and



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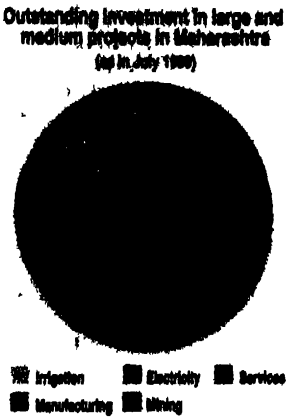
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promising direct employment for 14,69,086 persons, about 8.5 persons per Rs.1 crore of investment.

However, Maharashtra cannot afford to take its dominant position for granted. Of late, besides Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have also been successful in attracting sizable industrial investment.



Source CMIE's Survey of Investment Projects, August 1999

TO what extent do the investment proposals approved by the Centre culminate in projects on the ground? Maharashtra's Directorate of Industries has monitored the progress of 6,332 of the 8,199 proposals that have been approved for the State since August 1991, involving a total estimated investment of Rs.1,72,558 crores. It has found that 3,357 of the proposals have been implemented at a total cost of Rs.51,926 crores. The projects concerned have gone into production, providing employment to 2,95,254 persons. Another 1,022 proposals, involving investment totalling around Rs.23,361 crores and promising employment to an estimated 1,17,481 persons, are in the process of being implemented. While some of the remaining 1,953 proposals on the monitoring list are progressing towards implementation, a substantial number of them have been dropped, deferred or shelved or are being reconsidered by the entrepreneurs concerned.

Like the data published by the NIC, the August 1999 Survey of Investment Projects (SIP) of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), Mumbai, provides telling evidence of Maharashtra's return to the top position among the industrialised States. The CMIE surveys at three-month intervals the outstanding investment (investment in projects announced, proposed or under implementation) in large and medium projects in the areas of manufacturing, mining, power generation and distribution, services and irrigation. (Public sector investment is also included.) All the six surveys the CMIE conducted between May 1998 and August 1999 found that Maharashtra was ahead of all the other States in outstanding investment.

According to the latest survey, the outstanding investment in Maharashtra as of July 1998 stood at an estimated Rs.1,51,739 crores. It is followed by Tamil Nadu, with outstanding investments totalling an estimated Rs.1,41,472 crores, and Gujarat with Rs.1,36,449 crores. Investment in Maharashtra is spread across 618 projects. The corresponding figures for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are 272 and 274 respectively. But it is Karnataka, with a figure of 299, which is second to Maharashtra in the number of outstanding projects.

According to the CMIE's *Monthly Review of Investment Projects* (January 1999), the major factors that contributed to Maharashtra regaining its top position include the announcement of a couple of large infrastructure projects (one of them being a Rs.5,000-crore cargo complex for Nagpur) and a couple of roadways projects estimated to cost about Rs.5,000 crores; the revival of a Rs.4,500-crore petrochemical project by NOCIL; a proposal by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India to set up a project in the State (substantial expansion of the Tarapur Atomic Power Station, or TAPS, in Thane district at an estimated cost of Rs.6,421 crores); and an escalation in the estimated costs of some of the steel projects in the pipeline.

Out of Maharashtra's outstanding investments totalling Rs.1,51,739 crores as of July 1999, Rs.88,800 crores are in projects under implementation. Thus, the rate of implementation is 58.5 per cent. In this area too, Maharashtra is ahead of other States. Andhra Pradesh is a poor second, with a rate of implementation of 48.4 per cent, and Tamil Nadu is in the third place, with just 27 per cent.

The CMIE review says that the rise in project investment in Maharashtra "could probably mark a reversal of the trend" of investments in the State slowing down during 1994-97 after rising sharply during the earliest years of liberalisation. "This period had also seen many projects being shifted to the neighbouring States," according to the review.

"Inadequate infrastructural facilities in the interior part of the State (Maharashtra), local resistance against new projects in the coastal areas, as also increased competition amongst States, had led to a drop of fresh investment proposals in the State. In an attempt to attract more investments, the State government announced additional tax concessions to large projects," it says.

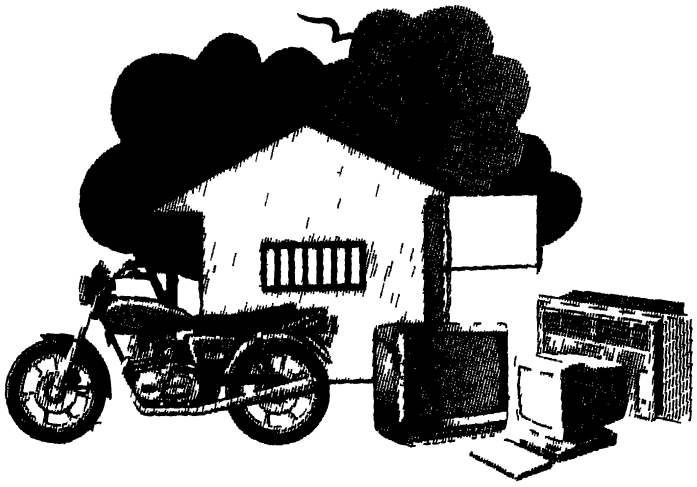
Given this background, it is noteworthy that as much as 25.5 per cent of the outstanding investment in large and medium projects in the State as of July 1999 was in the electricity sector and that another 32.3 per cent was in the services sector, including physical and social infrastructure. Manufacturing accounts for only 21.9 per cent of the investments; mining and irrigation account for 1.3 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. Power generation, transport services, chemical industries, storage and distribution services and metal and metal product industries account for 25.4 per cent, 16.6 per cent, 7.8 per cent, 7.8 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively.

The large power projects being implemented in the State include, besides the TAPS project, the Rs.7,450-crore second phase of the Enron-promoted Dabhol project in Ratnagiri district; the Ispat group's Bhadravati thermal power project in Chandrapur district (Rs.4,636 crores); Jindal Power Ltd's Raigad power project (Rs.2,412 crores); the Reliance group's Patalganga project in Raigad district (Rs.2,000 crores); and Ispat Energy Ltd's Dolvi power project in Raigad district (Rs.1,500 crores). They also include projects relating to the expansion of the Koyna hydroelectric project in Satara district (Rs.2,500 crores), and the Maharashtra State Electricity Board's Khaparkheda (thermal) project in Nagpur district (Rs.1,353 crores).

The large manufacturing projects that are being implemented in Maharashtra include Ispat Industries' hot-rolled steel project (Rs.4,845 crores), Ispat Metallics India's hot metals project (Rs.1,840 crores), and HOC Chematur's MDI (methyl di-isocyanade) project (Rs.366.73 crores), all in Raigad district; Usha Ispat's hot-rolled steel coils project (Rs.1,990 crores) in Sindhudurg district; TELCO's small car project (Rs.1,700 crores), which saw the launching in January 1999 of the Indica, the company's first passenger car, in Pune; and a part of Ashok Leyland's multi-State commer-

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cial vehicle project in Bhandara district (Rs.1,700 crores).

As these figures indicate, the Ispat group is deeply involved in the industrialisation effort that is under way in Maharashtra.

Raigad district has the largest share (16.7 per cent) of the outstanding investment. It is followed by the districts of Thane (11.1 per cent), Greater Mumbai (10 per cent) and Ratnagiri (7.2 per cent). Since all these districts are in the Konkan, it goes without saying that this coastal region has bagged the lion's share of the investment. Other districts that have a substantial share of the outstanding investment are Pune (6.4 per cent) in western Maharashtra and Nagpur (4.5 per cent) and Chandrapur (3.7 per cent) in Vidarbha. Each of these districts has outstanding investments in excess of Rs.5,500 crores. Northern Maharashtra or Marathwada, the State's most backward region, does not figure in the list of districts having investments of such magnitude.

An analysis of the distribution of outstanding investments by ownership as of July 1999 reveals that the State government has a much larger share of the total investment in Maharashtra than in any of the five other States that have attracted substantial investments. In Maharashtra, 136 State government projects involving investments totalling Rs.58,483 crores account for 38.5 per cent of the total investments in the State. The State that comes closest to Maharashtra in this respect is Andhra Pradesh, where State government investments account for 26.6 per cent of the total investments. Given the financial crunch that the Maharashtra government has been facing, there is scope for an investigation into the question of whether the government was justified in going in for investments on such a large scale.

The Indian private sector accounts for 23.6 per cent of the outstanding investments in the State, while the foreign private sector accounts for 21.1 per cent. This shows that Maharashtra is way ahead of other States in the matter of proven capacity to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). According to SIA data published by the NIC, the Centre has approved a much larger volume of investment for Maharashtra than for any other State every year since 1992-93. A record total FDI of Rs.6,458.78 crores was approved for the State in 1997-98. Between August 1991 and July 1999, Maharashtra bagged 1,428 approved FDI proposals, representing an estimated investment of Rs.24,588.14 crores. Tamil Nadu won the second largest number (925) of such proposals approved during this period, and Karnataka the second largest estimated volume of investment – Rs.14,864 crores.

According to the SIP (August 1999), 75 major projects involving investments totalling Rs.7,464 crores were completed in Maharashtra between August 1998 and July 1999. Eleven such projects, undertaken by foreign private enterprises, accounted for 62.4 per cent of the total investment, and 43 projects undertaken by Indian private enterprise for 23.3 per cent. The State government's share of the investment in the completed projects is 4.3 per cent and the Centre's share 10 per cent.

An analysis of the sectoral pattern of investments in the completed projects reveals that power generation accounted for 43.3 per cent of the total amount





invested, manufacturing 39.3 per cent, mining 2.2 per cent and services the remaining 15.2 per cent.

The largest project completed in Maharashtra between August 1998 and July 1999 is the Rs.3,128-crore first phase of the Dabhol power project. Two automobile projects – the Rs.750-crore passenger car project of Mercedes Benz India Limited and the Rs 200-crore two-wheeler and three-wheeler project (substantial expansion) of Bajaj Auto, both located in Pune, together account for as much as 12.7 per cent of the total investment in the completed projects.

Also completed between August 1998 and July 1999 were the Rs.400-crore glass fibre project of Owens-Corning (India) Limited (yet another manifestation of FDI), a Rs.250-crore nitrogenous fertilizer project of Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers, a Rs. 177.38-crore ethylene project of Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited (IPCL) and a Rs.15-crore Portland slag cement project of Indo Rama Cements, all located in Raigad district. The list of completed projects also includes Western Coalfields Ltd's Ukni OC coal project (Rs.100.37 crores) in Chandrapur district.

A WORD or two about certain policy initiatives of the Maharashtra government would be in order. On January 14, 1999 the government approved sales tax incentives for mega projects in the automobile sector located in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region or the Pune Metropolitan Region. By definition, mega projects are projects that envisage an investment of more than Rs.1,500 crores in gross fixed capital. The sales tax incentives would be available for two years, subject to a ceiling of 10 per cent of the gross fixed investment in a given project. This policy initiative was evidently prompted by the slipping away of several passenger car projects from Maharashtra's grasp.

Another thrust area for the State government is information technology (IT). The government has adopted a policy aimed at making the State globally competitive in the IT sector. Among the strategies to be adopted to achieve the goal are measures to "make the people of the State computer-literate and produce top-class IT professionals through strong human resource development initiatives" and to provide the IT industry and IT-facilitated services with a fillip through fiscal and non-fiscal incentives. ■

Growth unlimited

With some streamlining of its physical and administrative features, Mumbai can aspire to achieve a more globally prominent position.

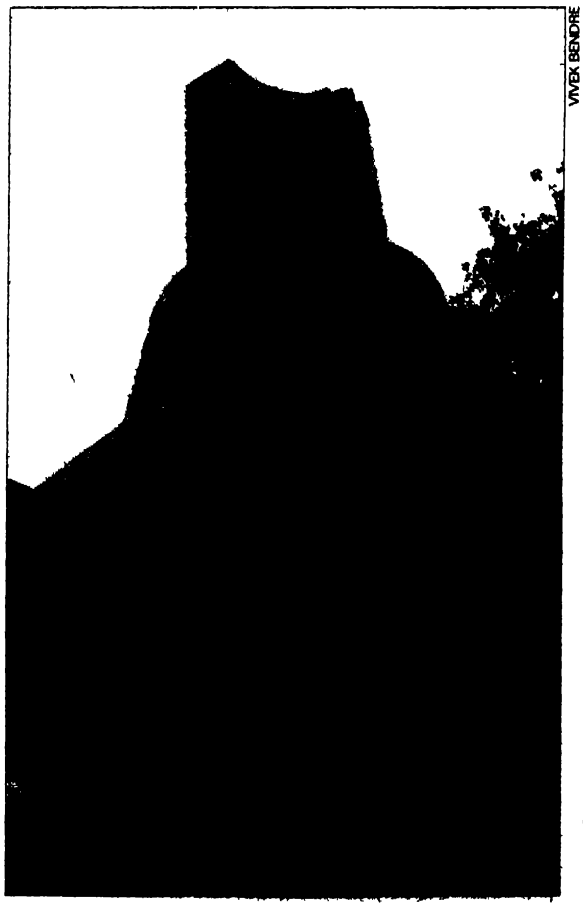
KRIPA RAMAN
in Mumbai

MUMBAI, the financial, commercial and corporate capital of the country, has all the features required of a world-class financial centre. The country's apex bank, the Reserve Bank of India, and the Export Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) have their headquarters in Mumbai. The State Bank of India, the country's largest bank, also has its head office here. Besides, a number of other public sector commercial banks and private banks have their main operations in Mumbai, with the city contributing between 45 per cent and 50 per cent of the deposits mobilised and nearly 70 per cent of the advances made.

Financial institutions such as the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) and the ICICI also have their headquarters in Mumbai; the Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation has its operating office in the city. Naturally, Mumbai gets the bulk of sanctions and disbursals by financial institutions (FIs) – nearly 75 per cent of the total.

Even a largely State government institution such as SICOM Ltd offers foreign exchange loans to industry. (SICOM is the first State industrial development corporation to offer foreign exchange loans.)

Then there is the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), established in 1875 as The Native Share and Stockbrokers' Association. It is the oldest stock exchange in Asia (the Tokyo Stock Exchange was founded in 1878). The BSE accounts for close to 90 per cent of the market capitalisation in the country and about 70 per cent of the listed capital.



VIVEK BENDRE

The Bombay Stock Exchange. It accounts for close to 90 per cent of the market capitalisation in India.

Nearly 15 foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have their broking operations in Mumbai. More than 400 FIIs route their investments through Mumbai-based brokerage firms. Some of them, such as Dresdner Kleinworth Benson, S.G. Asia and Jardine Fleming, have their Indian arm in Mumbai.

Mumbai is also home to the largest mutual fund (MF) in the country, the Unit Trust of India, often referred to as the "Big Daddy" of the Indian securities markets.

General Insurance Corporation, the holding company of the four State-owned insurance companies, also operates out of Mumbai. Life Insurance

Are your investments in keeping with your age?

Part II

By a panel of experts

Last time we described life-cycle financial planning and discussed Phases I and II. We now move on to the other two.

Phase III : Age Group 45 to 60 years

Objective: Retirement Planning

If you are a salaried individual, you have to only augment your corporate benefits like Provident Fund, Gratuity, Superannuation, Pension, etc. If you are self-employed or a professional you must make full provision for a secure retirement.

You can look at PPF, Infrastructure Bonds and share dividends for fully tax exempt income under Sec 10. Consider N.S.C., Units, Mutual Funds, etc. for tax-free incomes under Sec.80-L.

Objectiv:Home Ownership Provision

Loans from employer, P.F. and financial institutions. Secure the prepayment of loan (against your untimely demise) with a mortgage redemption policy.

Objective: Preparing your Family for Life without You

Tell your family about your investments and planning and acquaint them with your financial arrangements as well as your financial and legal advisors.

Objective: Opportunity Fund

Set up a fund in bank fixed deposits/bonds to take advantage of opportunities of starting a business or making a good investment.

Phase IV : Age Group above 60 years

Objective: Regular Income from Investments

If you want money at frequent intervals, the Monthly Income Schemes of UTI are best suited. If you prefer a less frequent inflow, say once every three months, there are other avenues such as bonds that will meet your need. Also, shuffle your portfolio of investments in shares.

Objective: Post Demise Provisions



Set up a fund to defray the costs of disposal of the estate and to settle taxes that might remain unpaid at the time of your demise.

This is the phase when a powerful new concern emerges, overriding financial objectives: the occupation of your time. A neat solution is to work as a consultant (rather than do a part/full-time job). The advantage is that, while it takes care of your time, you can reduce your tax liability by claiming part of your house rent, electricity and telephone charges, car expenses, depreciation on car and office equipment, all as business expenses. Besides, you work at your own pace and place.

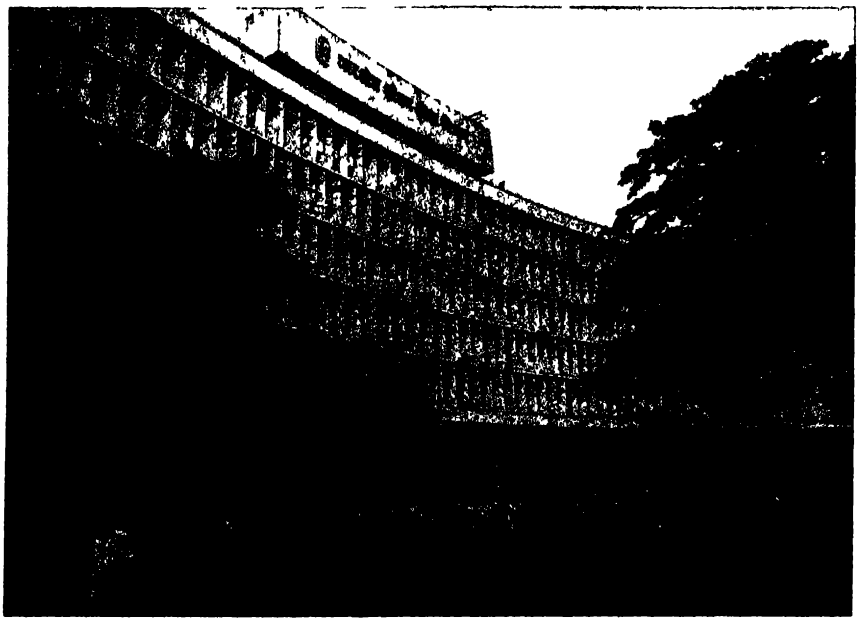
Your Mediclaim policy allows you annual health check-ups at designated centres. This will enable you to address another concern typical of this phase: your health.

The four phases are not really watertight compartments. The objectives and strategies can overlap across phases and vary from person to person. You must therefore fix your position in your life-cycle, identify those objectives that you want to make your own, select matching strategies, study and analyse the various saving/investment options available, and then decide your plan of action.

Your Net worth (the difference between what you own and what you owe) is a good indicator of your financial planing. You must calculate it and review it every year.

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VIVEK BENDRE

Life Insurance Corporation of India's headquarters in Mumbai. The city has all the features required of a world-class financial centre.

Corporation of India is also based in Mumbai.

Indications are that Mumbai will evolve into a purely financial and services centre.

However, the housing and commuting problems of the city have led many corporate houses to seek roomier pastures such as New Delhi and Chennai. Manufacturing is clearly headed out. Several of the smaller industries in the Thane-Belapur belt in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (parts of Thane district and Navi Mumbai form part of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region) have shut down or moved out.

The corporate and financial world saw the writing on the wall some time ago when a group of people from that section got together to form Bombay First (Mumbai was formerly known as Bombay). At a 1994 seminar organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the British Council Division, this group discussed the city's future as an emerging global financial centre. The concept of Bombay First was similar to that of London First. (London repackaged and marketed itself as a major financial and commercial centre when employers and labour began to desert the city.) Members of Bombay First felt that Mumbai should do likewise. They felt that since Mumbai has an enviable geographical location, situated as it is between the large cities of South-East Asia and the commercial and financial hubs of Europe – London, Zurich and Frankfurt – it could be a hub between the two regions. Mumbai's large English-speaking skilled workforce would be an added asset.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (Western Chapter) went a step further and requested permission from the RBI to develop the city as an Offshore Financial Centre (OFC). One of the main supporters of this proposal is Nimesh Kampani of JM Financial, who believes that the metropolis could become one of the top OFCs in the world if it is declared a free port and a tax-free zone. Since this requires a host of approvals, the proposal is still in the realm of imagination.

MUMBAI could, meanwhile, improve upon its status as the financial capital of the country and try to achieve a more prominent position globally. At a CII conference on the services sector held in Maharashtra a year ago, Tino Puri of McKinsey & Co. remarked that Mumbai could become a world-class financial centre with some streamlining – for example, reducing stamp duty, ensuring better connectivity and so on.

Mumbai also has the largest air and maritime commercial hubs in the country, besides the largest bullion and forex markets. It will have the most modern diamond bourse in the world if plans for the Bharat Diamond Bourse at the Bandra-Kurla complex take off.

Observers feel that contrary to indications, Mumbai has enough space to accommodate any amount of growth in the financial and commercial sectors. One view, a view which is often contested by pro-working class groups, is that freeing mill lands for development could release considerable space for both office and residential purposes in central Mumbai. Many of the old textile mills in central Mumbai are slowly becoming home to advertising agencies, consultancies, entertainment firms and the like. The India property markets report for 1998-99 of the real estate services company Jones Lang Lasalle noted that in the prime industrial belt of Andheri a number of industrial units were being used for commercial purposes.

The problem of space was solved to a certain extent when the previous Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party government lifted the 1970s ban on the development of further office space in the city. The floor space index (FSI) has now been increased for several categories of buildings and areas.

The Rent Control Act, however, remains a big problem, especially in South Mumbai, making a lot of space unavailable for use or improvement. However, since South Mumbai is no longer the sole preserve of companies – many of them are looking to the northern suburbs – it is not an insurmountable problem.

The Shiv Sena-BJP government had also planned major entertainment and shopping centres in the city for its working population. It had allocated space under flyovers – 55 of which were to be built in the metropolitan area, involving a cost of roughly Rs.1,500 crores – and built-up space above railway stations for this purpose. (Twenty-five of these flyovers have either been completed or are in various stages of construction.)

The State government also came up with a special Information Technology Policy last year which allowed for residential space to be used as office space for operations relating to information technology. At Navi Mumbai, the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation is developing a Millennium Industrial Park, while SICOM is developing the Vashi Infotech Park. (The Vashi Infotech Park claims to offer all facilities IT companies require at a single location.)

Although other Indian cities are competing with Mumbai to attract capital – whether manufacturing or financial – the

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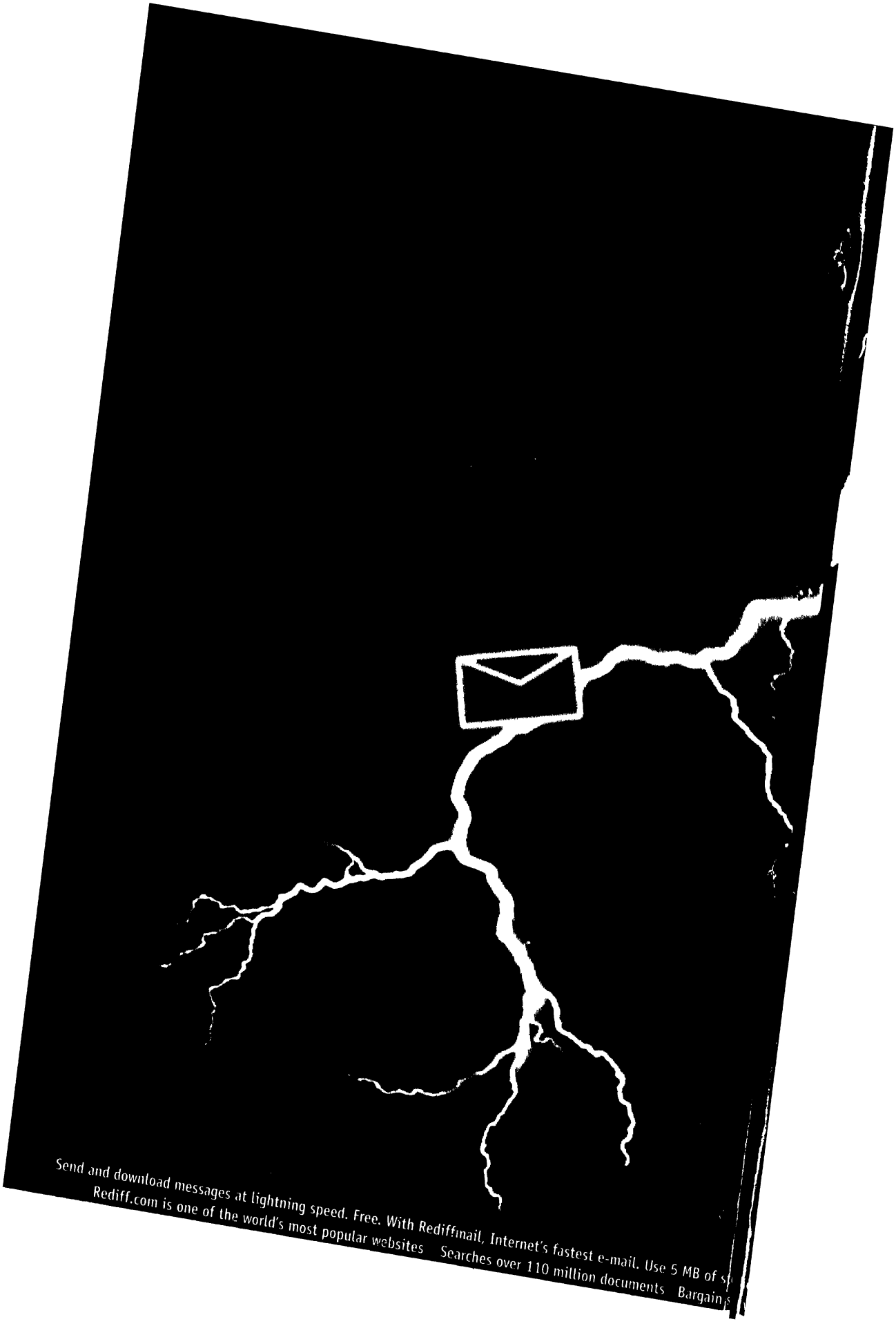
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State government feels that several factors favour Mumbai, including the availability of ample electricity. Many offices that relocate to cities such as Delhi and Bangalore have had to make alternative arrangements for uninterrupted power supply.

The Shiv Sena-BJP government had also sanctioned the development of five-star industrial estates in the State in Nagpur, Nashik, Sinnar, Amravati, Aurangabad, Kolhapur, Mahad-Ratnagiri, Pune and Nanded. Industries located there would naturally have a liaison office or financial operations office in Mumbai or in the Mumbai metropolitan area.

One view is that Mumbai needs to streamline itself physically since it presents a picture of decay. More than half of its population lives in slums. Although several rehabilitation schemes have been proffered, none of them has been able to solve the problem. It is hoped that the dispersal of the manufacturing industry will lead to a dispersal of some of its population. The Municipal Corporation of Mumbai has come up with a grand plan to clean up and refurbish the city at a cost of more than Rs 3,000 crores, loans for which are proposed to be raised from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) and FIs. It remains to be seen what plans the Congress(I)-Nationalist Congress Party government has for the development of the State, its capital in particular.

The World Bank-funded Mumbai Urban Transport Plan Phase II will hopefully help speed up commuting within the city. A separate Mumbai Rail Vikas Corporation has been set up in order to streamline the rail system.

In addition to all this are the immeasurables. Many people in the industry feel that Mumbai allows the young executive a good working atmosphere as well as a modern lifestyle. As a young professional working in the city said: "The city never sleeps and young people will not get bored in the hours after work. It is a safe place for women executives who may have to work late. This is also the place where your work speaks for itself."

There is much debate as to whether Maharashtra, and with it Mumbai, is losing its premier status as a business region. Maharashtra, however, claims that it is still number one, and that by revamping itself and repositioning its capital city as a financial and services industry hub, it will continue to remain so ■

Towards better connectivity

Maharashtra gears up to use information technology in building bridges between the government and the people.

SUREKHA SULE

BOLSTERED by its leading position in industrial development, Maharashtra is set to take a big leap forward in information technology. The State is keen to ensure 'anytime, anyhow, anywhere' connectivity to empower people at the grassroots. It hopes to achieve this by replicating extensively the Warananagar Wired Villages project.

On August 15, 1998, the Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party government launched the State's IT policy and announced 1999 as IT year. It also decided to develop the Mumbai-Pune corridor, where the IT industry is concentrated, as a 'Knowledge Corridor'. The Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone (SEEPZ) in Mumbai was started in 1972. It houses several leading IT companies.

India is expected to emerge as a major IT power in the Asia-Pacific region. A survey found that Australia, South Korea, Taiwan and India dominated the two largest segments of the IT industry, namely personal computers (PCs) and services, and by 2003 Australia, China and India together would drive the demand for services across the region. According to a five-year forecast, the IT industry in India, which has a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28 per cent, would overtake those of Korea and Taiwan. Along with China and Indonesia, India has the highest five-year CAGR in the region. Even as the region reeled under its worst recession, India stood firm and increased its shipment of PCs by 30 per cent. In the PC segment, India is expected to remain the fastest growing market.

According to *Dataquest*, India sold 1.7 lakh PCs in 1996, when the turnover of the IT industry was Rs 6,000 crores. In spite of the subsequent economic slowdown, the industry's turnover increased to Rs 24,000 crores and the sale of PCs touched the million mark. The pace of IT absorption has been breathtaking across



Hiranandani Gardens in the Mumbai suburb Powai. In an effort to provide incentives to IT entrepreneurs, the State government has introduced numerous measures, including permitting the software industry to function in residential areas.

ll industries; this has been true of both systems and applications.

Maharashtra contributed a lion's share to the IT boom, largely through initiatives in the private sector. As Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh became more IT-savvy and Bangalore and Hyderabad became the preferred destinations for domestic as well as international IT players, Maharashtra appeared to be losing the race. But recent measures by the State government, such as providing incentives to IT entrepreneurs, are bound to attract new investments.

Maharashtra contributed a lion's share to the IT boom, largely through initiatives in the private sector... Recent measures by the State government are bound to attract new investments.

The software industry will be permitted to function in residential areas and included in the users' list for the No Development Zone. IT parks developed by the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation and the City Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) will be allowed 100 per cent ~ ra Floor Space Index at 25 per cent pre-m ium. The industry will not require permission to use agricultural land in residential areas. Software units will not require clearance from the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board. IT units in zones classified as A, B and C will be entitled to benefits that were reserved for units in the D zone. Sales tax on hardware has been reduced to 2 per cent and that on software to 1 per cent. There will be no sales tax on customised software. There will be no change in these rates for the next five years. The octroi on IT products will be refunded and electricity duty for IT units waived. Property transactions in IT parks will be exempt from stamp duty.

Many IT players have hailed the new policy and are positive about further growth of the industry in Maharashtra. Ashank Desai of Mastek said: "We have the largest presence with 85 per cent of the business in the State. We are undertaking further expansion in the Millennium Park in Navi Mumbai." Mastek is convinced that it needs to invest more in the State because of the excellent infrastructure. Infosys Technologies, India's number one software company, has also increased its presence in the State. It is investing Rs.60 crores in the first phase and Rs.130 crores in the second phase in the Pune Infotech Park.

Devang Mehta of the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) said: "The Knowledge Corridor will attract both local and overseas investment and NASSCOM is opening offices in the State. With leading educational and training institutes such as the Indian Institute of Technology, the National Centre for Software Technology (NCST), and the new institute for software engineering (in Pune), the State is the right choice to set up IT businesses. Onward Novell is setting up an institute for networking technology in the State, thus bringing in the best of networking technology of the world leader, Novell."

The Knowledge Corridor begins in Mumbai, the commercial capital of India, and passes through a number of IT centres up to Pune, a centre of learning. Mumbai is the largest single consumer of IT products and services and boasts of the first-ever IT zone, the SEEPZ. Now the zone is being expanded into SEEPZ++. The other landmarks along the corridor are the International Infotech Park in Vashi; the Airoli Knowledge Park; the Millennium Business Park in Mahape; the Dronagiri IT Hardware Park; the Talawade Software Technology Park, Pune; the Pune Infotech Park; Hinjawadi Phase I and Phase II; the Indian Institute of Software Technology, Pune; and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune.

C-DAC has advanced the open-frame architecture for flexible supercomputing through the PARAM series of supercomputers. This allowed India to retain its position in the league of supercomputing nations. C-DAC has created software for personal computers in all Indian languages through its GIST technology. It has evolved a high-quality intellectual resource base in the form of an expert team with specialised knowledge of advanced computing. C-DAC has set up an Advanced Computing Training School to meet the training needs of existing and prospective users and for students of advanced IT.

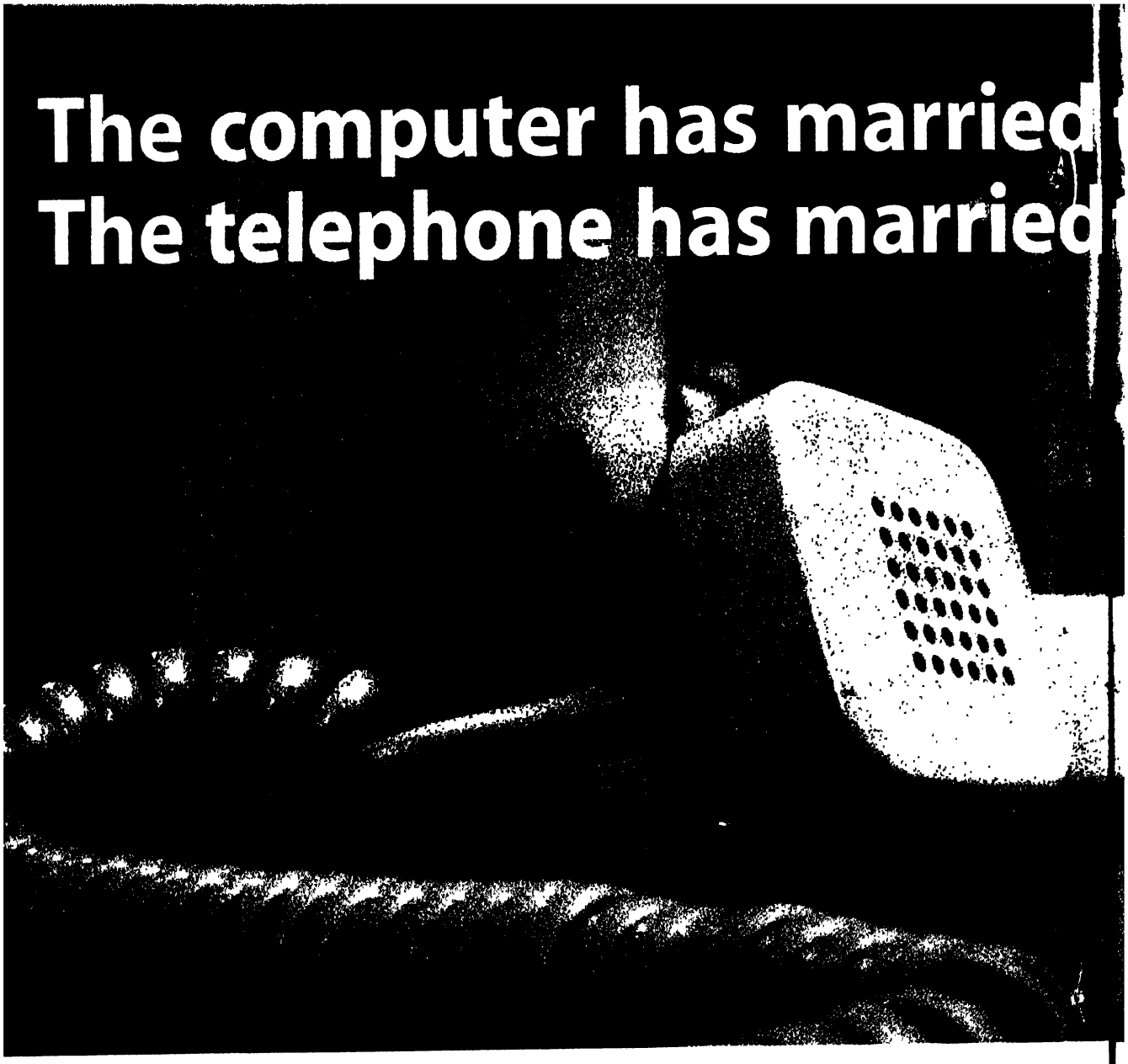
The Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) and the State's Public Works Department and Irrigation Department will facilitate the laying of fibre optics cables by private Internet service providers or telecom service providers. While the MSEB has invited tenders, the other agencies will offer right of way to the IT industry at half the normal charges. The municipal corporations and municipal councils will be asked to allow the use of street-light poles to extend the fibre optic cable network or cable network for Internet connectivity.

The government proposes to set up computer laboratories at a cost of Rs.15 lakhs in 637 government and other schools, possibly with Internet connections, over the next five years. Aided schools will be encouraged to set up such laboratories through private participation. Teachers will be provided computer training. Engineering colleges will be encouraged to add on IT courses. A digital library will be set up in the University of Pune where English or Marathi-speaking users can access CD-ROMs and the Internet.

The government itself is emerging as the biggest IT user. It is trying to improve productivity and quality of service, make the administration more transparent and take IT to the common man. It intends to replicate the Warananagar Wired Villages project in other regions of the State. The aim is to computerise quickly those departments that have greater public contact, such as Sales Tax, Revenue, Health, Education, Irrigation and Public Works. Bulletin boards and public tele-info systems will be used to provide people instant information about government programmes, policies and procedures. Efforts will be made to increase computer literacy and accelerate proficiency. IT will be used to monitor government programmes and ensure speedy implementation of projects. The use of e-mail between the State headquarters and district-level and taluk-level offices will be made obligatory as part of a move towards achieving "paperless" offices.

The goals include providing the people of the State world-class IT infrastructure, putting in place the appropriate institutional mechanism, making people computer-literate, producing top-class IT professionals, and computerising citizen-government interface in order to make the government more transparent. ■

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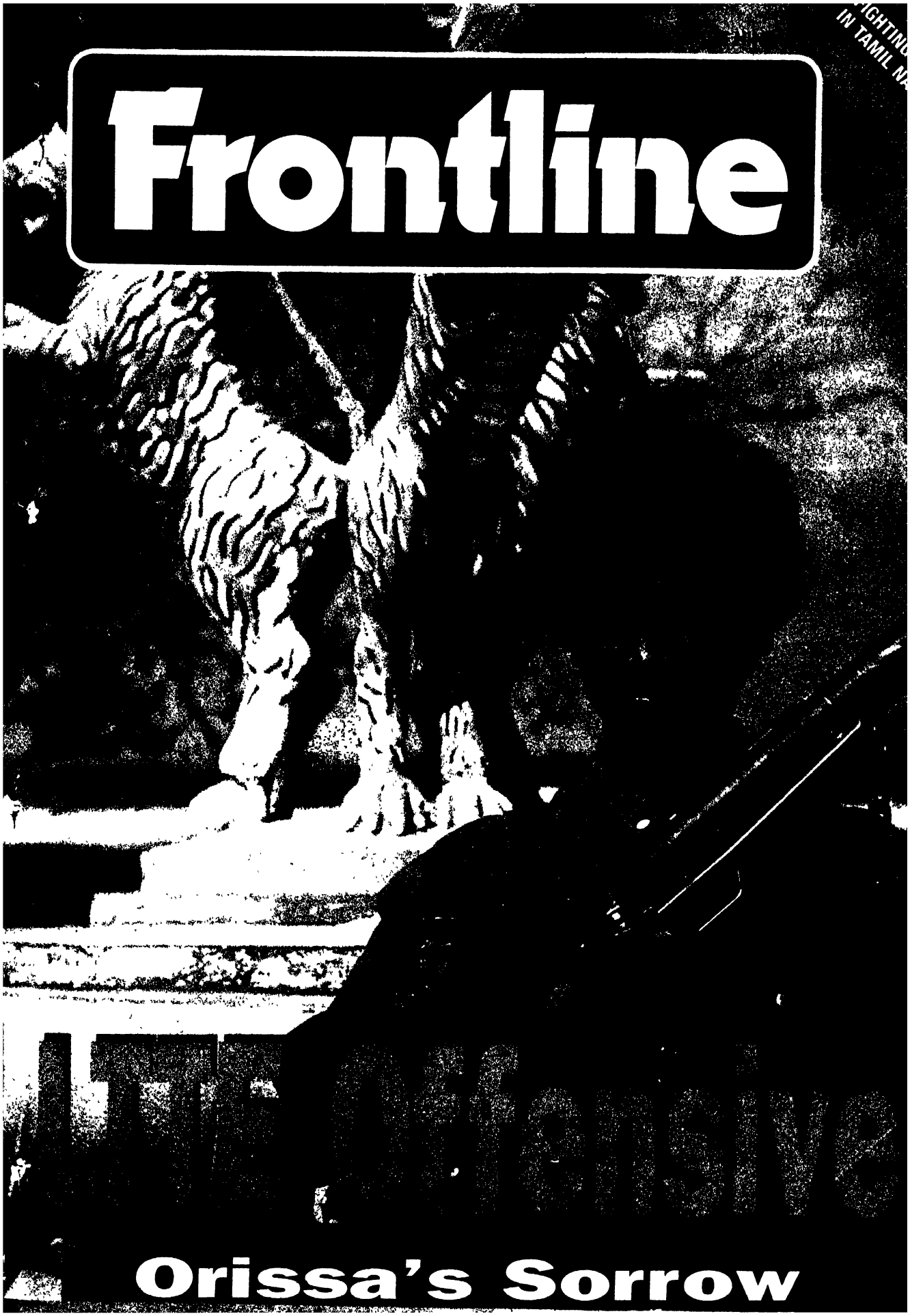


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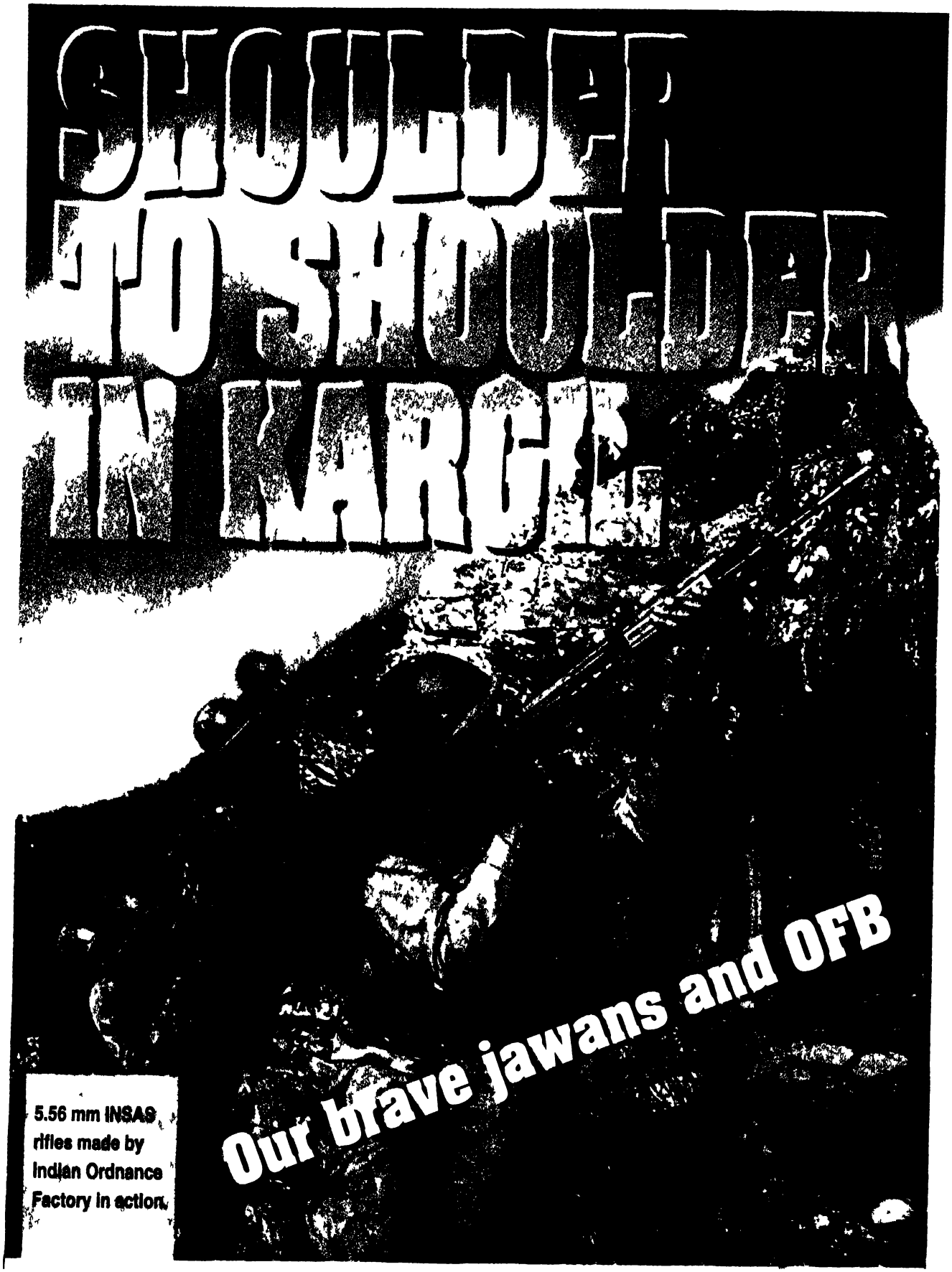
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Frontline



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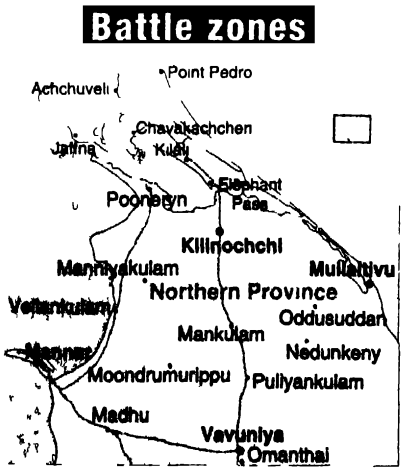
LTTE OFFENSIVE

With the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam demonstrating its military resilience and marking major advances in the Wanni war, the avowed objective of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's war for peace stands exposed as a non-workable exercise.

D B S JEYARAJ

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched on November 2 the third phase of Operation Oyatha Alaigal (Unceasing Waves) in the northeastern sector of the Wanni region in Sri Lanka's Northern Province. By November 15 the LTTE's positions had advanced in a southwest direction from Oddusuddan on the A 34 highway to the outskirts of Omanthai on the Jaffna Kandy A 9 highway. The Tigers also moved southwards on the eastern flank to the militarised settlements of Manal Aaru or Weli Oya. Vavuniya, the southernmost town of the Northern Province also came under threat.

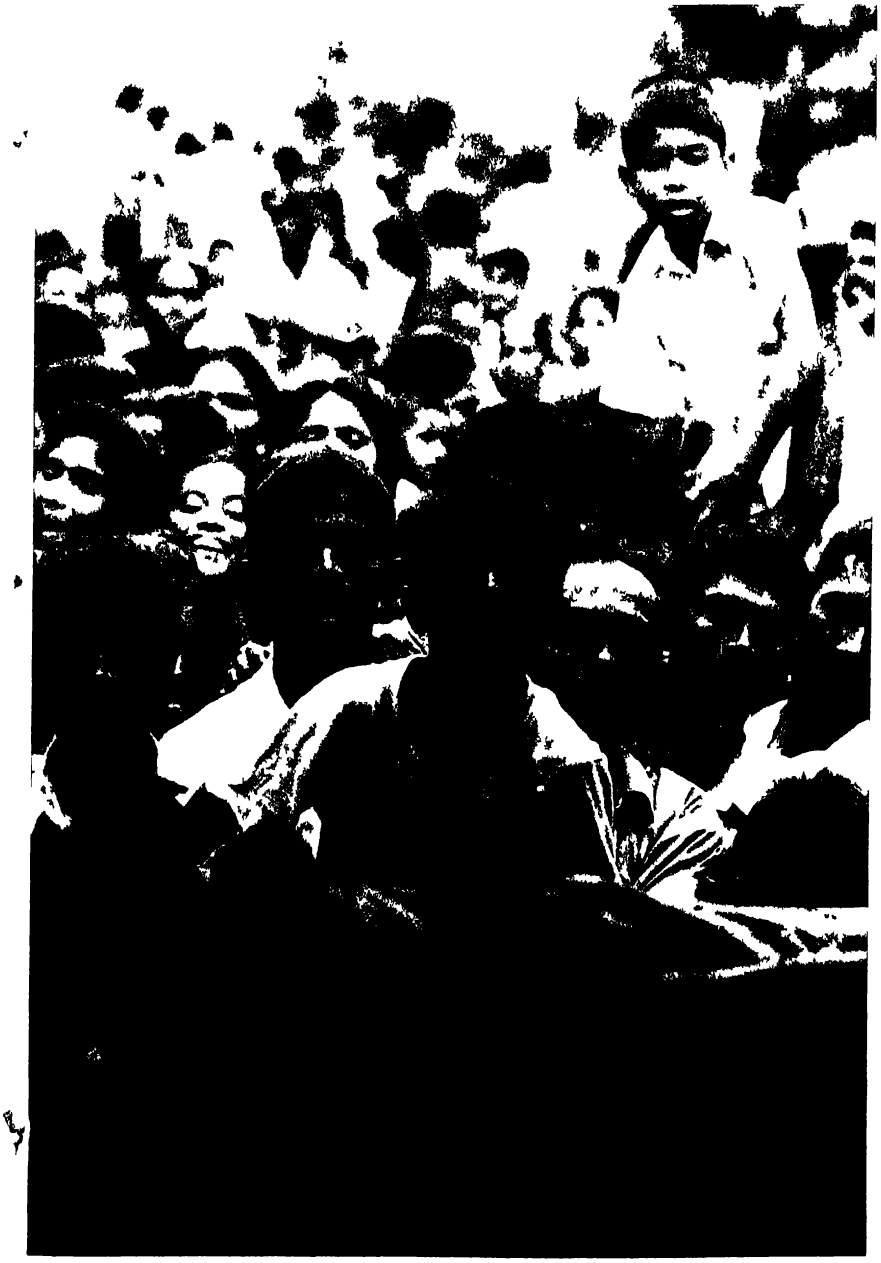
After a brief respite, the LTTE recommenced its operations on November 18 by conducting assaults simultaneously on military positions in the northwestern sector of the Wanni region which comprises the districts of Mullaitivu, Mannar, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. The Tigers captured several Army camps in these areas; they also took control of the famous Holy Rosary Church at Maruthamadhu, popularly known as Madhu. However, the Army recaptured it within 48 hours. In the process, 38 civilians who had taken refuge in the Catholic church were killed and 60 injured. The Army and the LTTE have blamed each other for the tragedy. The LTTE has also started attacking military positions on the island off Mannar on the northwestern coast. As of November 22, the fighting continued without any signs of abating.



(Top) An armoured personnel carrier of the Army proceeding to the battlefront in Vavuniya in November.

The first phase of Operation Oyatha Alaigal was conducted in July 1996 in





Mullaitivu. The Army camp there was demolished and the town fell to the LTTE. During the second phase of the operation in September 1998 the Kilinochchi military complex was overrun. More than 2,000 soldiers were killed in these operations. The armed forces have not been able to wrest control of these areas.

The third phase of the campaign has proved to be the most successful military offensive recorded by the LTTE in the entire history of the armed conflict. If one were to adapt Winston Churchill's famous line after the aerial battle of Britain in 1940 to the LTTE attack it could be said that never in the history of the Eelam conflict has so much territory been regained in so few days with so little losses by such small groups of Tigers.

After dislodging the Tigers from the Jaffna peninsula in 1995-96, the Sri Lankan forces had made several attempts to undermine their presence in the Wanni. The idea was to establish a land-linked route between Vavuniya, the southern point of the Northern Province, and the Jaffna peninsula through the conquest of the 77-km stretch of road between Vavuniya and Kilinochchi on the Jaffna-Kandy road known as the A-9 highway. After various operations which saw mixed results, the Army succeeded in taking a 44-km stretch of road between Vavuniya and Mankulam. Some of the key areas along this road that were under Army control were Omanthai, Puliyankulam and Kanakarayankulam. The Army had also made deep inroads into the northeastern sector of the Wanni, lying to the east of A-9 highway. Government troops had consolidated their positions in areas extending to the northeastern village of Oddusuddan along the A-34 highway linking Mankulam and Mullaitivu on the eastern coast.

Another series of operations saw the Army establish control over substantial areas in the northwestern sector of the Wanni, too. The place it took control included the Our Lady of Madhu church. One puzzling aspect of these operations was the lack of resistance by the LTTE in the early stages. But when the Army tried to take over the coastal Mannar-Pooneryn

Deputy Minister for Defence Anuruddha Ratwatte. He wanted a military drive although the rain had made the terrain difficult to wage a war. (Left) At Weli Oya, curious Sinhalese refugees look on as bodies of Tamil Tigers are removed from the war front.

road and establish another land route the Tigers offered resistance

SIGNIFICANTLY, the LTTE's record in the past year was marked by the conspicuous absence of military operations from November 1998. Its spokespersons abroad would maintain that the militants refrained from putting up any resistance for fear of endangering the peace initiatives. But the reality was that the LTTE, in typical guerilla fashion, was trading space to buy time. Ceding land made the Army overextend itself, by spreading thin over too much land, thereby increasing its vulnerability. On the other hand, the LTTE was quietly recruiting and training cadres, assembling weapons and arsenals and drawing up plans for a counter attack. The fact that the LTTE had allowed the Army to seize much territory without resistance had demoralised its supporters. In order to regain public support, the Tigers had to complete a military mission successfully.

The onset of the monsoon made the forest terrain sodden. The climate was not conducive to major military activity. Nevertheless, the Tigers had to launch a counter offensive, for politico-military reasons. The LTTE had originally planned its operation for November 11. Apart from being War Remembrance day, November 11 also marked the sixth anniversary of Operation Frogleap, the amphibian attack that demolished the Pooneryn-Nagathevanthurai military complex in 1993. By conducting a successful operation, the LTTE could create the ambience of victory that was necessary for Maaveerar Thinam, its annual Great Heroes' Day. After a military success, LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabakaran could deliver his traditional address from a position of perceived strength. The LTTE, however, advanced its operations in order to pre-empt any moves by the Army.

THE LTTE's military operation was preceded by an unusual manoeuvre by the Army. Starting in mid-October, the Sri Lankan security forces advanced along the old Kandy road from Karipputta-imurippu on the Mankulam-Mullaitivu road and established a permanent presence at Ambakamam. Subsequently, troops advanced from Oddusuddan on the east of Karippattaimurippu on the Mankulam-Mullaitivu road, known also as the A-34 highway. These troops established forward defence lines that were linked to positions at Ambakamam in a somewhat rectangular shape. On October 30 and 31, troops used this rectangular formation to push upwards in the direction of Muthaiyankaddu. After meeting stiff resistance from the militants, they returned to Ambakamam and Oddusuddan on November 1.

The Army operations in the Oddusuddan-Ambakamam sector were described as 'Operation Watershed'. The nomenclature itself was a give-away of the underlying compulsions for the operation. A presidential election was in the offing. The Chandrika Kumaratunga government was constrained to demonstrate through contemporary military successes on the ground that the Tigers were being defeated. Projecting such an image would have contributed immensely to an electoral success for Kumaratunga, it was felt. The People's Alliance (PA) government has on several occasions been criticised for setting up military deadlines to suit political timetables. Now the government needed a war victory during the election campaign. So, in spite of the adverse weather conditions, the Army was politically pressured to deliver militarily. Calling the operation a "watershed" suggested that the ultimate objective of the manoeuvres may be overrunning LTTE strongholds, including Prabakaran's "One Four Base". What was hopefully a politico-military watershed paved the way for the Waterloo that followed.

Once the LTTE anticipated Army expeditions, pre-emptive strikes became



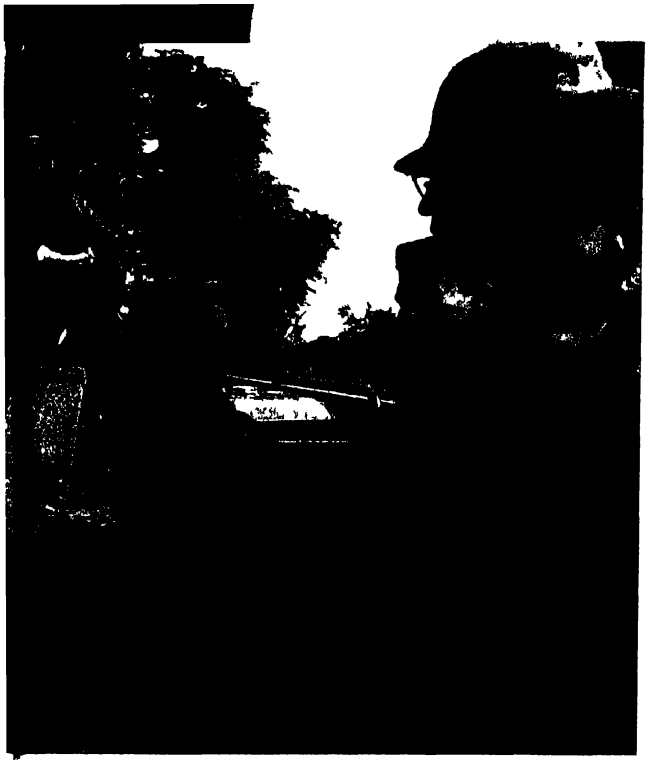
SEMJNU AMARASINGHE AP

Army reinforcements on their way in Medawachiya.



SPYANTHA WALPOLA

Major-General Niel Dias, the new Army Commander for the Wanni region.



imperative So the D Day of Unceasing Waves-III had to be advanced On November 1 the LTTE held a top-level conference in the historically significant Katsilaimadhu located north of Oddusuddan and south of Puthukkudiyiruppu Pandara Vanniyan, the legendary Vanni chieftain of Adankapattu who ruled in Panankamam, was defeated by British troops led by Major Dieberg at Katsilaimadhu A stone inscription as well as a statue erected about 20 years ago bear testimony to the heroic image of the last feudal ruler, who defied the imperialist aggressor Katsilaimadhu witnessed another historic occasion on November 1 Prabakaran, along with his senior deputies, was there to finalise plans to launch Oyatha Alaigal Several Tiger commanders, such as Balraj, Karuna, Sornam, Jeyam, Bhanu, Theepan, Rabat, Nagesh, Anton, Selvarajah, Asha, Durga and Malathie, were present at the conclave Even as the meeting was on, thousands of male and female cadres secretly converged on Muthaiyankaddu, Sammalankulam, Mulliyawalai, Thanneerootru, Katpoorappulveli, Kodalikkal, Indimadhu and Thanduvan They were drawn from different fighting formations, such as the Charles Anthony and Jeyanthan infantry divisions, the Sothiya Women Corps, the Kittu artillery brigade, the Victor armoured corps, the Leopards Commando unit, the Black Tiger suicide squads and the anti-aircraft unit There were also members from auxiliary civilian units

Prabakaran was both the architect and the chief executive of the operation Tiger literature claims that the entire operation was guided, inspired and masterminded by the leader who is also the supreme commander of LTTE forces The LTTE's deputy military commander-in-chief, Balraj, a son of the Wanni soil, was in charge of coordinating the operational headquarters Karuna, a senior commander from Batti-caloa was the overall field commander Once Prabakaran gave the go ahead, the Tigers started their operations

The first target was Oddusuddan, which was seized by the Army 1st December in Operation Revibalaya (Solar Power) Oddusuddan was guarded by the Second Gajaba Regiment on the west and the Walagambaya division of the Navy on the east Incidentally, three naval divisions were deployed on land duty in the eastern sector of the Wanni Likewise, Air Force divisions were on duty in the western sector Both services were being used as supplementary ground troops, to assist the Army The western and eastern Wanni sectors were demarcated by the A 9 highway, which bisects Wanni

An LTTE commando unit infiltrated the Army lines on Manavalanpattaimurippu on the Mullaitivu road, west of Oddusuddan Around midnight, the unit attacked the Gajaba troopers from behind A little later, three formations of LTTE fighters attacked the camp from all three sides After nine hours of fighting, the LTTE overran the Oddusuddan camp The Gajaba soldiers and the Walagampaya naval personnel were virtually annihilated A fresh column of LTTE cadres, along with the civilian militia, came in a motorcade from Mullivawalai and hoisted the Tiger flag It is said that Karuna performed the honours Thereafter, the Tigers and their civilian militia began transporting by road to Mullaitivu the vehicles, arms, ammunition and equipment seized

The Tigers then proceeded in three directions to the northwest towards Ambakamam westwards to Karippattaimurippu and Olumadhu, and to the southwest to Nedunkeny Nedunkeny was taken in the preliminary stages of Operation Jeyasikurui in May 1997 It is situated on the Puliyankulam Mullaitivu road and is the interface of Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts It is very much the gateway to Mullaitivu or the Tiger heartland The access route between Oddusuddan and Nedunkeny had the 3rd battalion of the Sinha Regiment at Samanankulam and the 8th battalion of the Vijaybahu Regiment at Pandarikulam After some fierce fighting,



LTTE supremo V. Prabakaran, the chief executive of Operation Oyatha Alaigal III.

Caught in the crossfire in Vavuniya

V S SAMBANDAN
recently in Vavuniya

CAUGHT between despair and hope that sums up the state of the residents of Vavuniya. The sound of heavy artillery sends them helter-skelter, whether it is day or night.

Vavuniya's woes started in early November when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam embarked on its offensive in the Wanni region. When Operation Oyatha Alaigal began along the eastern flank of the Kandy-Jaffna road (A-9 highway) the residents were cautiously optimistic that their town would not be affected. However, in just over a week they found themselves packing their belongings and proceeding to areas specified by the LTTE. The LTTE, in broadcasts on the Voice of Tigers (VoT), asked them to shift from Vavuniya town, Pandarikkulam, Katkuli, Thonikkal, Vairavapuliyankulam, Pattanippuram, Veppankulam, Nelukkulam, Thandikkulam and Pathinarmagilamkulam, as the Army camps there could be shelled. The safer places it suggested included Aasikkulam and Rajendrakulam.

A few days after most of the town's residents, estimated at around 80,000, had evacuated, another LTTE broadcast asked them to shift back to their homes but warned them to keep off the Army camps. (No correct estimate of the population figures of Vavuniya is available, and this confirms the distancing of the northern districts from the rest of the island. As no census was taken in the northern and eastern areas since 1981, actual population estimates vary from the figure provided by the Government, which is 50,000, to that mentioned by relief agencies, 1,00,000.) The confusion over numbers notwithstanding, it was a matter of grave humanitarian concern.

The residents of Vavuniya did as they were told. The Tigers ensured that their word was taken as a command by the civilians in the government-held areas. The military aggression of the days preceding the announcement only reemphasised this. I did not personally hear the LTTE announcements, but I was told that the leader wanted us to move. So I obeyed. Then, he wanted us to return. We did so," said a resident of Vavuniya. Some Tamil leaders were of the opinion that the LTTE carried out the entire Vavuniya exercise just to prove a point. "It caused so much of misery to the people to prove the point that its word carried weight."

THE majority of people who fled Vavuniya during the current offensive were those who had sought refuge in the town after their lives were disrupted in an earlier offensive elsewhere in the north. Thousands of people – students and traders, landlords and the landless, professionals and casual workers, government employees and shopkeepers – who were uprooted from the battle-scarred northern districts had only started life anew in Vavuniya.

On November 11, when the LTTE asked them to move out, they were confused. Did the Tigers mean what they said? Was it a ruse to send the Army into panic? Was it a rumour spread to cause confusion? However, all doubts ended the following morning.



Civilians in makeshift tents outside Vavuniya.

Moving out of the heavily fortified town was the first priority. "Those of us who have passes (issued by the police) can go to Colombo, but others would have to stay behind," was the initial reaction.

"I am going to lock my house and flee. In which direction? The Tigers have specified some locations. We will follow their instructions," a watchman of a lodge in the town said.

IN Rajendrakulam near Vavuniya, a new settlement had come up overnight. Several families were living under extreme odds – under trees or bullock carts, in makeshift huts, in semi-finished houses and in thatched-roof schools.

"I have been on the move since the 1970s," said I. Sabaratnam, a former employee of the Excise Department He has practically lived out of his suitcase, having moved to whichever area the displaced people were sent to. The exodus from Vavuniya brought luck to Sabaratnam, who now owns a soft drink stall. "Look at the wares I sell," he said pointing to the stacked-up bottles of aerated drinks and household goods. "Traders from Vavuniya sold them at rock-bottom prices. They just wanted to sell their stocks and take the money before fleeing." With a shop located in a displaced region, finding buyers could well turn out to be his next problem.

Along the dirt track that runs across Bharatipuram, another location near Vavuniya, families live in tents, children play in makeshift swings and men huddle around a tea-stall.

"Whether we have money or not, what we need is passes," said Thurairaja, a former resident of Jaffna. For people like him who have been constantly uprooted, the main concern is to ensure that all members of their family have passes. "Only that will ensure that we travel together." In the militarised zone, only civilians holding a pass issued by the police can move about freely. People without passes could be taken for militants.

"Imagine carrying passes in one's own land. I was leading a comfortable life in Jaffna. I owned a car, my family was well-settled. The troubles began and we left. Now I work as a mason. But there is not enough work."

For Shah Jahan, who fled Jaffna after the LTTE began its ethnic-cleansing, his family's return to Vavuniya would be determined by the Tigers. "If they remain in the area, I will not come back," he said, as he waited for a bus to take his family to the Muslim-majority Puttalam town.

Voluntary organisations gave priority to providing shelter. But those who wanted tents were required to produce their passes and register themselves with government officials.

Dharmalingam, a leftist now in his sixties, is in a tearing hurry. "I have a list of 70 people. I want to ensure that everybody gets some kind of shelter. Let us go fast, the officials may go away," he says as he gathers a group of people. At the makeshift office, an empty desk awaits him. "They have gone," a 50-year-old widow tells him. "I have to come back. I hope it does not rain (for the people have no roof over their heads)," he says. He added: "Some of the former militant groups have helped us. The houses, which are yet to be completed, were built at the initiative of the members of Parliament belonging to the People's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE)."

At Bharatipuram, cadres of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) were overseeing mass cooking for the displaced. "We are trying to do our best. Some rice, some curry, some vegetables," says Ganeshamoorthy, urging the workers to finish the task fast. As the rice boils, there is a cloudburst. A heavy downpour sends the people running for cover. And with that goes the hope of a meal.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

The exodus from Vavuniya following an LTTE broadcast asking residents to leave the town.

THE situation in Vavuniya changed rapidly when the Tigers asked the displaced people to return to the town on November 17. The residents returned to their moorings, to begin the process of normalcy. But this was shattered by incessant shelling of Army positions north of Vavuniya. A shell which landed at Thonikkal, on the outskirts of the town, killed a child and injured three persons. Panic set in again with hundreds of civilians taking shelter at a church in the town. "We do not stir out after dark," said Ganesh, a casual worker. After dusk, the roads are largely deserted, with most people choosing to stay indoors.

In the areas near Vavuniya, an uneasy calm prevailed. "We don't know what will happen next," said a shopkeeper at Medawachchiya, south of Vavuniya.

Rather than the threat of a Tiger advance, it is the refugee influx that is a matter of concern for the people living in the vicinity of Vavuniya. In Anuradhapura, further south, Sinhalese residents of Vavuniya had sought refuge with their friends and relatives.

The Army maintains a nervous vigil, checking all those who enter or leave the town. At a checkpoint outside the town, students wait for some mode of transport to take them to safety. Resumption of normal life depends on the course the conflict would take next. ■

Nedunkeny also fell to the LTTE.

In the meantime, the other two Tiger columns were confronting two naval divisions stationed on the western flank of the Mullaitivu-Mankulam road on the one hand, and the 55th division personnel on the Ambakamam rectangle, on the other. After heavy fighting, Karippattaimurippu fell. Then the Tigers proceeded along the old Kandy road towards Ambakamam while other formations kept pounding Olumadhu adjacent to Karippattaimurippu on the road between Mankulam and Mullaitivu. Reinforcements sent from Mankulam were prevented from reaching Olumadhu as Tiger commandos blew up a bridge over a tributary of the Kanagarayankulam.

Soon Ambakamam fell, and it was followed by Olumadhu. Thereafter, advancing LTTE personnel began pounding Kanagarayankulam and Mankulam, both on the A-9 highway. Shortly thereafter, Mankulam fell. The Tigers then started proceeding southwards by vehicles along the Jaffna-Vavuniya road. Government troops had captured the stretch of roadway between Vavuniya and Mankulam in Operation Jeyasikurui after 19 months of fighting. Now the Tigers were merrily cruising along the stretch. Some rearguard action was proffered at Kanakarayankulam, the headquarters of the 56 Division manning the eastern Wanni sector. But the following day, Kanakarayankulam too fell. Then the Tigers went further south to Puliyankulam, which also succumbed the same day.

Finally, on November 7, the LTTE reached Panickaneeraavi on the outskirts of Omanthai, 15 km south of Vavuniya. Omanthai too had been captured by the Army in May 1997. The rapidly retreating troops finally dug in at Omanthai. Reinforced by troops from Vavuniya and artillery field guns, the Army began defending Omanthai. Other places where some resistance was displayed were Madhiyamadhu and Nainamadhu on the Puliyankulam-Nedunkeny stretch; Othiyamalai and Pattikkudiyiruppu in the Nedunkeny area; Karappukuthi and Katkidanku near Kanakarayankulam; and Semamadhu near Omanthai.

The LTTE has also seized some points on the western sector or areas to the west of the A-9 highway. Moondrumurippu near Mankulam, Mannakulam near Kanakarayankulam and Puthoor near Puliyankulam have been seized. Some Air Force personnel and soldiers were killed or injured.

The LTTE has also begun artillery attacks on Pallamadhu and Palampitty in Mannar. Both these places are of strategic importance in the context of an attempt to take the Mannar-Pooneryn road. After Operation Jeyasikurui aimed at securing the A-9 highway was aborted, the Army had launched a series of operations, named Ranaghosha, or battlecry, and seized a lot of territory and vast stretches of the Pooneryn road. It was said that the objective was to utilise the Mannar-Pooneryn road as the land route to Jaffna.

The government began its manoeuvres in the Wanni with the launching of Operation Jeyasikurui, but called them off in December 1998. The operation had seen the Army sustain tremendous losses, with the LTTE taking to positional warfare by defending entrenched positions. Now, after the first stage of Oyatha Alaigal-III, the Army has lost 30 km of the 44-km stretch it had seized on the A-9 highway and, according to preliminary estimates, 1,269 sq km of territory on the eastern Wanni front. It has lost in just a week areas annexed over a period of two and a half years: the losses include 10 bases, 24 camps, 116 posts and an unknown number of bunkers. Massive amounts of arms, ammunition, equipment, tanks and armoured cars and other vehicles were seized by the Tigers. So too were large amounts of dry rations. Although the Government puts it at unbelievably low levels, the Army and the Navy have lost more than a thousand men, Opposition parties allege. The LTTE claims that its losses are only in hundreds.

The more significant aspect of the fighting was the fact that the LTTE adopted conventional techniques to chase the Army out. Thousands of troops literally ran away instead of fighting. There have been reports of rebellion, in some places of which officers and military policemen



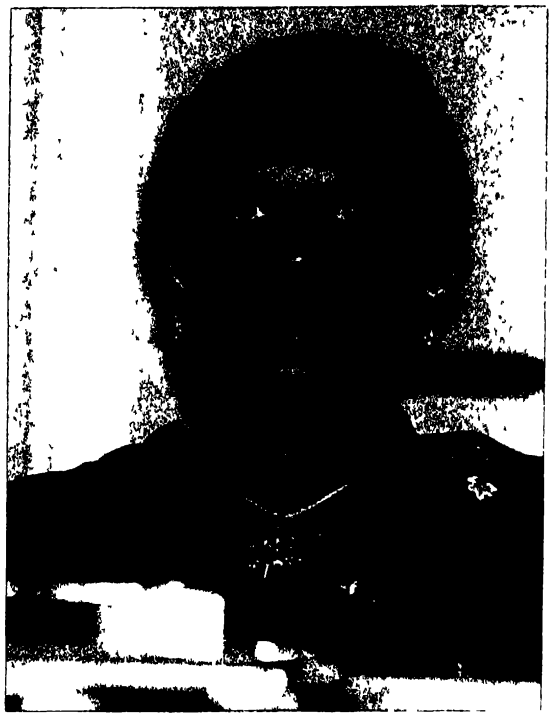
SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

were shot. Large-scale desertions have occurred. There has been a breakdown in discipline. In short, the Army, despite its numerical and logistical superiority, has been decisively routed. How did this happen?

TWO developments occurred on the first day itself, and these had important consequences in the course of war in the immediate future. First, the LTTE used newly acquired anti-aircraft weapons to bring down two helicopters and damage a plane. The Air Force panicked, thinking that the Tigers possessed the ability to blast planes in the skies. The Air Force suspended all active engagement in the conflict for more than a week. Thus the beleaguered ground troops on different fronts in the eastern Wanni sector could not receive assistance from the Air Force for quite a while.

Secondly, the officials in Oddusuddan hastily loaded a South African "Buffel" tank with all communication codes and signal crypts and tried to send it to the 56 Division headquarters at Kanakarayankulam after their camp came under attack. The tank got bogged down in the slush. As the troops abandoned it, the Tigers seized it. Using the codes, the LTTE began penetrating the radio communications system of the Army. As a knee-jerk reaction, the Army stopped all internal communications. The communications equipment within the combat zone went dead for several days. As a result, panic and confusion set in among the troops.

The primary cause for the debacle was the suspension of aerial contact and radio communications. Without a proper leadership issuing directives or morale-boosting reassurances, the individual Army detachments began withdrawing. Several officers had begun retreating, instead of urging the soldiers to stand and fight. The Government's refusal to accept the bodies of soldiers from the LTTE in the conflict zone also fuelled troop resentment. A collapse of logistical support hampering transport, food supplies and medical treatment also created a demoralising impact. After fighting at Oddusuddan and a few other places, the soldiers preferred "flight" to "fight". An angle being probed by the Government is sabotage and propaganda by pro-United National Party (UNP) elements. It is suspected that some officers who support the main Opposition party had sabotaged the war effort.



Chandrika Kumaratunga. Her avowed objective of war for peace appears non-workable.

The primary cause for the debacle was the suspension of aerial contact and radio communications. Without a proper leadership issuing directives or morale-boosting reassurances, the individual Army detachments began withdrawing.

In its anxiety to find scapegoats, the Government has transferred all senior commanding officers. But there is criticism of the political leadership itself. Many intelligence warnings went unheeded because the Government wanted a quick military victory to boost its chances in the presidential election. Monsoon rain had made the terrain in the Wanni region difficult for military operations, but Deputy Minister of Defence Anuruddha Ratwatte wanted a military drive. Hence Operation Watershed was launched to take Ambakamam first, and follow it up with further incursions. The stationing of troops on the outer perimeter endangered other points, which the Tigers exploited. Another reason for demoralisation among the troops was the realisation that they were being cynically expended in a war that had the ruling party's electoral victory as its ultimate motive. According to Lasantha Wickrematunge, editor of the pro-UNP newspaper *Sunday Leader*, "The Government has to face the fact that the defeat was a result of bad military planning. The soldiers deserted because they realised they were not fighting a war to save the country but to further the interests of a particular political party."

THREE salient points that contributed to the LTTE successes were tremendous artillery barrages, the rapid mobility of personnel and vehicles, and expert tactics. After the initial stages, the element of surprise was no longer there: thereafter it was only superior mobility, better tactics and the precise use of artillery that mattered. The very same weather conditions that affected military movement did not hinder the Tigers. Also, the LTTE allowed the retreating soldiers an escape route in most cases instead of trying to surround and decimate them. This led to most soldiers opting to run away rather than fight. It must be noted that in many earlier operations, the denial of escape routes by the Tigers contributed to soldiers rallying and fighting a literal battle for survival, thereby preventing an outright LTTE victory.

Another area where the LTTE made an impact was Weli Oya or Manal Aaru. This strategic region was carved out by the UNP, with the objective of ending the territorial contiguity of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The P.A. Government, after the initial successes of Jeyasikurui, embarked on implementing the scheme of colonising armed settlers and establishing a network of camps. It must be remembered that Tamil inhabitants were driven away earlier in a systematic form of ethnic cleansing. The LTTE has succeeded in destroying several camps in Weli Oya and continues to put pressure on the region. More than 7,000 Sinhala settlers have fled the area.

VAVUNIYA, the southernmost town of the Northern Province, too is under threat. The LTTE announced that it was going to shell the town and asked residents to move away. This led to about 9,000 people abandoning the town (see

separate story). Fearing a major assault, the armed forces gathered in large numbers in Vavuniya, transforming it into a garrison town. Instead of organising a swift counter-attack, the Army focussed its energy on protecting Vavuniya.

THE objectives of the LTTE in triggering such an exodus are yet to be revealed. It is, however, assumed that by threatening to invade Vavuniya, the Tigers succeeded in stalling government efforts to mobilise a swift counter-attack in the areas that were lost. Instead, it has concentrated personnel in Vavuniya. This gave the LTTE time to transport the arms and equipment that were seized and to revise its defence structures. Since the Tigers had not bargained for such early gains, they need time to consolidate and build defences to retain seized areas. They also need time for logistical preparations to continue their operations.

Given the prevailing low morale and poor fighting spirit among the armed forces, the LTTE decided to strike again. After a brief period of "rest" between November 9 and 17, the Tigers recommenced operations, in the northwestern sector this time. A number of military positions were attacked simultaneously. Most of these camps had been established on interior roads after different stages of Operation Ranaghosha. They were extremely vulnerable, being mere "islets" of troops in a surrounding "ocean" of LTTE-infested jungle terrain. They served very little strategic value. But to a government wanting to impress Sinhala voters with the extent of "real estate" acquired from the LTTE, it became a necessity to retain these camps. In the process, the Army spread itself thin and played into Tiger hands.

The LTTE took over a number of camps in a matter of days with comparatively little bloodshed. A repetition of the earlier pattern of soldiers deserting positions on their being pounded by artillery was quite evident. Areas such as Palampitty, Thatchanamaruthamadhu, Palamottai, Vaarikkuttiyoor, Navvi, Periyathambanai, Periyapandivirichan, Sinnapandivirichan and Periyamadhu were overrun with comparative ease. One area where the LTTE met with stiff resistance was Iranailuppaikulam. The large base there proved to be formidable. With Army reinforcements having been sent to Iranailuppaikulam, fighting continues in the area.

On the Mannar-Pooneryn road, the strategic junction of Pallamadhu was taken, along with Pappamottai and Naayaaruveli. Although the LTTE is yet to gain a permanent presence on the Vavuniya-Mannar road, it has succeeded in driving the Army back from most areas to the north of this road. The Army now retains positions only on this road and has forbidden civilian movement on it.

Emboldened by these successes, the LTTE began an artillery attack against the main camp at Thallady in Mannar district. Thallady guards and controls the causeway to Mannar island where the important town of Mannar is located. The Tigers also shipped field guns to Erukkalampitty on the island and began attacking the Army camp at the Mannar Fort premises. Later, Sea Tiger boats from the Nachikkudah base tried to invade the island at the Pallimunai coast.

Another controversial and sad event was the attack on Madhu (see box). On November 18, the LTTE surrounded the outlying areas of the church. The Army left the church premises. The Tigers did not stay in the church, in deference to the wishes of the priests. On November 20, a commando unit stormed their way into the church. About 3,500 refugees were asked to sleep inside the church and the adjoining Sacred Heart Chapel. At about 10-15 p.m. there was some shelling. The Army says that the LTTE fired the shells. The Tigers say that the Army had tried to move on to Palampitty and were repulsed by them. They maintain that the retreating soldiers had trained their tanks on the chapel.

Since fighting continues in the northwestern sector and positions are fluctuating, it is not possible to assess the total situation. But the LTTE does seem to have retaken 800 to 900 sq km of territory at least in this second stage of its operation. Three major camps at Periyamadhu, Periyathambanai and Palampitty, along with a number of smaller ones, have fallen. Neither the rate of casualties nor the nature of the military tactics adopted by the LTTE is known. But the important question is why the military debacle was in such colossal proportions. In the first stage, of course, there was the element of surprise. But after the fighting started, the other camps should have been vigilant and prepared.

THE major consequence of this military campaign is that the LTTE has demonstrated its military resilience once again. The avowed objective of Chandrika Kumaratunga's war for peace stands exposed as a non-workable exercise. Even if the Tigers are compelled to relinquish the newly taken territory, they have very effectively made the point that the organisation simply cannot be undermined gradually. Also, no strategy based on the ephemeral conquest of territory is workable. As such, bold and creative alternatives for a resolution of the conflict will have to be found in the long term. In the short term, the fighting will continue.

The Army's reversals have encouraged the Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, who is the chief opponent of Chandrika Kumaratunga in the presidential election. The UNP chief hopes to hold talks with the Tigers, if elected. He says that there is no military solution to the ethnic conflict and that the Tigers cannot be wished away. The LTTE has to be politically accommodated. The military reversals have considerably diminished Kumaratunga's expectations and increased Wickremasinghe's. The boundaries are now back to where the Wanni hostilities began, and all the gains by the Government have been negated. But excessive victories by the LTTE may provoke a Sinhala backlash, which may result in Kumaratunga doing well.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora too is elated. Being hopelessly unrealistic and uncompromisingly intransigent, these sections now feel that Eelam is just around the corner. Despite being witness to so much territory change hands so many times, these elements construe the latest Tiger successes as an indicator of ultimate victory over the Colombo Government. That the LTTE leadership itself neither expected nor prepared itself to acquire so much territory in such a short time is lost on these sections. The very same sections that were shouting themselves hoarse calling for peace talks are now using jingoistic statements: no need for talks until Eelam. Also, massive fund-raising campaigns are being undertaken successfully.

The strategy adopted by the LTTE for the greater part of this year was perplexing. Nevertheless, with the wisdom of hindsight, it is clear now that the tactics worked.

Now it is Chandrika Kumaratunga's turn. With the presidential election just around the corner, she would be constrained to launch some dramatic counter-attacks, if possible. This is a risky – and from a humanitarian perspective unacceptable – option, but there does not seem to be any other way out for her.

So the cycle of violence will continue. It remains to be seen when the Sri Lankan forces will start their operations and how the Tigers will react. ■

The northern aggression

The message from the military operations in the Wanni region is that only a political solution will result in a permanent end to the hostilities.

V.S. SAMBANDAN
in Colombo

"Wars have never hurt anybody except the people who die."
– Salvador Dali

THE separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has redrawn the military map of the northern territory of Sri Lanka by recapturing within the first two weeks of November areas that were taken by the Sri Lankan Army through various military operations over the past two years.

Before Operation Oyatha Alaigal III started, the military map was a matter of satisfaction for the troops. But within days, Army camps fell like nine-pins. Areas that had been captured by the Army, some of them in difficult battles, during its military campaigns, were retaken by the militants with remarkable ease. Oddusuddan, Nedunkeny, Olumadu and Mankulam, important military camps that the Army had established after beating back the Tigers, fell in rapid succession. Puliyankulam and Kanakarayankulam, among the strongest and best-fortified Army outposts along the Jaffna-Kandy highway, were among those that were captured. For over a year since May 1998, this road had witnessed the troops inching forward, fighting to open a main supply route to the northern Jaffna peninsula, which it had regained from the Tigers.

Embarking on their latest thrust along the main highway, LTTE cadres swept vast tracts of land to the east and west of the A-9 highway and took control of several strategic towns. For all practical purposes, the government's military gains, built up over the years, were lost.

The island, especially the southern region, was preparing for the presidential election when the LTTE launched its offensive. For well over a year, the Tigers had been at the receiving end.

Some military observers feel that the timing of the operation had nothing to do with the presidential election. "The main and the only motive was military," said a former militant. "The LTTE wanted to make the maximum haul of war equipment. It would have anticipated a further thrust towards Mullaitivu ahead of the election. Hence the attack on Oddusuddan," he reasoned.

Military officers are of the view that the LTTE would have conceived a smaller operation but enlarged it after seeing the effectiveness of the attack. "They have got more than what they would have expected," he said.

Although the fighting capability of the Tigers is considered formidable, such a sudden loss of territory by the Army,



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

Army patrolling in a deserted Vayuniya town.

apparently without even putting up a fight, has caused concern. While Opposition leaders have alleged that the Government's strategy of gaining more territory was the reason for the "thinly spread out" nature of the Army's presence, sections of the Government see a possible political conspiracy behind the military debacle. The Defence Ministry promptly appointed a court of inquiry comprising senior officers of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force to investigate the reasons for the debacle. Even as this professional exercise was under way, damage-control measures were initiated.

Censorship on military news, which was in place since June 1998, was further tightened. Sections of the national media were accused of providing grossly exaggerated and misleading casualty figures. The concern was more on keeping down the reported number of soldiers killed in action.

War casualties were contained by resorting to what has been described as "tactical withdrawals". "This is now an artillery-based aggression by the Tigers. There is less of man-to-man combat and that would explain the relatively lower numbers of casualties," said a military official. Initial estimates placed the number of soldiers killed at 101 and those missing in action at 743 in the five-day offensive.

Military commentators were also quick on the draw. In their analysis, it was the strategy of massing military personnel in the north for a push against the Tigers that led to the debacle.

"They have been gaining territory without a fight," said an analyst, referring to the Ranaghosa operations. It was during these operations that the Tigers withdrew from Oddusuddan and other areas, helping the Army to move in with relative ease.

As the Tigers moved out without offering resistance, it was reasoned, "they were able to keep their fighting units intact." "As the Army had to hold the territory it had gained, it was bound to spread its forces thin. Moreover, the Army had not won major victories by inflicting losses on the Tigers. This meant that the LTTE could strike back with full force," a military commentator told *Frontline*.

The Army's fighting units in the north also came in for a restructuring in the com-

A news black-out on military matters

V.S. SAMBANDAN

FACTS are invariably the first casualty of a war. Objectivity comes next. Then those killed in combat are reduced to mere numbers, and the ones missing in action are lost in a procedural maze.

When the Sri Lankan Government in June 1998 clamped censorship on all news relating to military activity in the country, it did what many countries of the world have done during an escalation of armed conflict. Censorship was in place for a brief period in 1995, during the Army operations in northern Jaffna.

If restrictions on access to the conflict zones and a military censorship of all war-related news ensured that the state had defined in clear terms the limits to the people's "right to know", a ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) completed the picture. Effectively, the ban made access to the Tigers, in any manner, illegal.

In fairness to the People's Alliance (P.A.) Government, its record on the human rights front – specifically that pertaining to the unhindered working of journalists – is a vast improvement over previous regime's. Reports of the disappearance of journalists critical of the establishment are now a thing of the past. During its early days, the P.A. Government permitted private radio and television stations to present news and current affairs programmes – an area that was until then restricted to the state-run media.

A relatively free atmosphere prevailed until the LTTE turned its heat on the government. In a situation where access to the war zone and areas held by the LTTE was restricted, the statements issued daily by the Defence Ministry formed the key source of information. The LTTE's press releases, normally faxed to newspaper offices, gave the rebel version.

In such a restricted atmosphere came the added limitation of the news censorship. Initially, a military officer was made the Competent Authority to judge the suitability of the news. Later a civilian authority was vested with the responsibility.

The Government was concerned mainly about reports on casualties. Needless to say, sordid media reports of soldiers dying in large numbers would have had a significant political impact. The stated reasons for the imposition of censorship, however, are "strategic" factors: it is claimed that in the absence of restrictions the media would through their reports of the war provide leads to the "enemy" on the moves of government troops.

The clamping of censorship has often come in tandem with setbacks suffered by the security forces. For instance, the censorship apparatus was activated when the Tigers overran the northern town of Kilinochchi and during the Operation Watershed III battles. In stark contrast, when Sinhalese civilians were reportedly hacked to death by Tamil militants in the eastern town of Amparai in September, the national media, including the state-run media, went to town with gruesome pictures of the victims, in violation of the censorship regulations. The Government ferried a group of journalists from Colombo to Amparai.

Censorship was last imposed in June 1998 and its vigorous implementation happened in two phases: between June and December, when Operation Jayasikurui was in progress, and around the time Operation Oyatha Alaigal III commenced.

The Government is, however, in a fix: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has a contract with the state-run Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), under which the BBC has acquired air-time on SLBC on the condition that its programme will be broadcast as presented. In contrast, when telecasts of overseas news organisations, mostly Indian and British, are repeated by the island's private media, matters relating to Sri Lanka are often blurred out. There have been knee-jerk reactions as well. The blacking out of an overseas television story on the positive aspects of the Sri Lankan economy is a case in point.

In yet another instance, the Sri Lankan Customs held back Indian publications when people evacuated from Vavuniya after being asked to do so by the LTTE. Customs officials refused to clear the newspapers and

mand, the most significant step being the replacing of the Commander of the Security Forces in the Wanni, Maj. Gen. Wasantha Perera, by Maj. Gen. Neil Dias. Senior military leaders in Colombo, including Lt.Gen. Sirilal Weerasooriya, the Army Commander, and Major General Lionel Balagalle, the Chief of Staff and until recently the Commander of the Security Forces in the Wanni, reached Vavuniya to oversee the operations.

By the turn of the week, the LTTE had reached Mankulam on the Jaffna-Kandy highway. Mankulam was won by the Army last year, when the Tigers overran Kilinochchi during Oyatha Alaigal II, inflicting heavy casualties on the Army. With the retaking of Mankulam, the LTTE consolidated its presence on the Jaffna-Kandy highway and pushed its territorial gains further south.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

Security check in Colombo.

Then came the threat to Vavuniya, the island's northern garrison town and the headquarters of the Army's Wanni operations. Through announcements, the Tigers asked the civilians to leave the town in view of an impending attack.

Although this was dismissed by the Government as part of the "psychological operations" of the Tigers, civilians started leaving the town. By November 12, practically the entire town had emptied itself, with only those who could not afford to travel or those who did not have identity passes to move out staying behind. A few days later, the Tigers said that the civilians could return but asked them to stay away from areas situated near the Army camps (see separate story).

LIFE in the south, however, was largely unaffected by the northern casualties. Colombo continued in its normal self. There was a clear distancing from the battlefield, not only in geographical terms but also in mental terms. But for political leaders, academicians, peace activists and activists of non-governmental organisations involved in relief operations, the northern casualties largely seemed to involve "somebody else's war". But a similar situation existed during last year's Kilinochchi defeat.

One interpretation is that this also has "positive" implications in that there is a fundamental "no backlash on the minorities". This, analysts observed, was in stark contrast to the 1983 situation when the killing of 13 soldiers sparked anti-Tamil riots throughout the island.

Sunil Bastian of the International Centre of Ethnic Studies, Colombo, attributes the larger "ambivalence" of the country's population to war as a reason. "People just want to get on with their lives," he said.

Making the point that extreme Sinhala opinion is now divided, Bastian also observed that any "instability in the south as the consequence of an event in the north is always organised". As in the past, some "sections in the parties that held power were behind it." The present southern reaction to the northern debacle, he said, made it "quite clear that now those groups do not exist in the main parties. There is no space for hardliners in these parties."

Moreover, incidents directly involving the southern people, such as those related to the insurrections by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) during the 1980s and early 1990s, had a more direct bearing on the people in the south.

The most telling implication of the Tiger offensive, however, would be on the living conditions of Wanni residents. The displacement of the people, providing food and other essentials to them, and averting chaos will have to engage the attention of the Government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and

asked their distributors to obtain the permission of the Competent Authority. The censor, however, maintained that clearance would be given if the Customs sought clarifications on specific reports. The matter, however, was sorted out when the Ministry in charge of the media wrote to the Customs asking it to release the publications.

For the residents of northern Jaffna, the areas held by the LTTE, as well as places close to the rebel-held areas, the clandestine radio station of the Tigers, Voice of Tigers (VoT), is a key source of information. Taking the propaganda offensive into the government's turf, the LTTE last year commenced services in Sinhala, aimed apparently at "demoralising the security forces". Of late, according to displaced residents in the north, the LTTE's broadcasts are electronically jammed.

Curbing war-related news is but a manifestation of the thinking that column-centimetres and sound bytes can defeat into victory. However, a disturbing result of keeping the northern conflict zone and the rebel-held areas out of bounds for the media as well as independent non-governmental organisations has been a consistent deterioration of the living conditions and the people's thinking in those regions. An underlying, perhaps unintended, consequence has been the furthering of the 'us' and 'them' syndrome in an already ethnically divided country.

Militarisation of Madhu

V.S. SAMBANDAN

REVERED by people of all religious faiths, the Roman Catholic Madhu church, in the battle zone, has been a nest of peace through the island's bloodiest conflicts. The Dutch-period shrine was shelled on November 21, leaving 38 civilians dead. The Sacred Heart chapel and a section of the main shrine were damaged.

During periods of turmoil, the shrine and its precincts, an enclave of tranquillity, have offered refuge to thousands of displaced persons, almost entirely Tamil. Priests had persuaded both the Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) not to take their battle to the pilgrimage centre. The situation, however, changed gradually since March.

Once the Sri Lankan security forces gained control over the shrine, the LTTE left the area. A minimal presence of government commandos was maintained there. The priests protested against the militarisation of the pilgrimage centre. The Government took over Madhu in March just ahead of the Provincial Council elections in the south and interpreted this as a "military gain". The town was soon given power supply. Simultaneously, thousands of refugees who had lived there for years were evacuated and "rehabilitated" either in their villages or in government-held areas.

In mid-November, the shrine was back in focus. As the LTTE moved westwards with its Operation Unceasing Waves III, some 3,500 persons from Mannar district moved into the church as refugees. The Tigers had earlier taken towns and villages to the north, and civilians had flocked to Madhu. The Tigers followed suit. On November 18, government troops left the shrine and the Tigers gained control over the church and its precincts. Two days later, government troops "regained control over Madhu".

According to the priests, "the Army came in with its armoured cars into the pilgrimage centre". The peace of the church was shattered by artillery fire the same night. The Lankan Defence Ministry, which had maintained silence on the loss of Madhu, blamed the LTTE: it said that "after the security forces consolidated the area," the LTTE "launched a heavy-artillery-and-mortar attack indiscriminately on the Madhu church premises." Church authorities said that 13 of those killed were children. At least 56 people, including 25 children were injured.

Rev. Dr. Rayappu Joseph, the Bishop of Mannar and the secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, said: "Such a desecration has never happened of in the church's 450-year history." Church leaders appealed to "both the state forces and the LTTE to immediately withdraw from the sacred area of the shrine of Madhu... to strictly refrain from using Madhu for any strategic or political advantage... and leave Madhu completely free for the pilgrims to visit the shrine without any restriction for their spiritual purposes."

international organisations. Some former Tamil militant groups, such as the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), have started supplementing the relief efforts of the Government and aid agencies. "We are organising blood donation camps and providing other relief materials for the displaced," said Sudhan, a TELO area leader.

If Operation Unceasing Waves III brought more territory to the Tigers, it remains to be seen how they will be able to spread further. Military officials, putting the larger picture in perspective, feel that if the Tigers spread their terrain too far, they would be faced with the same constraints as the Army faced – too much land and too little people to man it.

While recent northern military campaigns have clearly redrawn government- and rebel-held territories, they have also sent across the signal that more than military gains and losses it is in addressing the separatist conflict from the political perspective that would result in the cessation of hostilities. Until then, unfortunately, the wounds of the war will fester.

V.S. SAMBANDAN

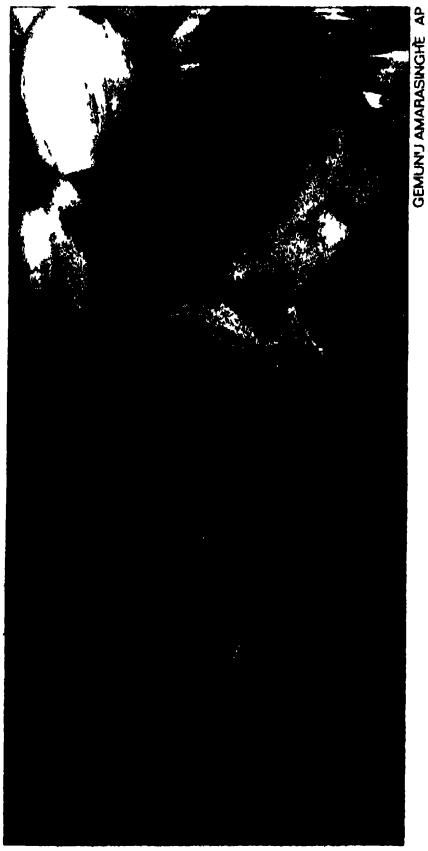
"The military don't start wars Politicians start wars"

– William Westmoreland

SRI LANKA is at a crucial political juncture An estimated 11.8 million voters approach the presidential election scheduled for December 21. The two main contestants are President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Given the country's sensitive voting structure, the minority vote will determine the outcome Support for the two main contestants, fielded by the ruling People's Alliance (P.A.) and the Opposition United National Party (UNP), is evenly balanced.

In the 1994 elections, Chandrika Kumaratunga, contesting on a promise of bringing peace to the northern area, won a landslide victory with the support of the Tamil vote This time around, she is determined that there will be no cessation of hostilities until the Liberation Tigers of



GEMUNU AMARASINGHE AP

President Chandrika Kumaratunga at the election commissioner's office to file her nomination papers.

A close race

Tamil voters may hold the key in the December 21 presidential elections in Sri Lanka. But how many will actually vote?

Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is militarily weakened and brought to the negotiating table on the government's terms.

The ruling formation is further handicapped by the current military setbacks in the Wanni region.

Wickremasinghe, who had remained silent on the Government's peace package for the last four years, approaches the elections with a "pact with the people" agenda, which includes, among other things, talks with the Tigers and a promise of "rehabilitating the militant cadres" after finding a solution to the conflict.

While Chandrika Kumaratunga presents the "peace package" that she was unable to push through in Parliament owing to the absence of a two-thirds majority, Wickremasinghe pins his hopes on the "pact".

For his part, V. Prabakaran, the LTTE supremo, has placed the militarisation issue clearly on the agenda by launching the third phase of Operation Oyatha Alaigal soon after the election dates were announced. Scoring victory after victory in the eastern parts of the Wanni, the LTTE moved to the western flank, thereby maintaining pressure on the Government, and consequently, on the southern polity.

The LTTE offensive also ties up the resolution of the ethnic conflict with military action and comes as a challenge to the island's liberal-thinking peace constituency.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the electioneering will be the manner in which the majority vote will be sought. The Tamil voters, for all practical purposes, have distanced themselves from Chandrika, who was elected last time on the promise of bringing about an "honourable peace". The experience of the past four years has, however, made it impossible for even moderate Tamil politicians to tell voters to back her this time. "We do not have anything to show the Tamils that concrete gains have been made," a Tamil politician said. Another said that he was likely to be dismissed by the Tamil electorate if he sought their vote for the President.

Wickremasinghe's position is no better. Even those Tamil voters who are opposed to the candidature of Chandrika Kumaratunga are reluctant to espouse the cause of the UNP. Anxious to distance themselves from the mainstream parties, overall a large section of the Tamils seem to show a lack of interest in the elections.

"It is an election with which we are not concerned," said a voter in Vavuniya. Echoing similar sentiments, some residents of Jaffna said that it was practically "a southern election". One voter said: "With the Army present all over this place, the thought of an election is secondary to our interests."

The eastern Batticaloa district overwhelmingly voted for Chandrika Kumaratunga last time. This time the situation has changed. "We gave her the largest number of votes, but we are disappointed," a Tamil leader from the area said.







UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, after filing his nomination papers on November 18.

This sets the stage for the ruling coalition to succumb to pressures from majoritarian sentiments. The recent crossing over of some known Sinhala hardliners from the UNP – Nanda Mathews, Wijepala Mendis and Susil Moonasinghe – points to this possibility. Significantly, Moonasinghe stated in clear terms after his cross-over that he was opposed to the peace package which alters the unitary status of the Constitution. He added that he was, prior to his defection, proposed by the island's Buddhist clergy as a presidential candidate.

The continued impasse on the conflict-resolution front, and the military actions in the north, could also mean a reduction in the number of Tamils who will cast their votes. With the LTTE capturing more territory, there is a possibility of the elections turning out to be predominantly southern (read Sinhalese) affair.

With 13 candidates in the fray, the largest number in any presidential election in the country, the coming weeks promise to throw up a cacophony of voices. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has fielded a politburo member, Nandana Gunathilaka, who espouses a single-point agenda of the abolition of the Executive Presidency. During the previous election, the JVP had withdrawn its candidate in favour of Chandrika Kumaratunga as she had promised to do away with the Executive Presidency. Given the nature of its Left-wing constituency, the JVP could eat into the votes of the P.A. This is an added disadvantage for the P.A., as already the incumbency factor is working against it. The UNP, on the other hand, is yet to be seen as a party which could provide an alternative.

Vasudeva Nanayakkara of the Left and Democratic Alliance has the backing of non-governmental organisations. He hopes that the Tamil vote would come his way. He has promised to stop the war and end the difficulties faced by Tamils.

Other contestants include Harishchandra Wijayatunga of the Sinhalaye Mahasammathe Bhoomiputra Pakshya, who is for a "Sinhala-Buddhist state"; Rajiva Wijesinha, an academician belonging to the Liberal Party; and Tennyson Edirisurya, who has declared his opposition to the Executive Presidency. Edirisurya has called upon the voters to invalidate their votes and has promised to do so himself. ■

Exit Kalyan Singh

Kalyan Singh makes way for Ram Prakash Gupta as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, but the prognosis for the Bharatiya Janata Party is far from positive.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in Lucknow

"THE political roller-coaster has completed one cycle, but this is by no means a halt. It is bound to move again, and next time, who knows, the results may be vastly different." That was Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh's response to the developments in the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which culminated in Kalyan Singh's replacement as Chief Minister. The statement of Ram Prakash Gupta, the new Chief Minister, that he was "wearing a crown of thorns" could turn out to be truer than he meant it to be, added Amar Singh.

This assessment may have come from a leader of the BJP's principal political adversary in the State, but it has many takers within the BJP. The mood among a large number of legislators on October 12, when the Ram Prakash Gupta Ministry was sworn in, and on October 17, when it was expanded, illustrated this. There were many glum and angry faces at an event that was billed as the beginning of a process meant to lift the party's sagging fortunes.

It is not merely the supporters of Kalyan Singh who are upset and who predict the return of chaos to the State BJP. Even leaders belonging to upper-caste groups, led by Ministers Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon, who had campaigned for Kalyan Singh's removal for nearly six months, were not really savouring what should have been their moment of victory.

For, although Kalyan Singh was replaced, the leaders had failed to realise their personal objectives. Both Mishra and Tandon had aspired to become Chief Minister; in fact, days before Kalyan Singh was removed, Mishra's supporters and a section of the media were certain that Mishra would be appointed. Even on November 9, when the central leadership of the party foisted Ram Prakash Gupta on the State unit, Mishra's supporters had not given up hopes.

Rajnath Singh, president of the State unit of the party, too had projected himself as a candidate, but his disappointment was relatively minor for two reasons. One, he managed to retain his party post, despite indications that along with the replacement of the Chief Minister, there would be changes in the party organisation. Second, sensing early on that none of the three chief ministerial candidates stood a good chance, he backed Gupta's candidature when the central leadership first suggested it. This tactical move strengthened his relationship with Gupta.

Other factors could add to Rajnath Singh's primacy in the State unit. Gupta has been out of active politics for long and might find it difficult to come to terms with the prevailing political equations, which are based on caste and pressure groups. Gupta is not lacking in administrative experience – he was Deputy Chief Minister in 1967 under Charan Singh – but the



SUBIR ROY

Chief Minister Ram Prakash Gupta with (from right) outgoing Chief Minister Kalyan Singh, president of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP Rajnath Singh and BJP president Kushabhau Thakre in Lucknow.



SUBIR ROY

BJP leaders Lalji Tandon and (right) Kalraj Mishra, who were contenders for the chief ministership.

political and bureaucratic structures of those times were not as caste-oriented as they are today. This is bound to increase Gupta's dependence on Rajnath Singh.

Mishra and Tandon, on the other hand, have other problems. In addition to the disappointment of losing the race, they find that their supporters are resentful at having been kept out of the Ministry. Among the aspirants for ministerial berths were two former Ministers whom Kalyan Singh had dropped – Ravindra Shukla, dropped following the controversy over the directive to make the recitation of "Vande Mataram" and "Saraswati Vandana" compulsory in schools, and Devendra Singh Bhole, for criticising the then Chief Minister's style of functioning. Dr. Surjit Singh Dang, the only Sikh MLA, and Rajesh Pandey, a senior Member of the Legislative Council, too had hoped to become Ministers.

In the end, Gupta inducted only two new Ministers of State, Seema Rizvi and Ram Babu Harit. Both these appointments were made with an eye on two key political constituencies – Muslims and the Scheduled Castes. Further, Dhanraj Yadav, a Minister of State under Kalyan Singh, was elevated to Cabinet rank. This too was done with caste equations in mind.

The disappointment in the anti-Kalyan Singh camp was accentuated by the fact that Gupta did not drop Ministers who were considered close to the deposed Chief Minister. Many key activists in the campaign to have Kalyan Singh replaced had hoped to fill the ministerial positions vacated by Kalyan Singh's associates. Their hopes soared on November 12 when only seven BJP Ministers were sworn in, although the "quotas" of alliance partners such as the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC), the Janatantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP) and the Samata Party were filled up. This was seen as an indication of Gupta's intention to ease out Ministers close to Kalyan Singh, principally Hukum Singh, Premalata Katiyar and Surya Pratap Shahi.

However, on November 17, when the Ministry was expanded, all of them were sworn in. A section of the anti-Kalyan Singh group interprets this as a move to isolate Kalyan Singh from his own supporters.

One thing is certain: the change of leadership has engendered bitterness not only among the deposed Chief Minister and his supporters but also among those who claim to have overthrown him. This bitterness is not a good sign for the BJP and its new government.

THE initial signals from the dispensation hold no promise that the leadership change will bring any good to the State. When the campaign to have Kalyan Singh replaced was on, it was often claimed on behalf of the BJP that one of the factors that impeded good governance was the size of the 90-strong Ministry. The suggestion was that once Kalyan Singh was removed, the Ministry would be downsized. According to some central leaders, this issue came up when the proposal to remove Kalyan Singh was considered. It was raised with alliance partners too, and a few leaders of the UPLC and the JBSP reportedly agreed to consider the proposal. However, Gupta's Ministry is 91-strong: all the Ministers belonging to the alliance partners have been reinducted, and additionally two BJP leaders have been taken in. Evidently, the compulsions of keeping the coalition afloat take precedence over other promises.

The new Chief Minister's response to some of the controversial appointments made by Kalyan Singh during his last days in office, including the appointment of Lucknow Municipal Council member Kusum Rai as chairperson of the State Women's Commission, points to an inclination to take the path of least resistance. At least half a dozen others were similarly rewarded with chairmanships of corporations: Raj Narayan Bhind (Mandi Parishad), O.P. Singh (Seed Corporation), Dr. Anupam Alok (Forest Corporation) and Vinod Singh (Sugar Corporation). Kalyan Singh also transferred about 200 senior bureaucrats and police officers during his last 10 days in power.

Gupta is unlikely to reverse these measures; the beneficiaries of Kalyan Singh's largesse are thus likely to continue in their positions.

WHAT, then, do the BJP and the State stand to gain from Kalyan Singh's removal? It appears that the only tangible difference now is that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was bent on removing Kalyan Singh from office, is pleased. So keen was he to attain this objective that he found time to discuss it with party colleagues even as the nation was coming to terms with the cyclone devastation in Orissa. Home Minister L.K. Advani and his supporters wished to see Kalyan Singh continue as Chief Minister, and BJP president Kushabhau Thakre was sympathetic to this line. But Vajpayee had his way.

On November 3 and 4, the BJP National Executive met in New Delhi to discuss Uttar Pradesh. Here, Vajpayee insisted that he would settle for nothing short of Kalyan Singh's removal. Murli Manohar Joshi backed Vajpayee. He put forward an old proposal – that Kalyan Singh, who belongs to a backward class, be replaced by a person from a forward caste. The allegation that Kalyan Singh had sabotaged the BJP's chances in the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh in concert with Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav, who too belongs to a backward class, was repeated. Thakre then said that the leadership was thinking of taking "corrective measures" in Uttar Pradesh.

Thakre made a set of suggestions to enable Kalyan Singh to make an honourable exit but Kalyan Singh rejected all

'Caution will be my watchword'

Ram Prakash Gupta was as surprised as the rest of the political class in Uttar Pradesh when he was chosen as Kalyan Singh's successor. Known for his austere ways, 76-year-old Ram Prakash Gupta's qualification for the top job was that he was not part of any group in the State unit of the BJP and was acceptable to all groups. **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** met the Chief Minister at his official residence in Lucknow to find out about his priorities and how he proposed to pursue them. Excerpts from the interview:

▶ *You have taken over as Chief Minister at a time when the BJP faces internal dissension. Also, there are complaints about misrule by the earlier regime. What are your priorities now?*

My primary objective is to improve the understanding between the party and the government. In this, I am getting support from all sections, including the MLAs of the ruling coalition, the workers of our party and the people in general. I myself am a representative of the high command and that ensures the cooperation of the central leadership. Because of these factors, I am certain that my job will be relatively easy and that I will be able to accomplish the party's objectives.

▶ *During the Kalyan Singh regime, sections of the State and central leaderships identified three major problems – lack of coordination between the government and the party; tussles between various factions led by prominent leaders; and divisions on caste lines in the State leadership, which had manifested themselves during the Lok Sabha elections. What specific steps would you take to address these issues?*



SUBIR ROY

These are not permanent problems that cannot be solved. These can be overcome with some care by the leadership, including the Chief Minister. But problems such as these should not be seen as the creation of a single person. Nor is finding a solution to them the responsibility of one person. And, if the government and the party function in such a manner as to bring welfare and justice to the people without bias or favour, these problems would disappear automatically.

▶ *There is a perception that you are a stopgap Chief Minister with a specific brief – to run a feel-good government that would create the right ambience for mid-term elections. It is also said that because of your long absence from active politics, you have difficulty in understanding and adapting to contemporary political practice.*

Elections are not in my mind. Nor are they part of my brief. As far as I am concerned, elections are far way. My task is to provide good governance and I want to strive towards this end with the help of my MLAs and the bureaucracy. With regard to my ability to adapt to the new political situation, I have full knowledge of the situation, its challenges and nuances. I am also aware that there is no use talking about the past. But I am sure that I can learn what is to be learnt, by taking a realistic approach, realising my

'A judicious selection'

Political observers consider **Rajnath Singh**, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Uttar Pradesh unit, the real winner in the latest power struggles in the party. Although his ambition to become Chief Minister did not materialise, the general perception is that it was his manoeuvres that thwarted other contenders to the post, such as Kalraj Mishra. The central leadership's announcement that there is no move to replace Rajnath Singh as party president has also strengthened his hands. In this interview to **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan**, Rajnath Singh gives an assessment of the situation in the State BJP and the government. Excerpts:

▶ *What will be the impact of the change of leadership on the government and the*

I do not think that the change of leadership in government and related initiatives have been made on account of any crisis in the State BJP. Every party and organisation makes changes in its organisational and administrative setups to improve its functioning. This is what has happened here.

▶ *But a group of legislators had been running a campaign against Kalyan Singh for many months. Kalyan Singh also criti-*

Allegations and counter-allegations are natural in politics. But the point to note is that the BJP has never pursued its politics on the basis of caste, creed or class. It always strove to take all classes and castes on the basis of its socio-political philosophy. Sections of the party had deviated, although slightly, from this basic understanding. Some of them had involved in verbal duels too. All this had created an abnormal situation in the party. But it will be an exaggeration to brand it a crisis. All that our central leadership did was to take corrective steps to make the situation in the party normal. And this was done in a very smooth manner.

▶ *How far did the record of the Kalyan Singh government lead to the development of the abnormal situation cited by you?*

The Kalyan Singh government took a host of steps that were beneficial to the State and its people. But as in the case of every government, there could have been some mistake or the other. The central leadership took that also into consideration while taking corrective

▶ *The central leadership has selected Ram Prakash Gupta, who has been out of active politics for nearly a decade, as a compromise candidate.*

strengths and weaknesses as they are. My effort will be to make my actions speak louder than words. That, I hope, will put an end to all this talk about my inability to adapt to the political situation.

▶ *You said that providing justice and welfare to the people would be your primary concern. Does it imply that the Kalyan Singh regime was not able to do this?*

I do not say that. My predecessors have done so much. But nobody is perfect. There could have been decisions and programmess that upset people. I will look into all these.

▶ *Some decisions taken by Kalyan Singh during the last days of his government, particularly the one on the appointment of his friends and close associates to sinecures, have generated controversy. Will you review these decisions?*

There is no need to review all decisions. But if there are specific charges, I shall look into them.

▶ *A section within the BJP is opposed to the reforms initiated by Kalyan Singh in the financial and power sectors and in local administration...*

I shall look into such specific questions. There is a perception that some of these plans were pushed ahead in a hasty manner. So, caution will be my watchword.

▶ *Could this review lead to a rollback of some of these steps?*

It could. If a rollback is in the interests of the people, we will do that. I want to assert that these measures should not be seen as steps against a person or a group. I would like decisions on these matters to be unanimous. Hence, I shall ensure wide-ranging consultations on these matters.

▶ *There is a perception that Kalyan Singh is being isolated by both your government and the party. The exclusion of his supporters from the Cabinet is cited as a case in point.*

This is all media speculation. You will see all of us working together harmoniously.

▶ *There is the feeling that the intervention of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in government will increase, since you are more committed to the RSS than Kalyan Singh is.*

There will be no need for the RSS to intervene. All its intervention will be done through me, because I am the seniormost RSS worker in Uttar Pradesh. There could be more important RSS leaders in the State, but there is unanimous opinion about my being the living example of the RSS way of life, values and ideals. So I am there to take care of the RSS interests and there is no need for intervention.

▶ *But many of the BJP's allies, such as the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC) and the Janatantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP), do not accept the Hindutva philosophy of the RSS.*

I would like to affirm that none of the RSS' ideals is against the people. The RSS is pro-poor and wants to remove corruption from society. The RSS has idealism unmatched by any other organisation. If I may add, the Hindutva philosophy was manifest in a striking manner in Mahatma Gandhi. If you realise the fact that Gandhi was the greatest Hindu of this century, then there is no difficulty in understanding Hindutva. The RSS has kept Gandhi as part of its "*pratha smarana*" (things and people to be remembered first in the morning) along with Rama and Krishna. People do not try to understand Hindutva in all its depth. They approach it superficially. To some people you are Hindu if you become anti-Muslim. I do not think these people are Hindus.

▶ *But it was the BJP and the Sangh Parivar that created this impression during the Ayodhya agitation.*

I would only like to say that the basic Hindu value of life is humanity. I believe that this is the value in Islam and Christianity too. My effort will be to underscore this and create a situation of harmony in Uttar Pradesh society. ■

It is not right to see Ram Prakash Gupta as a compromise candidate. He is one of the senior most leaders of the party in the State and has vast experience in government and in the organisation. He understands the various problems and the possibilities of the State well. In fact, the central leadership has made an extremely judicious selection. I congratulate them on this.

▶ *What are your priorities now as the president of the BJP's State unit?*

I shall strive to make the party stronger under the leadership and guidance of Ram Prakash Guptaji. The difference of the party from other political parties has to be highlighted properly. The fact that the party leadership is one with the masses in sharing their miseries and happiness would be emphasised again through our actions.

▶ *Kalyan Singh has said that the BJP suffered electoral reverses in Uttar Pradesh mainly because it abandoned issues such as the Ram temple, Article 370 and a Uniform Civil Code.*

The central leadership has gone into all these questions and will study the opinion expressed by Kalyan Singhji. Only after a comprehensive assessment can one give a response on this.

▶ *You had offered to resign as party president owning moral responsibility for the electoral reverses. The central leadership accepted similar offer from Kalyan Singh but has rejected yours. What do you think is the reason for the difference in the responses?*

I had taken up the moral responsibility and offered to resign. But I am also a disciplined soldier of the party. Hence I have to abide by the decision of the leadership, whatever it is. If the central leadership thinks that I have to continue to look after the organisational affairs of the party, I cannot disobey it and insist on my resignation. ■

these proposals in the belief that with the backing of Advani and others such as party general secretary K.N. Govindacharya, he would continue in office. Advani and Co. supported Kalyan Singh on the basis of the argument that Other Backward Classes such as Kurmis and Lodh Rajputs were the mainstay of the BJP in the State and that large sections of people belonging to these caste groups owed their allegiance to Kalyan Singh. At the end of the National Executive meeting, Kalyan Singh exuded confidence; returning to Lucknow, he asserted that there was no move to remove him.

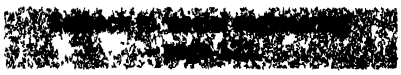
But in the next four days, reality caught up with him. The central leadership announced that Gupta would be appointed in his place. A shaken Kalyan Singh went on the offensive: he made a trip to the makeshift temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid at Ayodhya and accused the Prime Minister of not giving adequate attention to the BJP's basic campaign themes. He followed this up with the appointment of his supporters in key posts. For the next few days, he kept the central leadership on tenterhooks on the matter of

precisely when he would submit his resignation. Finally, he handed over his resignation letter to Governor Suraj Bhan on the morning of November 11, barely a few hours before Gupta was to be elected leader of the BJP Legislature Party.

IN the final analysis, even the choice of Gupta is an indication that the central leadership acknowledges Kalyan Singh's clout. That none of Kalyan Singh's detractors such as Mishra, Tandon and Rajnath Singh was chosen reflects the inability or reluctance of the leadership to go all out against Kalyan Singh. The same applies to the retention of Kalyan Singh's supporters in the Ministry. In fact, at a meeting of the State leadership of the party on November 11 and 12, Mishra, Tandon and Rajnath Singh had pressed for the removal of some of Kalyan Singh's close supporters from the Ministry and Gupta reportedly agreed to do so. However, this plan was torpedoed by some nifty counter-moves by Govindacharya and Advani. Govindacharya rushed to Delhi to inform Advani of the move; Advani said he would not attend the swearing-in if Kalyan Singh's supporters were dropped. He made it clear that the State leaders should wait for Vajpayee, who was abroad, to return and take a final decision. After Vajpayee returned, Advani held talks with him; by all indications, this led to the retention of all of Kalyan Singh supporters in the Ministry.

Given the fact that Kalyan Singh has his own people in the Ministry and in the BJP Legislature Party, he will continue to be a force in the State BJP. He also has a good rapport with a large number of MLAs of the UPLC and the JBSP. However, the section of the BJP that has the support of Tandon and Mishra reportedly plans to initiate moves to focus attention on allegations that he was working in tandem with the S.P. during the Lok Sabha elections; its intention is to force the former Chief Minister to take extreme steps and get him expelled from the party. This section apparently has a new plan to build up the BJP in the State (see separate story).

One thing, however, is certain. Despite his being a "compromise candidate", Gupta will find the going tough. And as BJP insiders admit, Gupta's elevation has not ended the fireworks in the party. In fact, the post-Diwali change of leadership has merely given a new dimension to political pyrotechnics in the Uttar Pradesh BJP. ■



POLITICS

Tussles ahead

Out of power, Kalyan Singh has the potential to cause immense damage to the BJP, and although the central leadership is wary of displeasing him, hardliners in the State unit want to raise the stakes.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

LEADERS who campaigned for the removal of Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister cited three reasons for the demand. They claimed, first, that the Bharatiya Janata Party's traditional support among the upper castes was eroding owing to the Kalyan Singh Government's policy of appeasing backward classes. Second, they claimed, Kalyan Singh's style of governance – characterised by an excessive dependence on bureaucrats and undue interference by his family members and friends – had led to a situation where grass-roots-level leaders and activists felt alienated. Third, the leaders said, Kalyan Singh had made no effort to build a cohesive working relationship between the party organisation and the administration, and that the BJP organisational machinery had no role in governance.

Now that Kalyan Singh has been replaced with Ram Prakash Gupta, will the BJP be able to rectify these "problems"? BJP leaders are less than optimistic. Moreover, large sections of the party at the State and central levels fear that the erosion of the BJP's support among upper-caste groups, which are increasingly turning to the Congress(I), may be unchecked.

The BJP reckons that it lost a dozen seats in Uttar Pradesh in the recent parliamentary elections on account of the shift in the votes of the upper castes, especially Brahmins, to the Congress(I). Several central leaders, including Atal Behari Vajpayee and Murli Manohar Joshi, and their supporters in Uttar Pradesh had emphasised this point to reinforce their demand for Kalyan Singh's removal and the appointment in his place of a leader who would be acceptable to upper-caste groups.

However, Home Minister L.K. Advani and his confidant and party general secretary K.N. Govindacharya pointed out that the party had lost an equal number of seats owing to an erosion in its support base among the backward class-

SUBIR ROY



On a visit to Ayodhya on November 9, two days before he resigned as Chief Minister, Kalyan Singh with sants and mahants associated with the movement for the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid.

es. They did not want any immediate action taken against Kalyan Singh.

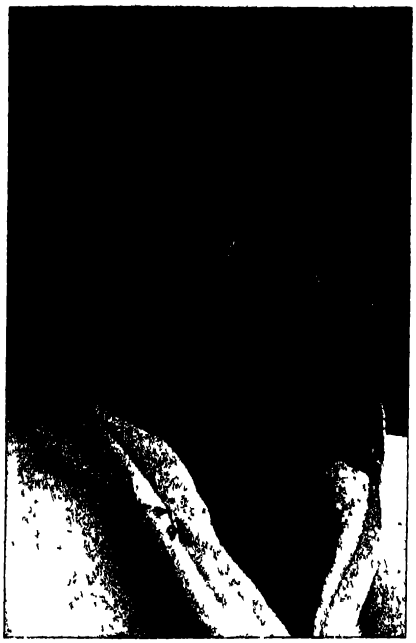
Obviously, the Vajpayee-Joshi combine's viewpoint prevailed: Kalyan Singh was eventually removed. However, the leadership and the rank and file are not sure whether the party can win back the support of upper-caste voters.

According to a senior Minister in the State, if the central leadership had wanted to win back the support of the upper-caste groups, it should have appointed a Brahmin or a Thakur Chief Minister, not a leader belonging to the Vaish (Bania) community. (Banias, who constitute an intermediate caste, account for less than 2 per cent of the State's population; Brahmins account for about 9 per cent and Thakurs 8 per cent.)

The Minister (who is a Brahmin) told *Frontline* that the central leadership should have acted "boldly" and appointed either Kalraj Mishra, a Brahmin, or Rajnath Singh, a Thakur. "Now," he said, "the BJP might end up losing the support of both the upper castes as well as the backward castes whose votes Kalyan Singh used to bring in." Kalyan Singh belongs to the Lodh Rajput community, which accounts for about 6 per cent of the population; he also has significant support among the Kurmi community, which accounts for around 7 per cent.

These caste equations could get further complicated if Kalyan Singh decides to rock the boat. He has two options: join hands with Samajwadi Party (S.P.) president Mulayam Singh Yadav and form of a broad coalition to represent the backward classes, or implement his pledge to renew the movement for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya. If he chooses to team up with Mulayam Singh, it could lead to a direct political battle between the upper castes and the backward classes, and the demographic advantage will be with the backward classes. The S.P. already has a support base among Muslims; the consolidation of the backward class vote would make a new coalition a major force. Mulayam Singh, on his part, has sent feelers to Kalyan Singh: he said that Kalyan Singh's removal was an affront to the backward classes. He called for an agitation to press for 54 per cent reservation for the backward classes.

If Kalyan Singh chooses to raise the Ram temple issue, it would reflect an attempt to exploit, once again, his twin strengths: of being a backward class leader and of being a mascot of the Ayodhya agitation. It was on the basis of these strengths that he became Chief Minister in 1991. Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the dismissal of his government, he came to be seen as a leader who sacrificed power for a greater cause.



R V MOORTHY

Samajwadi Party president Mulayam Singh Yadav.

Owing to considerations of realpolitik arising from the BJP's pursuit of coalition politics at the national level since 1998, the Ram temple issue receded into the background. In the changed circumstances, Kalyan Singh was perceived more and more within the BJP as a leader of the backward classes who would not be able to retain upper-caste support, the BJP's main base. It was this consideration that ultimately led to his removal.

It is doubtful whether his promise to renew the temple agitation will help him politically, but the message is clear. He can embarrass the central leadership, particularly Vajpayee – who he says put the temple agenda on the backburner. Sensing a chance to return to the limelight, the sants and mahants of Ayodhya who are associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) welcomed Kalyan Singh's announcement. Evidently, Kalyan Singh proved his potential to damage the BJP.

It is this factor that compelled the central leadership to appoint Gupta, rather than a leader who had campaigned actively for Kalyan Singh's removal, his successor. Having decided to remove him, the central leadership did not want to displease him too much.

But an overwhelming section in the State unit of the BJP thinks that such caution has not served the party's interests. While a compromise was the preferred choice for the central leaders, the perception within the party and outside is that a weak choice has been made in order to avert an open revolt by Kalyan Singh. Sections of the upper-caste group, particularly supporters of Kalraj Mishra, blame Advani and Govindacharya for this: according to them, the two leaders accused Mishra of running a media campaign to project himself as the Chief Minister and of vitiating the atmosphere to an extent where a smooth selection of a successor to Kalyan Singh became impossible.

There are suggestions within the BJP that Rajnath Singh also played a part in this operation: he was by then sure of retaining his position as president of the State party unit and did not want Mishra or Lalji Tandon to become Chief Minister. The choice of Gupta suits Rajnath Singh; it is unlikely that Gupta, a septuagenarian who is returning to active politics after a long gap, can become a power centre in his own right.

IN the midst of all these, supporters of Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon have advanced a radical line: that the central leadership provoke Kalyan Singh into leaving the party. According to them, even if Kalyan Singh teams up with Mulayam Singh and consolidates the backward class vote, such a coalition can be countered by an alliance between the BJP and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Mishra and Tandon have good equations with BSP leader Mayawati.

Leaders close to Advani have opposed this proposal. According to them, such a course of action would trigger a shift in the support of Muslims from the BSP to the S.P., which would render a BJP-BSP combine weak. Just how the tussle will unfold is to be seen, but it is clear that the confusion within the BJP is far from resolved despite Kalyan Singh's removal.

Party leaders such as Rajnath Singh and Gupta hope that they will be able to show better results on the two other problems identified by those who campaigned for Kalyan Singh's removal. Gupta is known for his austerity and integrity, and there is no likelihood of any undue interference in the administration by his relatives and friends. And since Rajnath Singh and Gupta have a good rapport, there could be better understanding between the party organisation and the administration. How far the new Chief Minister, who has not held an administrative office for long, will depend on bureaucrats will be watched with interest. ■

A clutch of new bills

The NDA Government is set to push through in the winter session of Parliament several pieces of legislation, some of which have raised concern owing to a watered-down approach to financial wrongdoing and an anti-people tack.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

THE winter session of Parliament, scheduled to start on November 29, is likely to provide firm pointers about the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government's intentions on the policy changes known as "second generation reforms". The increasingly assertive nature of the statements issued by official spokespersons suggests that the greater security of numbers that the Government enjoys in the Lok Sabha may encourage it to adopt an ambitious legislative agenda in the next few months.

In order to be able to do this, an element of concord will need to be fostered with sections of the Opposition, since the National Democratic Alliance, the ruling coalition, does not command a majority in the Rajya Sabha. Although the Congress(I) is ideologically committed to many of the legislative proposals that the BJP may introduce, there could be a tacit effort to premise its cooperation on the fulfilment of certain other (largely unstated) conditions. A further possibility – though at this moment that is a remote one – is a genuine change of heart within the Congress(I). Sections within the Congress Working Committee are known to be arguing the case for the party to assume the mantle of populist legitimacy that it has donned with great electoral success in the past. Too eager an advocacy of the economic reforms would be, in this perception, costly in political terms and corrosive of the party's identity as the principal Opposition party.

At the truncated first session of the 13th Lok Sabha, Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha introduced two bills with major ramifications: the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Bill and the Prevention of Money Laundering Bill (PMLB). Also introduced was a bill to amend the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act of 1956. The Foreign Exchange Management Bill, which was to be replaced with the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, could not be tabled owing to stiff resistance from the Opposition. This represents an anomalous situation, since the bills pertaining to foreign exchange management and money laundering were to constitute a composite piece of legislation.

The PMLB that was drafted though not introduced in 1998 was already a watered down version on account of pressure from various quarters. In the variant introduced in Parliament now there has been a further dilution, arising from the incorporation of the dubious recommendations of the parliamentary standing committee on finance. According to PMLB 1999, a person can be booked for money laundering only if it can be proved that he or she "knowingly" entered into a transaction involving proceeds of any of the crimes listed in the schedule to the Bill. The earlier Bill did not contain the word "knowingly". The Bill as it stands now requires the authorities first to prove a crime, ascertain that proceeds have been generated from the crime and finally establish that a person had "knowingly" entered into a transaction involving the proceeds.

In effect, the bill is redundant inasmuch as it requires that the accused be charged under any of the crimes listed in the schedule before the money laundering authority can take cognizance of transactions in any proceeds that may have arisen from such crimes. All that the bill now enables are additional penalties for money laundering after any of the other crimes listed in the schedule has been proved.

The greater security of numbers that the Government enjoys in the Lok Sabha may encourage it to adopt an ambitious legislative agenda in the next few

Two key concepts considered essential for the prosecution of acts of money-laundering have been omitted in the bill – "suspect property" and "deemed money laundering". The inclusion of these would have permitted the authorities to hold any unexplained property or money, whether to crimes listed in the schedule or not, as "suspect property", which would lay the person possessing or dealing in such property open to the charge of "deemed money laundering". These concepts were both included in earlier drafts, and pressures from various lobbies have compelled the government to delete them.

Even in its earlier incarnation, though, the PMLB did not incorporate major economic offences in its schedule, especially tax evasion that accounts for the largest chunk of black money in India. The 1999 version takes it a step further and has even left out the lone economic offence in the schedule, namely "falsification of accounts". Corporates indulging in falsification of accounts can now sleep easy. The deletion of this offence from the schedule was once again recommended by the parliamentary standing committee which heard representations from industry. PMLB 1999 proposes a stiffer penalty for vexatious search – imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to Rs. 50,000, or both.

PMLB 1999 requires not only financial institutions and intermediaries but banking companies to report transactions above a certain minimum amount to be notified. Although the parliamentary standing committee on finance had recommended that only cash transactions need be mandatorily reported, thankfully saner sense has prevailed.

The latest version also introduces a new chapter that deals with reciprocal arrangements with foreign countries for exchange of information for the prevention of the offence and assistance in transfer of accused persons. This is an improvement on the earlier draft.

The IRDA Bill 1999 seeks to establish a statutory authority to regulate, pro-

mote and ensure the orderly growth of the insurance industry and to amend the Insurance Act 1938, the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956 and the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act 1972. Section 2 of the Insurance Act 1938 is to be amended to include companies that have aggregate holdings of paid-up equity capital of up to 26 per cent by a foreign company either by itself or through its subsidiary companies or nominees. With this step, the insurance sector will be opened up to private and foreign investment. The entry of the private sector has been made possible through the amendment of "exclusive privilege" granted to the General Insurance Corporation in the GIC Act of 1956 and to the Life Insurance Corporation of India in the LIC Act of 1972.

Interestingly, the Bill stipulates that an Indian promoter dilute stake to 26 per cent in 10 years. The Bill proposes a minimum capital of Rs. 100 crores for life and general insurers and Rs. 200 crores for reinsurance firms. The Reserve Bank of India specifies that the funds of the policy-holders be retained within the country, but is silent on the repatriation of profits and dividend by the companies with foreign equity.

The Bill stipulates that life and general insurers must maintain solvency margins in the form of minimum assets in excess of liabilities. The solvency margin for insurers is fixed at Rs. 50 crores, while for reinsurers it is Rs. 100 crores.

The SCRA Bill envisages two new sections permitting derivatives trading and regulating plantations. An amendment to Section 29A to enable delegation of powers to the RBI is included. The 1969 Government of India notification that bans ready forward trading in government securities is to be repealed. This will empower the RBI to regulate ready forward transactions in specific securities. This, according to the Government, will help deepen and widen the debt market.

The tabling of the three bills in the last session was accompanied by a walkout by the parties of the Left and others. The Left parties, the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have described the IRDA Bill as "anti-national". For the Government, though, ensuring the cooperation of the Congress(I) would be sufficient to secure the passage of the bills.

What that would in turn entail is a matter for speculation. The most likely possibility is that the Congress(I) would take the pragmatic decision to sustain the economic reforms that it still takes great pride in having launched, despite all the political costs it has since borne. ■

Cautious moves

The Congress(I) is set to take a series of steps on the basis of lessons learnt recently.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

THE Congress(I)'s politics appears to have acquired a three-dimensional character following the first session of the 13th Lok Sabha. This was evident in the party's public pronouncements and also in inner-party manoeuvres.

Although the party is yet to assess fully the reasons for its debacle in the Lok Sabha elections, broadly, three factors have emerged, which point to the future course the leadership would take. The first is a move initiated by party president Sonia Gandhi to restructure the organisation on the basis of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses that became evident in the election results. Secondly, there is a near-unanimous conviction that only the slogan of single-party rule would prove beneficial to the party. Several senior leaders feel that there is no need to alter the stand on coalition governments, despite the reverses suffered in pursuit of this agenda. The third is a readiness to play the role of a constructive Opposition in Parliament and outside.

While a revamp of the party organisation is expected to take place after a committee headed by Congress(I) Working Committee member A.K. Antony completes the assessments of the election results, the latter two factors have become evident in political manoeuvres. Sonia Gandhi is likely to constitute a few committees to look into aspects of organisational restructuring, as was done after the 1998 parliamentary elections. A new team of All India Congress(I) Committee general secretaries, mostly young leaders, is likely to be appointed in order to infuse dynamism into the party.

The decision to break with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and contest the coming Assembly elections in Bihar on its own indicates that the party is serious about the slogan of single-party rule. According to a CWC member, the dominating perception has been that the party should confine its alliances to regions where alliances have worked traditionally - Kerala and Tamil Nadu, for instance. In this context, there is an attempt to strengthen the party's bargaining position in Tamil Nadu *vis-a-vis* the Dravidian parties by winning over the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC), which was formed by G.K. Moopanar and P. Chidambaram after they broke away in 1996. According to the CWC member, alliances that were struck in North Indian States such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have generally weakened the State units. The leadership, he said, had decided that the Congress(I) should function independently in these States, whatever the consequences.

THE Congress(I)'s decision to play the "role of a constructive Opposition" and the government's not-too-rigid stand towards the main Opposition party became apparent during the Lok Sabha session. The performance of Sonia Gandhi and Home Minister L.K. Advani on the floor of the House during the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address is a case in point. Both the leaders adopted a give-and-take policy.

In her maiden speech in Parliament on October 29, Sonia Gandhi went hammer and tongs against the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government for Rajiv Gandhi being named in the Bofors case charge-sheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Mixing politics and emotion in good measure, she alleged that the "government's action is politically motivated" and that the Congress(I) "shall not tolerate the framing of an innocent man who is not in a position to defend himself".

Advani, who responded to her speech in the absence of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, came out with a gesture that took everybody by surprise: he stated that he can "understand her sentiments and feelings on the issue" and promised that "the government is considering all aspects relating to the inclusion of Rajiv Gandhi's name in the Bofors charge-sheet... and the government will do whatever is appropriate."

Although Advani did not quite state that the Congress(I)'s demand to delete Rajiv Gandhi's name would be accepted,

there was an unmistakable hint of reconciliation. After Advani's speech, Sonia Gandhi added to the bonhomie by wishing Vajpayee speedy recovery from the illness that had kept him away from the House.

These developments were in direct contrast to the postures adopted by the NDA and the Congress(I) soon after the charge-sheet was filed. The two sides had differed on every aspect of the issue, including the procedure to be followed in Parliament when the issue was taken up for discussion. The Congress(I) saw "political vendetta" in the inclusion of Rajiv Gandhi's name, while the constituents of the NDA, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, affirmed that the CBI had merely done its job. The CWC even alleged that the charge-sheet was filed with the "sole purpose of denigrating Rajiv Gandhi, and that this would not be tolerated by Congress(I) workers."

The Treasury benches were ready to initiate a full-fledged debate, but the Congress(I) opposed the idea, stating that Parliament had already spent 69 hours over the last 12 years discussing the Bofors issue. Evidently, the party was "averse to one more session of Rajiv-bashing". According to Madhavrao Scindia, the party's Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, the filing of the charge-sheet had not been preceded by the presentation of any evidence against Rajiv Gandhi. He said that the BJP was trying to score cheap political points.

For a full week the NDA and the Congress(I) continued in this acrimonious mode, until the exchanges between Sonia Gandhi and Advani changed the situation dramatically. It is learnt that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has sought the Law Ministry's views on the Congress(I)'s demand.

These developments created an impression that the Congress(I) and the BJP were working out a deal on the Bofors payoffs case. So intense is this impression that Sonia Gandhi, on her first tour of Amethi and Rae Bareli constituencies after the elections, was at pains to explain to the traditional supporters of the Nehru-Gandhi family that there was no such deal. "I am not going to bargain on this (Bofors) issue at all," she asserted.

There is also a line of thought that the Congress(I) has struck a deal with the government essentially on account of its failure to unite the rest of the Opposition on the issue. Its attempts to win over the Left parties and the 26-member-strong Samajwadi Party (S.P.) failed. However, the Left parties did focus on one aspect highlighted by the Congress(I). This related to the non-inclusion of the names of the three Hinduja brothers in the charge-sheet (they find mention only as co-conspirators), although investigations had suggested that they were also recipients of payoffs.



ANU PUSHKARNA

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi.

Apart from its failure to gain the support of other Opposition parties, the Congress(I) suffered embarrassment on account of the individual performances of leaders such as Mani Shankar Aiyar and party spokesperson Kapil Sibal. The former moved a notice under Rule 193 of the proceedings for a discussion on the issue, only to withdraw it subsequently, apparently under pressure. According to party insiders, Manishankar Aiyar and fellow Congress(I) members Jagmeet Singh Brar and Pawan Kumar Bansal, wanted an all-out attack to be launched against the government, even by stalling parliamentary proceedings. But senior leaders, such as Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Madhavrao Scindia, prevented them from going ahead with the plan.

Kapil Sibal caused severe embarrassment when his argument that the names of dead persons should not find mention in criminal charge-sheets was dismissed by Information and Broadcasting Minister Arun Jaitley, who cited the charge-sheets in the Rajiv Gandhi and Indira Gandhi assassination cases. Kapil Sibal's *faux pas* took the steam out of the Congress(I)'s aggressive posture. As a result, the party virtually pleaded with the government to delete Rajiv Gandhi's name following the precedent set by the Janata Party government in 1977 in dropping Defence Minister George Fernandes' name from the Baroda dynamite case.

Referring to these failures in Parliament, Congress(I) leaders who had opposed Sonia Gandhi's choice as the Leader of the Opposition maintained that their objections had proved correct. One of them told *Frontline* in an almost triumphant tone that he had predicted that Sonia Gandhi would be unable to counter effectively contentious issues that involved her family, such as the Bofors case and a bill to bar citizens of foreign origin from holding high office.

This cynical attitude towards Sonia Gandhi's leadership capabilities may well have snowballed into a major inner-party problem had it not been for her October 29 performance. But, the most important question centres on the government's intent in adopting a reconciliatory posture, especially after pushing the Congress(I) to the ropes politically. On the face of it, the NDA would have gained by accentuating the Congress(I)'s discomfiture and highlighting this in public.

Informed sources say that a factor that compelled the government to change tack might be the need to complete the "second round of economic reforms" without any hitch. This process is said to have started with the Insurance Regulatory Authority Bill. This is one of the priority items on the Prime Minister's policy agenda. A two-thirds majority is required for the passage of such bills. The government has to depend on Congress(I) support for their passage in the Rajya Sabha too, as it is the dominant party in the Upper House. Ironically, the Congress(I) is the only party in the Opposition that is ideologically committed to the "reforms".

Apparently, the Congress(I) has taken advantage of this situation in order to minimise the damage caused by the Bofors issue. In fact, leaders such as Pranab Mukherjee had stated that the Congress(I) would not cooperate in the passage of important items of legislation if the government persisted with its arm-twisting tactics. Echoing this view, party spokesperson Ajit Jogi told *Frontline* that the Congress(I) would be forced to review its stand on several issues if the government sought to malign the memory of Rajiv Gandhi.

Apparently, these suggestions did play a part in the government taking a conciliatory approach. But, as Ajit Jogi points out, the Congress(I) perceives this merely as the first step and wants the government to take it to its logical conclusion. If the game proceeds along the lines set out by the Congress(I), the polity may witness more synchronised performances by the government and the main Opposition party. ■

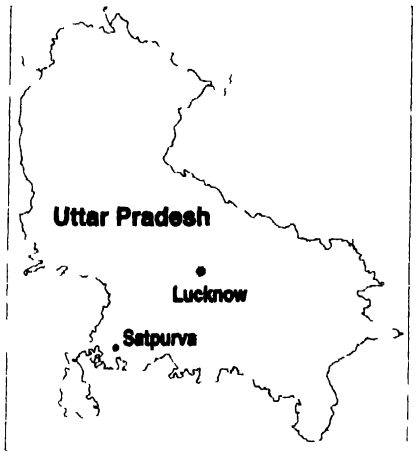
An act of desperation

In a village in Uttar Pradesh, a widow ends her life on her husband's funeral pyre, raising disturbing questions about the status of women, particularly widows, in society.

V. VENKATESAN
in Satpurva
VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in Lucknow

THE road to Satpurva hamlet, 10 km from Charkari in Mahoba district in southern Uttar Pradesh, is unmotorable However, tyre tracks of vehicles that braved the dusty road point the way to the village of some 20 Dalit families, which seems virtually untouched by development. Satpurva became the focus of attention last fortnight following an incident in which a 55-year-old woman reportedly immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband

The incident, as narrated by villagers, occurred on November 11, the day Mani Ram Shah, 60, a Dalit resident of



Satpurva, died of tuberculosis After the cremation, his son Sishpal, 22, and a few other relatives went to a nearby pond for a ritual bath At that time, Charan Shah, the widow, is believed to have left home and headed for the cremation ground, where she jumped into the pyre and was burnt to death There are conflicting reports about whether Charan Shah's actions went entirely unnoticed, but it is almost certain that hardly any attempt was made to rescue her from the pyre.

Charan Shah s wilful taking of her own life, and specifically her decision to end her life on her husband's burning pyre – which evoked images of the outlawed medieval custom of sati – whipped up a storm However, there was little or no evidence that the customary rituals associated with sati had been observed in this case. And although there appears to have been an *ex-post facto* attempt by some persons in Satpurva and neighbouring villages to



R V MOORTHY

The police keep a vigil at the site where Charan Shah ended her life on her husband's funeral pyre, in Satpurva village in Mahoba district. The police have taken action to prevent any attempt to glorify Charan Shah's death or worship at the cremation site.

glorify Charan Shah's tragic death and to weave mythic tales of miracle cures of those who "worshipped" at the "sati sthal", the police appear to have concluded after inquiries that Charan Shah did not, in fact, commit sati. These findings have been corroborated by the report of a fact-finding team of leaders and activists of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA). The National Commission for Women also deputed a fact-finding team to Satpurva.

Immediately after Charan Shah's suicide, the police interrogated Sishpal and Charan Shah's brother Malkhan Singh in order to ascertain whether the widow's immediate family members knew of her intention to end her life, in the manner in which she did so. Mahoba Superintendent of Police L. Ravi Kumar, however, said the two were blameless. Sishpal said that he would have informed the police had he known that his mother was contemplating suicide.

The police, who received news of Charan Shah's death only 12 hours after it happened, did not register a first information report(FIR) on the incident, arguing that there was no evidence of sati or of abetment to suicide. In fact, the police claimed, at least two women, both in their fifties, had seen Charan Shah heading for the cremation ground and had attempted to give chase. Attempts by police officials to reconstruct the events of November 11 have been hampered by the conflicting versions given by villagers. While some people claimed that there was no reason to suspect that Charan Shah contemplated suicide, a few others said that she had indeed expressed a desire to die along with her husband. "In such circumstances, whom can we find guilty?" a police official asked.

Ravi Kumar said that there were several reasons why the claim that Charan Shah had committed sati did not ring true. One, unlike the sati incident at Deorala in Rajasthan on September 4, 1987 involving Roop Kanwar, an 18-year-old widow, Charan Shah did not proclaim her intention to commit sati, as is dictated by medieval social custom. Second, she did not observe the rites associated with sati and did not wear a bridal dress. (Her relatives claim that she asked for a new dress, but that they did not give it.) Third, no

The law, and the facts

V.VENKATESAN

UNDER the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, "sati" is defined as the act of burning or burying alive any widow along with the body of her deceased husband or any other relative. This definition applies, irrespective of whether the widow voluntarily submits herself to such burning or burying or is coerced or persuaded into doing so.

Under the Act, glorification of "sati" is defined as the observance of any ceremony or the taking out of a procession in connection with the commission of sati; the supporting, justifying or propagating of the practice of sati; and the arranging of any function to eulogise a person who has committed sati, or the creation of a trust, or the collection of funds, or the construction of temple or other structure, or the carrying on of any form of worship or the performance of any ceremony there, with a view to perpetuating the honour of, or to preserve the memory of, a person who has committed sati.

FOLLOWING media reports of Charan Shah's death on her husband's funeral pyre on November 11, the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) deputed an all-woman team to Satpurva to ascertain the facts of the case. The team comprised Subhashini Ali, former Lok Sabha member from Kanpur and working president of AIDWA in U.P.; and Urmila Awasthi and Sheila Narayan, leaders of the Kanpur district unit of AIDWA. The three leaders visited Satpurva hamlet on November 15 and met the members of Charan Shah's family, their neighbours, and other villagers. The AIDWA team concluded that Charan Shah's death was not a case of "sati murder"; the widow committed suicide because she did not wish to live without her husband. And there was no abetment to suicide on the part of anyone, the team noted. Charan Shah's decision to end her life had not been conveyed to anyone beforehand, and she did not dress in bridal clothes; nor were there any rituals or ceremonies associated with sati, the AIDWA team said.

Subhashini Ali told *Frontline* that in the perception of the AIDWA team, Charan Shah's death was a case of suicide. However, even if it was treated as a case of sati going by the definition of sati under the Act, against whom would the police take action, she wondered. On the basis of the team's interaction with a cross section of people in the hamlet, she affirmed that there was no abetment of any kind. Subhashini Ali said, "If you prosecute the villagers for her death, they will not be able to survive. They are innocent."

Sishpal told the AIDWA team that the police wanted him to state that his mother was mentally ill, but that he refused. He further said that a few villagers had said that if a "sati" temple came up at the site, the village would benefit: offerings would pour in, shops could be set up and a road would be built.

The AIDWA team reported that several women of the village had claimed that they had heard that Charan Shah flew to the pyre and that physically disabled people who worshipped at the site had been cured miraculously. But the women could not substantiate these claims. Their innocent belief in supernatural powers was being used by people who wish to gain commercial advantage by creating a "sati myth" and pressing for a temple, the team said. Media reports that thousands of people had visited the village were exaggerated, the report said.

The team met an influential landowner of the area, a retired Colonel whose family had donated land to Dalit families during the Bhoodan movement in the 1950s. A member of the Rajput community, he told the AIDWA team that his mother had committed sati but that they had not built a temple in her honour. Such sentiments "propagated by educated influential individuals... encourage ritualised glorification of sati," the AIDWA report noted.

There are at least three sati temples in the region, at Thathaura, Mudhari and Jaari, all of them outside Mahoba district. The AIDWA report demanded that the administration remain vigilant to thwart any attempt to build a temple to glorify Charan Shah's death, and stated that a widespread social reform movement, based on concrete developmental activity, was needed in the area. The entire Mahoba district, which is part of the Bundelkhand area (comprising the southern districts of Uttar Pradesh and the

musical instruments were played and no bhajans to "sati ma" were sung when Charan Shah took her life.

(In Roop Kanwar's case, the residents of Deorala actively participated in the sati rituals; dressed in bridal finery, Roop Kanwar, who belonged to a middle-class Rajput family, sat on her husband's pyre, which was then lit by her brother-in-law, Pushpendra Singh, a minor. Of the 38 persons who were brought to trial in the case on the charges of murder and glorification of sati, 32 were acquitted in 1996. The Rajasthan Police went in appeal before the High Court, but that case is yet to come up for hearing. Two of the accused are absconding, and the four others, whose case was to appear before the juvenile court, are out on bail.)



R V MOORTHY

Charan Shah's sons. Several social factors, principally the failure to address issues related to the status of women, underlie the tragic incident.

northern districts of Madhya Pradesh), is a drought-affected, backward region where brutal exploitation by feudal landowners is common and criminal gangs operate freely. The AIDWA report said that it was a commentary on successive governments in the State that Satpurva did not have even the basic necessities for human existence.

A FEW other women's groups and activists are rather more inclined to take a strictly legalistic view of the circumstances of Charan Shah's death and the response of the villagers of Satpurva. Kavita, an activist in Jaipur, argued that Charan Shah could have been pulled out from the pyre and given medical help. "Even if it was too late, she could have been declared dead at a hospital. Why did the villagers not do that? The villagers' mindset and the fact that some of them made offerings at the site amount to a violation of the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act," said Kavita.

Senior lawyer Indira Jaisingh wondered how the police had, without filing a First Information Report, concluded that there was no abetment. In her view, whether Charan Shah's death was a case of suicide or sati was purely an academic question: she had already died. The relevant point is whether there was abetment by anyone. If the police had any evidence, then the Act could be invoked, she said. After all, she noted, the police were already implementing the provisions of the Act with regard to the prevention of glorification of sati. ■

LOCATED amid picturesque hills, Satpurva in Charkari tehsil was populated mainly by agricultural labourers until about 15 years ago, when some Dalits were given land to till, under the Cooperative Society Act. Today there are about 20 Dalit families, of whom some are land-owners, some are farm labourers, and others are manual labourers. The village has no electricity and no proper roads.

There is no recorded evidence that sati is practised or has social sanction among Dalits in the Bundelkhand region. However, some residents of Satpurva claimed, without adducing any evidence, that there had indeed been a few incidents of sati in the region, but that they had gone unreported. Among the villagers, currently prevailing attitudes towards sati are regressive, to say the least. Many of them seemed to consider a woman committing sati worthy of deification. They appeared to be unaware that the practice of sati had been outlawed, and that even glorification of sati would invite punishment. The few who did know about the illegality of the practice seemed to place a premium on the supremacy of faith and custom over man-made laws.

On the afternoon of November 14, when this correspondent visited the cremation site, an advocate practising at the Mahoba district court had come there with his daughter to have a "darshan" of "sati". He had walked a considerable distance to the site, and seemed to consider that the journey was worth the trouble. Asked if he did not consider his action unlawful, he admitted that it was and added that he would not advise other widows to emulate Charan Shah. Even so, he added, "sati" had enormous powers, and there was nothing wrong in worshipping Charan Shah. "Sati enters only a few widows, and only a sati could help a widow embrace death in this fashion," the advocate said. He claimed that about 30,000 people had come to the site the day after Charan Shah ended her life, and that in later days many more would have come had the police not used force.

THE police have acted to prevent any attempt at glorification of Charan Shah's death and worship at the cremation site – a barren stretch of land, with only the ashen remnants of the pyre to mark the spot. A police outpost has been set up in Satpurva, and movement of vehicles to the village is restricted. The police warned that any politician who visited the area with the intention of glorifying the death would invite penal action.

On the afternoon of November 14, a few policemen were present at the site, evidently to prevent villagers from erecting any structures at the site or offering worship. Even so, there was a clutch of curious persons from nearby villages, who had come to have a "darshan" of the "sati sthal", even if only from a distance. They were promptly shooed away by the police.

Ravi Kumar said that media coverage of the aftermath of Charan Shah's death had been less than professional, and in some cases downright dishonest. In particular, he alleged that a team from a television channel had filmed themselves offering donations at the site and had reported that throngs of people were mak-

ing donations to "sati". Contrary to media reports, there are no shops selling coconuts and agarbatis. A month-long mela, called Charkari Mela or Goverdan Mela, had begun near Satpurva from November 9, and many people from nearby villages come to attend it. A few of them visited the cremation site out of curiosity.

IN Lucknow, the government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party responded to the incident with a sense of trepidation, fully aware that it could blow up and become a cause of major embarrassment. Chief Minister Ram Prakash Gupta told *Frontline* that Charan Shah's death was a tragic case of suicide. The Government, he said, could do little by itself to change the perception among a section of people that she had committed sati. Only by raising social awareness could such beliefs be changed, and that was not something the government could do merely through administrative measures, he said.

A section of officials in the State Home Ministry initially appeared to discount the report that Charan Shah's death was a case of suicide, not sati, and that none of the rituals associated with sati had been observed. They suggested that an independent inquiry into the incident be instituted by the State Home Department, but this idea appears to have been shelved.

THE semantic tug-of-war over whether Charan Shah's death was a case of suicide or sati ignores other social factors that underlie the tragedy. Charan Shah's decision to end her life was motivated by several factors: she had lost the eldest of her three sons some years ago; her second son, who was employed as a casual labourer in Delhi, had been away from the family for years; she had been nursing her ailing husband for years. To a poverty-stricken 55-year-old Dalit woman in an underdeveloped region, life as a widow in a patriarchal, gender-insensitive social structure had little to offer, and even death perhaps seemed a deliverance. Only by addressing everyday issues related to the status of women, such as disparities in access to health care, education, employment, share of familial property and so on, can a woman's sense of self-worth in society be enhanced to a level where she no longer feels compelled to resort to acts of self-destruction in the way Charan Shah did.

■ THE STATES

Community crimes

The recent killing of two teenagers highlight the fact that women, Dalits and members of backward castes have to pay a heavy cost when conservative social codes are violated in Haryana villages.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in Rohtak

IN an incident reminiscent of medieval times, two teenagers were done to death on the night of October 12 in Ismaila village, 23 km from Rohtak in Haryana. The victims, a boy from the Lohar (ironsmith) caste and a girl from the dominant Jat community, had apparently transgressed the rules set by conservative society in the matter of mutual interaction. The police found their unclothed bodies two days later in a canal near the village. Five persons suspected of involvement in the killing, including two uncles of the girl, were taken into custody.

Members of the boy's family told *Frontline* that they had been threatened by the girl's relatives and two others, allegedly hired killers, before the incident. They said that the girl's relatives claimed that the boy had had an illicit relationship with the girl and demanded that he be handed over to them. The family also denied the claim about an illicit relationship. Later in the night, the family, which is among the few backward caste families in the village, was attacked by a group of persons led by the girl's relatives. They assaulted at gunpoint members of the family, including the boy's mother, and dragged the boy out into the darkness. The cries of the family were ignored by the rest of the village, dominated by upper castes. The girl was taken away despite her mother's protests.

The Lohar family maintained that nothing wrong had happened between the youngsters. The two families stayed close to each other and the victims' mothers went to the fields together. Members of the boy's family said that the killing was intended to remind them of their place in society. The Jat girl had interacted with a lower-caste boy, and she too was seen as deserving the same fate.

The panchayat had not been convened to discuss the issue. It is alleged that the murder had the tacit approval of the police. The sarpanch, who is a law graduate, visited the girl's family after the incident but ignored the Lohar family. A member of the sarpanch's family told *Frontline* that "improper behaviour" had led to the action.

The boy's father is an armyman. His distraught uncle, who works in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, said: "It is unimaginable that the village can gang up against our family while we fight for the country." The family was prevented from filing a first information report, but the boy's father managed to lodge a complaint. Some residents of the village allegedly warned the family against trying to take on the upper castes.

A few elderly Jats, who are at the same economic level as the Lohars, expressed their sympathy. They said: "The killing was wrong; there was nothing going on between the two victims." However, they added that it would have been "legitimate if there had been an illicit relationship between the two". One elder narrated a previous incident in their village in which a Jat girl and a Brahmin boy were killed as it was "established" that they had illicit relations.

According to Vidyabehan, a teacher and an activist of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), the community's reaction to the incident was unsympathetic. Except for the Lohar family, most people thought that "this was bound to happen". Rather than becoming an issue of serious concern, the incident had generated salacious gossip. According to Vidyabehan, in most such cases the families arrived at a truce or the cases were withdrawn under pressure.

AT Sampla police station, a case of abduction and murder was filed against five persons. But the attitude of the police personnel was no different from that of the residents of the village. They said that this was bound to happen as the

two had an illicit relationship. "Everyone in the village knew it," said a police official.

Vidyabehan said that similar incidents had taken place some years ago in at least two other villages, Nindana and Kiloi, in the district. In both cases the local residents supported the crime. She said that it was socially reprehensible for pubescent boys and girls to interact with each other. Even harmless chatter could be misconstrued as a relationship and lead to dire consequences, she added.

Another cardinal norm that is not allowed to be broken related to village exogamy or the practice of marrying outside the village. Everyone lives by this rule, and all other relationships, if they do take place, are clandestine. If exposed, there is no escape from the wrath of the community. However, punishment for breaking the norm is used also to settle inter-caste or intra-caste scores. In the upper castes' view, this serves to keep the lower castes in their "place".

It is a matter of concern that there has been an increase in the frequency of such incidents. Barring some progressive sections, political parties and women's organisations such as AIDWA, other quarters have been silent on this. The political leadership in the State, which more or less comes from the dominant communities, is obviously loath to take up issue with members of their own caste groups.

Social and political analysts say that it is the breach of caste exogamy, the transient notions of family, caste and community honour and the low status of women that cumulatively cause such murderous behaviour. A young Dalit couple was killed in public view in Shimla village in Kaithal district in March. The couple had violated the village exogamy norm. The panchayat exiled the boy and when he dared to return, challenging the decision, the couple was lynched. Probably the only national party to react to the incident, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), called for a legal ban on panchayats that passed such lethal judgments.

In Luhari Ragho village in Hissar district, the panchayat exiled a youth for seven years on similar grounds. He was warned that if he returned before the term expired, he would be handed a more severe punishment. In Narnaund village, also in Hissar district, a young couple was caught while eloping and the boy was handed over to the police. Meanwhile, the panchayat pronounced a death sentence on the girl. When the news of her killing appeared, Left organisations put pressure on the police to arrest the culprits and in the process saved the boy's life.

In Throo village in Sonepat district, a couple went through a civil marriage ceremony outside their village. The panchayat did not recognise the marriage and it ostracised the families of the two. Two Punia (a Jat sub-caste) boys of Paintawas village, in Bhiwani district, married two Sangwan (also a Jat sub-caste) girls of Sonepat district. The Sangwan *khap* (a *khap* is a conglomeration of castes in a cluster of villages where the dominant sub-caste or *gothra* assumes the *khap* name and makes all the decisions) decided that this violated the rules of village exogamy and declared the marriages invalid. It took on the "responsibility" of getting the girls other, appropriate alliances. In Thigana village, in Jind district, the panchayat exiled three persons accused in a rape case and their families for 10 years. All these incidents show that the upper-caste dominated panchayats have a stranglehold hold on village society.

Prof. Suraj Bhan, who retired as Professor of History from Kurukshetra University in Haryana, said that the State was still in the grip of "medievalism". Despite the modernisation of agriculture and general technological advances, social attitudes had not changed. The attitude towards women had remained "medieval", he said. Reforms, if any, he added, had been revivalist in nature. Compared to other States, there were no sharp cleavages between Jats and non-Jats and therefore the upper castes operated as a clique. Community killings were an example of the clique mentality, he said.

Panchayats are dominated by landlords and their henchmen. Some of them are strong advocates of casteism. Even



In Ismaila village, Haryana, the mother (second from right) of the teenager who was killed along with a Jat girl.

though sections of the peasantry have access to education, the teaching practices in educational institutions has been unscientific and *status quo*ist. Although untouchability and a strong brahmanical culture are absent in Haryana's social structure, the canker of casteism is present in the polity, the bureaucracy and the law-enforcement agencies.

Depending on the social and economic status of the families involved, panchayats follow different standards to deal with inter-caste or intra-caste alliances. If a couple belongs to the same caste, an attempt is made to settle the conflict quietly. In the case of a relationship between an upper-caste girl and a lower-caste boy, the death penalty is usually awarded, but in the reverse case, the influence of the boy's family would count.

Secretary of the CPI(M) State unit, Inderjit Singh, said that rules about village exogamy were not even uniform across the State. He said that in Sirsa district and even in the village from which Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala hailed, village endogamy or even *khap* endogamy was not taboo. He said that the mix of consumerism and feudalism had left the value system skewed, with women and members of backward castes and Dalits facing the worst consequences. He found it disturbing that the murderous acts had social sanction and said that they were linked to the popular perception that the stigma of inter-caste and intra-caste relationships affected future alliances. He said that the majority of panchayat-sanctioned murders or community lynchings were not reported.

R.S. Hooda, a leading criminal lawyer in Rohtak, said that the other sections of society were united against Dalits. Of the murders in Ismaila village he said that the Lohars were a landless artisan community and although members of this caste were engaged in agricultural operations, they were considered "menial". He said that the forward castes did not tolerate cohabitation with other castes. More so, it was the *khap* brotherhood that was considered inviolable. He said that even when there were signs of the brotherhood weakening, political parties encouraged such feelings as they provided them with a captive vote-bank.

The Ismaila incident is probably not the last one in the list of inhuman community killings. There can be no real progress as long as medievalism raises its head from time to time. ■

Digging up the past

Painful memories from Punjab's decade of terror continue to haunt families and institutions in the State.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Chandigarh

SEVEN years ago, 22-year-old Harjit Singh was killed. Through all these years, inquiry after inquiry, investigation after investigation, have sought to lift the multiple veils that shrouded his death. Now, a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe appears to have brought Harjit Singh's story closer to resolution than ever in the past. But the CBI's findings give no solace to either the Punjab Police or human rights organisations. If anything, they necessitate a painful examination of events in Punjab through its decade of terror.

From the outset, every fact about the death of Harjit Singh was sharply contested. His family insisted that he was picked up on April 29, 1992, while the Punjab Police maintained that he was in fact arrested almost a fortnight later, on May 11, from a bus stand at Thatian village near Baba Bakala. After interrogation, police officials say, he was taken the next day to an arms dump he had identified. There, police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were ambushed by terrorists. Harjit Singh and two others were killed in the firing. Police officials claim that Harjit Singh, long suspected of terrorist activities, was armed when arrested.

Kashmir Singh, Harjit Singh's father, had a very different story to tell. His son, he believed, was alive, but in illegal police detention. Kashmir Singh moved a *habeas corpus* petition before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, claiming that his son was being held in Amritsar's Maal Mandi Joint Interrogation Centre (JIC). On October 15, 1992, Justice H.K. Sandhu held that there was enough evidence to investigate Kashmir Singh's claims, and appointed a Warrant Officer to search the Amritsar JIC for Harjit Singh. Two days later, Warrant Officer R.L. Bhatia, Kashmir Singh, his relative Anoop Singh and friend Shingara Singh reached the gates of the JIC.

What happened at the Amritsar JIC lies at the heart of subsequent events. A junior police official, by accident or design, refused to allow the Warrant Officer access to the JIC. A protracted argument followed, until a Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) finally read the court order Bhatia carried and allowed the group in. Meanwhile, Kashmir Singh and Anoop Singh claim to have seen Harjit Singh gesturing to them from one of the JIC's barred windows. But by the time they were allowed into the JIC cell from where they thought they had seen Harjit Singh, the room was empty.

Outraged by the delay in granting Warrant Officer Bhatia access to the JIC, the High Court ordered a Sessions Judge to investigate the affair. Chandigarh Sessions Judge Amar Dutt took over the inquiry in 1993, but proceedings dragged on until the summer of 1995, and ended with the case being referred to the CBI.

Meanwhile, Harjit Singh's supposed disappearance became the centrepiece of Amnesty International's campaign on Punjab. In 1993, the organisation used Harjit Singh's case to illustrate "the lives behind the lies" the Indian government had put out on Punjab. In 1995, it argued that Harjit Singh's disappearance was just one of "scores of disappearances following arrest by the police in Punjab".

Judge Dutt's inquiry report, when it finally became available, established few facts. Constrained by a lack of official cooperation, it concluded that neither the government nor the Punjab Police had "cared to bring on record evidence" to support their contention that Harjit Singh was dead. Nor, it said, had they "made any attempt to clear the doubt that has been raised by the statements of these witnesses that Harjit Singh may possibly be present in the premises of the Interrogation Centre." No post-mortem report on Harjit Singh was produced; nor were witnesses who identified his body brought before the Sessions Court.

Through the three years of Judge Dutt's inquiry, a succession of Harjit

Singh sightings were reported. Police officials reacted to most of the reports with disdain. One, where witnesses claimed to have seen Harjit Singh at the back of a moving police jeep at 200 metres, provoked outright derision. Officials pointed out that the Maal Mandi sighting was also dubious, given the distance of the window from the JIC gate and the darkness of the cell. Nonetheless, the campaign for Harjit Singh remained firm in its assertions. As late as February 1996, an Amnesty document claimed "it appears that Harjit Singh, who is married with two children, may still be alive".

Investigators of the CBI, who examined the case on Judge Dutt's orders, have discovered a third narrative. It lies outside the stories of the Punjab Police and Kashmir Singh, and in the politics of Thatian village at the height of Khalistan terrorism. The CBI has now asked the Punjab Government to sanction the prosecution of six police officials, Constables Daljeet Singh, Dharam Singh and Harbhajan Singh and Assistant Sub-Inspectors Ram Lubhaya, Surinder Singh and Amrik Singh, along with one villager, Mottu, for Harjit Singh's murder. But the CBI investigation's core is not its recommendation for prosecution, but its revelations on the background to the killing.

Harjit Singh's sister, the CBI investigation found, had a long-standing affair with Baljit Singh, a resident of the same village. Word about the affair had presumably reached Harjit Singh. On at least two occasions, Harjit Singh had bitter exchanges with Baljit Singh that led to street brawls. After one such brawl, Baljit Singh was killed by unidentified terrorists. He joined the thousands of civilians, mainly Sikh, killed by terrorists in the course of village feuds and local political disputes through the 10-year battle for Khalistan.

Baljit Singh's brother Daljit Singh 'Mottu' believed that Harjit Singh was responsible for the murder. He perhaps had some reason to do so. The young Harjit Singh had secured a job in the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) during the years of violence. The PSEB, for much of the period, had been made captive by the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTFK) and put to work to buy legitimacy for the terrorist organisation. Slips signed by BTFK boss G.S. Manochahal led to hundreds of jobs being handed out at gunpoint. As an occasional police informer, Daljit Singh probably had a good idea of Harjit Singh's ideological leanings and his local BTFK contacts.

Death is not an infrequent outcome of village romance in Punjab. In normal circumstances, a case would have been filed and Harjit Singh tried for murder. But Punjab in 1992 was not normal. The courts, which are now energetic in the pursuit of human rights violations, had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. Where terrorism-related offences were concerned, the chance of securing a fair trial, let alone a conviction, were minimal. Police officials working overtime fighting terrorism, in any case, had no time to deal with village murders. But Daljit Singh wanted revenge for his brother's death, and the local police owed him a favour or two.

The CBI has found that Harjit Singh was shot dead on May 12, 1992, just as the Punjab Police had long claimed he was. However, there was no encounter. The PSEB employee was taken to a deserted field and shot dead in cold blood. Sources in the CBI told *Frontline* that one police official had confessed during interrogation that he was ordered to fudge records on the encounter-that-wasn't. Whether the station official will repeat his account when his six colleagues are tried remains to be seen, but on the basis of the evidence made available by the CBI, it appears probable that the Punjab government will grant the legally mandatory permission to prosecute.

In important senses, the real subject of the prosecutions will not be Harjit Singh's murder, but the truth about Punjab. Most right-thinking people will be appalled, in some ways rightly, that six police officials took it upon themselves to execute summarily a murder suspect. And many will, again rightly, conclude that this kind of instant justice was not rare in Punjab between 1982 and 1992. These twin facts, irreconcilable with core liberal belief, have underpinned the judicial and civil rights inquisition directed at the Punjab Police after the restoration of peace in 1993. The prosecution of Harjit Singh's killers will join the ranks of hundreds of cases faced by Punjab Police personnel.

BUT this case, like many others, raises disquieting questions. If the CBI version is true, the six indicted officers were in some senses just doing their job. In a context where the entire apparatus of state had disappeared, leaving only the police fighting desperately to secure the peace, Assistant Sub-Inspectors Lubhaya and Surinder Singh were trying to deliver justice to the victim of a crime as best as they could. Both they and Daljit Singh assumed there was no other way to punish Baljit Singh's killers.

Figures who faced the Khalistan assault have always understood the problems liberal faith encounters when the order it rests on breaks down. Communist Party of India (Marxist) workers Balwinder Singh Sandhu, his wife Jagdish Kaur Sandhu, his brother Ranjit Singh Sandhu, and Ranjit Singh's wife Balraj Kaur Sandhu held off armed attacks on their home, using automatic rifles and a light machine gun illegally supplied to them by the then SSP, Ajit Singh Sandhu. The four Bikhiwind comrades were awarded the Shaurya Chakra, India's highest civilian gallantry honour, becoming the sole family to have multiple recipients of the award.

When SSP Ajit Singh Sandhu committed suicide last year, as a result of a series of human rights cases he believed degraded his honour, the comrades were among the few who spoke out in his defence. "People can say what they like," Balwinder Singh told *Frontline* last September, "but those times will never be understood by anyone who did not live in rural Punjab then." "Perhaps the police killed a few innocent people, but as far as I'm concerned, that's a sad but acceptable price. It was a war, and it had to be fought. There was no government, no courts, no judges then. There were no choices."

The CBI's findings speak of the pain of an old man; a pain which led him to imagine seeing his dead son time and time again. If correct, they also speak of the cynicism of people who did not see Harjit Singh, because they could not have seen him, but authored the fiction that he was alive, for ideological ends. Anoop Singh, for example, claimed that the police attempted to kidnap him on November 6, 1992 in an effort to silence his claims to have seen Harjit Singh alive. Harjit Singh was not alive then, and the attack, if it took place, must have been provoked by anger against Anoop Singh's evident lies. These and other lies, official and private, drove the Harjit Singh affair from its outset to its end.

In a court of law, the six indicted police officials, if they are indeed guilty, may have to tell another lie. They will almost certainly plead innocent and insist that Harjit Singh was indeed killed in an encounter. They may do so because he in fact did. They may also do so, sadly, because the legal system offers no room for the truth about Punjab's 10-year carnage to be told. ■

Catching up with corruption

After a prolonged legal battle, a Special Court in Kerala awards five years' rigorous imprisonment to a former Minister in a corruption case.

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
in Thiruvananthapuram

THE long arm of the law appears to have finally caught up with R. Balakrishna Pillai, Kerala's former Electricity Minister. On November 10, delivering its verdict in a corruption case related to the Idamalayar hydel project, a Special Court sentenced him to five years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.10,000. Balakrishna Pillai and two others, K. Ramabhadran Nair, former Chairman of the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), and P.K. Sajeev, former Member of the KSEB's consultative committee, who received similar sentences, got a reprieve the following day as the High Court, admitting an appeal, suspended the sentence for six months and granted them bail. All the three avoided spending a day in prison on medical grounds.

Given the time it took for the case to reach the trial stage – during which Balakrishna Pillai had been in and out of ministerial office, and was similarly on bail in another corruption case – it is a moot point where its significance lies, in that a case involving such a high-profile politician took so long to reach the present phase or in that it reached this phase at all.

In the 10 years since a judicial inquiry found Balakrishna Pillai and some others guilty of abuse of power in the award of contracts for the project, investigations by a special police team and subsequent legal proceedings had taken the much-too-familiar road: the prosecution trying to sabotage the case; prosecutors and judges resigning or being replaced; appeals to the higher courts, including the Supreme Court, at every turn; and controversial government decision at one stage to drop the case in its entirety with the sanction of the High Court, on the basis of the argument that it was politically motivated. It was the single-minded pursuit of Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and former leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly (now convener of the ruling Left Democratic Front) V.S. Achuthanandan, who went on appeal in the Supreme Court, that resulted in the resurrection of the case in the High Court. The final verdict is yet to be delivered as Balakrishna Pillai and others have gone on appeal, but the Special Court order has brought the case into focus.

Several high-profile politicians (coincidentally, belonging to the Congress(I) and its allies) of the State are on trial for corruption and other serious offences. The twists and turns in the investigation and the unending trials that eventually push such cases out of public memory have almost gained acceptance as a fact of life. Idamalayar could, however, become an exception. In a way it justifies Balakrishna Pillai's observation that his political opponents were vindictive in pursuing the case. He is the leader of one faction of the Kerala Congress.



JOHNY THOMAS

R. Balakrishna Pillai, former Minister, being brought out of the court after he fainted following the delivery of the verdict.

THE multi-purpose Idamalayar project, located about 80 km from Kochi on the Idamalayar river, a tributary of the Periyar, was conceived in 1966 to generate 75 MW of electricity, to irrigate paddy crops in Ernakulam and Idukki districts and to prevent salt water intrusion into the Periyar. The Mumbai-based Hindustan Construction Company was the original contractor for the project, the cost of which was then estimated at Rs.23.40 crores. Later, in a controversial decision, the KSEB awarded the contract for the tunnel and surge shaft of the dam to K.P. Paulose, a co-accused. The project was completed in 1986, and by March 1989 Rs.90 crores had been spent on it.

Idamalayar began to arouse controversy in July 1985 when, during a trial run, cracks and leaks were detected in the tunnel and the surge shaft. Suspicions were raised about the quality of construction and fears were expressed about possible corruption in the execution of the project. Balakrishna Pillai, who was a Minister in the United Democratic Front (UDF) Government between 1982 and 1986 when the contracts were awarded, was out of office when the leaks were detected.

Balakrishna Pillai's party was a constituent of the ruling UDF when the Assembly's Public Undertakings Committee visited Idamalayar and recommended a judicial inquiry. Following similar demands from Opposition parties, Chief Minister K. Karunakaran appointed in 1986 a commission of inquiry

headed by Justice K. Sukumaran. The commission submitted its report to the E.K. Nayanar-led LDF government in June 1988. The report named Balakrishna Pillai and several others, including another former KSEB Chairman G. Ganesha Pillai and former Secretary, Irrigation and Power, G. Gopalakrishna Pillai, liable for acts of abuse of power.

The Government accepted the recommendations of the commission and constituted a special police team for further investigations. Based on the police report, the LDF Government constituted a Special Court in 1991 to try the case. What followed was a long process of hedging the due process. Judges of the Special Court were replaced three times and the public prosecutors eight times. After the 1991 Assembly elections, when the UDF returned to power with Karunakaran as Chief Minister, Balakrishna Pillai was once again made Minister (this time incharge of Transport). He appealed to the Supreme Court against the validity of the Justice Sukumaran Report. The apex court rejected the plea.



JOHNY THOMAS

P.K. Sajeev, former Member of the Consultative Committee of the KSEB, being helped out of the court premises following the verdict.

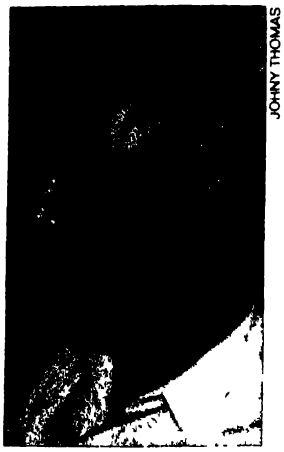
In August 1992, by which time Gopalakrishna Pillai became Additional Chief Secretary, the Karunakaran Government decided to drop the prosecution charges against him, claiming that the case was politically motivated and hence demoralising to the officials who were implicated. When this argument was rejected by the Special Court, the State Government went in appeal to the High Court. Justice Chettur Sankaran Nair allowed the prosecution to drop the charges against Gopalakrishna Pillai, observing that the Government could decide on dropping charges against the other accused as well. Following this, the UDF Government decided to withdraw the entire case.

It was at this stage that Achuthanandan petitioned the apex court. The Supreme Court criticised the High Court decision and ordered the Special Court to continue its proceedings.

Although resurrected, the trial once again hit snags when Balakrishna Pillai moved the High Court on the plea that the Governor's sanction was necessary to prosecute a Minister. His appeal was rejected. Balakrishna Pillai resigned when the Special Court found him and 11 others *prima facie* guilty of charges. When the final proceedings began in the Special Court in February 1996, the accused once again approached the High Court unsuccessfully. The request this time was that the case be dropped because of the delay in the proceedings.

Special Judge R. Natarajan, in his verdict given on November 10, said that there was enough evidence to prove that Balakrishna Pillai, Sajeev and Ramabhadran Nair had entered into a criminal conspiracy with Paulose, who had been awarded the contract for the construction of the surge shaft and the tunnel. The two contracts were awarded on the basis of such a conspiracy, because of which the KSEB accepted the special conditions set by the contractor, although they were detrimental to its interests, the judgment said.

The court observed: "A Minister who had the mandate of the people to rule the State had indulged in a criminal conspiracy with the contractors to make illegal profit and that too at the expense of the KSEB."



JOHNY THOMAS

K. Ramabhadran Nair, former KSEB Chairman.

In another damning observation against Balakrishna Pillai, the court said: "As an elected representative of the people, everyone had expected that he would prevent any act of malfeasance committed by an officer of the Board. But this person had colluded with the officers and influenced some of them for personal gain, causing loss to the Board and to the people of the State." Pointing out that the offence committed was of a very serious nature, the court said that such offences committed by persons in authority had to be dealt with seriously

Seven other accused, including Gopalakrishna Pillai and Ganesha Pillai, were acquitted. Paulose and another accused died during the pendency of the case.

Achuthanandan described the Special Court verdict as "fairly satisfactory, despite the long delay and given the evidence that was available." Balakrishna Pillai described it as the consequence of political vindictiveness. He said: "It will not reduce people's support for me... If the CPI(M) is trying to confine me in jail, I will fight them from jail."

Balakrishna Pillai said that he had merely taken the initiative to accelerate the pace of a pending project. He said that the KSEB made a profit of over Rs.500 crores through the project in the last 15 years. If the charges of corruption and poor construction were true, could the project have run so well, he asked.

The Idamalayar case is the second corruption case involving Balakrishna Pillai. In 1996, the Inquiry Commissioner and Special Judge, Thiruvananthapuram, found him guilty of corruption in the "Graphite case". The case pertains to the sale of electricity to Graphite India Ltd, a private company in Karnataka, without the knowledge of the State Government or the KSEB between 1982 and 1987. Balakrishna Pillai was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year and a fine. He is now on bail in that case. ■

Emerging patterns

The four-part analysis of the 1999 Lok Sabha election results, undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi, in association with a network of scholars from around the country, and co-sponsored by *Frontline*, draws to a close with this instalment that consists of an examination of the verdict in the States of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa. The earlier instalments included a three-part examination of the all-India patterns of the verdict and a closer examination of the verdict in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The State-wise interpretation combines analysis of the official election results with the findings from a nation-wide post-poll survey, National Election Study (NES) 1999. In attempting to unravel what lies behind the results in these States, the analysis focusses on regional variations and the voting behaviour among different social groups. The findings are put in context with reference to the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.

The NES is based on a nationally representative, randomly selected sample, and is part of a larger series of surveys examining the Indian electorate that stretches back to 1967. (For a more detailed methodological note on how the survey was conducted, see part two of the analysis in *Frontline*, November 19.)

While the sample is representative for the country as a whole, it is not necessarily representative for each of the States analysed here. The sample size for each State is mentioned in each article. Wherever the sample size of a particular group is statistically small, the particular row has been marked with an asterisk, and the findings treated with caution. Similarly, wherever the survey has over-represented or under-represented the vote-share for the leading parties, the fact has been mentioned. However, these discrepancies do not seriously affect the broad conclusions since the errors tend to be evenly distributed across respondents from different social backgrounds.

Sharp polarisation in Bihar

CSDS Team

IN a straight contest in Bihar, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ally, the Janata Dal (U), won 41 of the 54 Lok Sabha seats and polled 43.8 per cent of the votes, while the Rashtriya Janata Dal-Congress(I) combine won 11 seats and polled 37.1 per cent of the votes. If the number of seats won is the only indicator of success, then it can be assumed that the BJP-JD(U) combine registered a massive victory in a one-sided contest. But the margins of victory present a picture of a somewhat keen contest. The difference in the vote-shares of the two alliances is close to 7 percentage points; the results in 22 constituencies were decided by margins less than a 5 per cent of the votes polled. In 1998, the victory margin was narrow only in 17 constituencies. In fact, of the last three elections to the Lok Sabha, the recent round was the most keenly contested in Bihar.

Compared to its performance in 1998, the RJD-Congress(I) alliance suffered a major loss. However, in terms of votes the RJD, with 28.3 per cent of the popular vote, remains the single largest party in the State. In fact, it managed to increase its vote share by a little under two percentage points.

The success of the alliance cannot be credited primarily to the rise of the BJP in the State. Although the BJP increased its seats tally by three, it lost one percentage point in terms of vote share. This, of course, might be owing to the fact that it contested fewer seats. To a greater extent, the success of the alliance can be attributed to the merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal with the Janata Dal (U) and the formidable alliance worked out by the BJP, the JD(U) and the Bihar People's Party (BPP). This led to a consolidation of anti-Laloo Prasad Yadav votes across the State. Although the JD(U)'s vote-share fell by nearly four percentage points (considering the combined vote for the Samata Party and the undivided Janata Dal in 1998), the constituents of the alliance managed to increase their joint tally by seven seats.

The regional patterns show that although there were no major gains or losses for the two alliances in South and Central Bihar, there was a reversal of fortunes in North Bihar, which accounts for the largest number of seats – 26. In 1998 the RJD-Congress(I) combine won 16 of the 22 seats it won in Bihar. This time the alliance was practically decimated. Despite an increase of 3.8 percentage points in its vote-share, its seat tally dropped sharply to four. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) won the Bhagalpur seat,

Caste and voting: a sharp polarisation in Bihar

(percentage agreed)

Caste	RJD-Cong(I)	BJP-JD(U)
Rajput	8	92
Other upper caste	13	86
Kurmi-Koeri	19	79
Yadav	79	20
Lower OBC	27	55
Dalit	49	43
Muslim	79	19

Sample size in Bihar is 716.

Education and voting: An edge for BJP among all sections

(percentage agreed)

Education	RJD-Cong(I)	BJP-JD(U)
Matric and above	42	54
Middle	41	53
Illiterate	42	49

BJP more popular among rich than poor

Class	RJD-Cong(I)	BJP-JD(U)
High	37	57
Middle	44	52
Low	40	51
Very low	41	48

with support from the RJD and the Congress(I). All the gains that the BJP-JD(U) made in the State came from this region.

The merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal resulted in a shift in the voting pattern of different communities in Bihar. The new alliance, however, failed to transfer *en masse*, the support base of the Janata Dal to the BJP-JD(U) combine. The decrease in the number of votes polled by the BJP-JD(U)

The merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal resulted in a shift in the voting pattern of different communities in Bihar... Caste is still the most important political cleavage factor in Bihar.

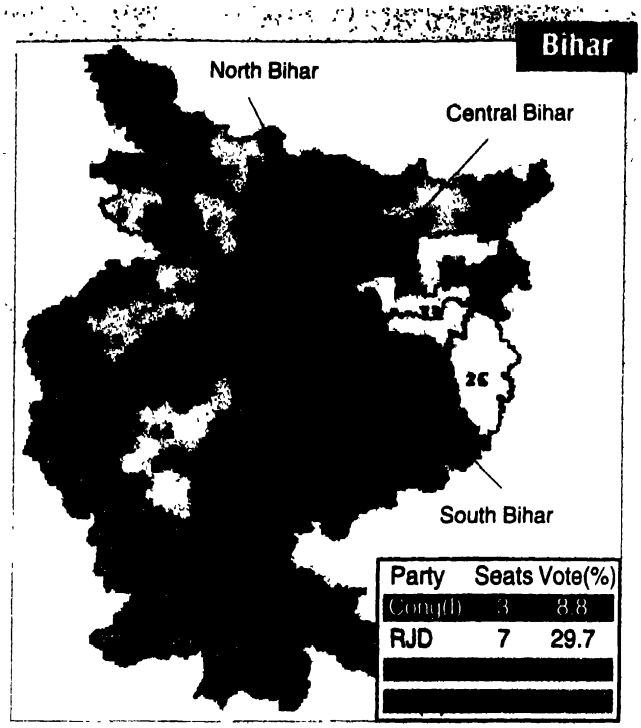
compared to the performance of the BJP-Samata Party-Janata Dal in 1998 bears testimony to this.

The community-wise table makes it clear that Rajputs, other upper castes and Kurmis and Keoris strongly supported the BJP-JD(U) combine. By contrast, Yadavs and Muslims were clearly favoured the RJD-Congress(I) alliance.

The BJP-JD(U) combine retained its strong support base among Rajputs, which was evident in the 1998 elections, and managed to transfer to itself the votes of the other upper castes that supported the Janata Dal. The inclusion of the Janata Dal in the alliance also consolidated votes of Other Backward Classes such as Kurmis and Koeris. These groups had supported the BJP-Samata Party in 1998 and so it is not surprising that the merger helped consolidate their support bases.

The lower sections of society had generally stayed away from the BJP, and it was uncertain whether Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and those Yadavs who had voted for the Janata Dal in 1998 would shift their allegiance to the BJP-led alliance. The CSDS survey answers some of these questions. In 1998, 25 per cent of Muslims had voted for the Janata Dal, whereas the BJP-Samata Party combine gained virtually no Muslim support. The transfer of Muslim votes has taken place; from the fact that the BJP-JD(U) has secured 19 per cent of the Muslim vote, it is clear that the Janata Dal was able to take most of its Muslim vote with it. Similarly, the JD(U) was able to transfer its Dalit vote base to the alliance. Ram Vilas Paswan managed to carry along with him a large percentage of the Dalit vote to the new alliance.

However, it was a different story with Yadavs. In 1998, the Janata Dal headed by Sharad Yadav won 25 per cent of the Yadav vote. It was widely expected that the merger and the formation of the alliance would lead to a shift of Yadav support to the



No.	Name	Winner
1.	Bagaha(SC)	JD(U)
2.	Bettiah	BJP
3.	Motihari	BJP
4.	Gopalganj	JD(U)
5.	Siwan	RJD
6.	Maharaganj	JD(U)
7.	Chapra	BJP
8.	Hajipur(SC)	JD(U)
9.	Vaishali	RJD
10.	Muzaffarpur	JD(U)
11.	Sitamarhi	JD(U)
12.	Sheohar	RJD
13.	Madhubani	BJP
14.	Jhanjharpur	JD(U)
15.	Darbhanga	BJP
16.	Rosera(SC)	JD(U)
17.	Samastipur	JD(U)
18.	Barh	JD(U)
19.	Balia	JD(U)
20.	Saharsa	JD(U)
21.	Madhepura	(JD(U)
22.	Araria(SC)	RJD
23.	Kishanganj	BJP
24.	Purnea	Not held
25.	Katihar	BJP
26.	Rajmahal(ST)	Not held
27.	Dumka(ST)	BJP

No.	Name	Winner
28.	Gooda	BJP
29.	Banka	JD(U)
30.	Bhagalpur	Not held
31.	Khagaria	Not Held
32.	Monghyr	JD(U)
33.	Begusarai	Cong(I)
34.	Nalanda	JD(U)
35.	Patna	BJP
36.	Arrah	RJD
37.	Buxar	BJP
38.	Sasaram(SC)	BJP
39.	Bikramganj	RJD
40.	Aurangabad	Cong(I)
41.	Jehanabad	JD(U)
42.	Nawada(SC)	BJP
43.	Gaya(SC)	BJP
44.	Chatra	RJD
45.	Kodarma	Cong(I)
46.	Giridih	BJP
47.	Dhanbad	BJP
48.	Hazaribagh	BJP
49.	Ranchi	BJP
50.	Jamshedpur	BJP
51.	Singhbhum(ST)	BJP
52.	Khunti(ST)	BJP
53.	Lohardaga(ST)	BJP
54.	Palamau(SC)	BJP

[illegible] Lok Sabha elections, 1999

Region	Seats	Turnout	Change over 1998	RJD-Cong(I) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP+JD(U) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Left Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	JMM Vote share	Swing
North	24	55.6	-0.6	4	-12	35.7	+3.8	20	+11	42.9	-3.6	1	+1	5.7	+0.9	0.02	+0.0
South	14	46.4	+1.6	3	+1	31.3	+0.4	11	-1	45.8	-2.7	0	0	3.7	-0.9	9.2	-1.3
Jharkhand	14	52.5	-2.5	4	—	28.1	-2.9	10	—	44.1	-2.6	0	0	8.9	-0.1	0	0
Total	54	52.0	-1.1	11	+11	32.1	+3.3	41	+10	43.8	-4.7	1	+1	6.1	+2.7	+2.0	-0.5

BJP-JD(U) combine However it was the RJD alliance that benefited from a greater consolidation of Yadav votes the support of the community for the RJD led alliance rose from 66 per cent in 1998 to 79 per cent

The class profile in Bihar for the two main formations is not as striking as it was in the early 1990s Although the BJP-JD(U) combine is the most popular among the upper class it draws considerable support from the lower classes as well In fact it is no longer true that the RJD Congress(I) enjoys greater support among lower class voters Laloo Prasad Yadav s early success came from the fact that he was able to consolidate the lower castes/ lower classes votes The survey found that in this round of elections, the RJD chief's monopoly over the votes of the poorest sections of society was broken

The voting pattern of the educated sections reveals a similar trend In each education-wise stratum, the BJP-JD(U) enjoyed greater support than the RJD-Congress(I) The BJP-JD(U) received proportionately more support among educated voters than uneducated voters

The survey findings thus show a sharper contrast in the voting patterns of different castes than of different classes and educational strata Caste is still the most important political cleavage factor in Bihar

With the Assembly elections due in March next, the Lok Sabha results may provide a useful indicator of the shape of things to come The data released by the Election Commission have made it possible to speculate on what the overall tally of seats in the Assembly would be Had the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections been held simultaneously, and the electorate voted in the same manner for each, then the BJP-JD(U) combine would have won a convincing majority, 177 of the 279 seats for which data are available, and the RJD-Congress(I) would have won 81 It remains to be seen whether Laloo Prasad Yadav, one of the most adroit political entrepreneurs Indian politics has seen, can stem the tide for the RJD ■

West Bengal: Limited losses for the Left

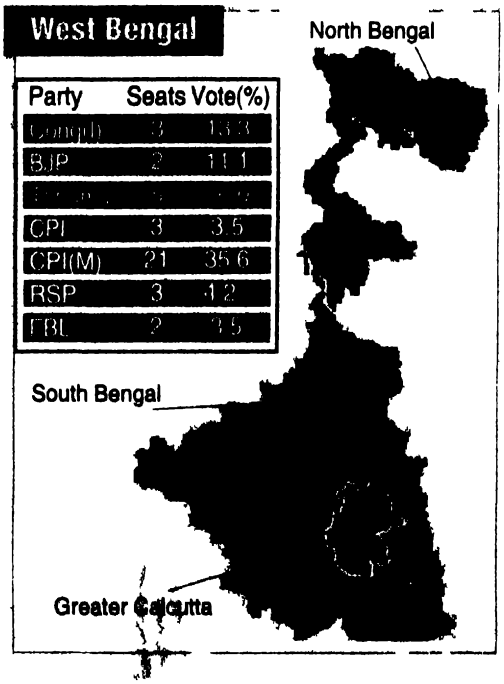
CSDS Team

IN the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 the Left Front in West Bengal received a jolt when the newly formed Trinamul Congress displaced the Congress(I) as its main rival and picked up seven seats Many observers read it as the beginning of the end of the Left Front s uninterrupted dominance of West Bengal politics since 1977 The electoral battle this year was widely perceived as a major trial of strength for both the parties which would provide enough hints about the outcome of the State Assembly elections, which are due in 2001

A quick glance at the results suggests that the Left Front has not lost, as much as it would have lost had the 1998 trends continued To be sure, it lost four seats this time It is for the first time since 1984 that the Left Front has conceded as many as 13 seats to its opponents Far from being able to snatch from the BJP the only seat it won in 1998, the Left Front conceded another seat Yet, what looked like a surge of the Trinamul-BJP combine seems to have slowed down In terms of vote share, the Left Front's losses were negligible this time, though at 47 per cent it stood much lower than the Left Front's vote share in the 1989 and 1991 elections The Trinamul-BJP combine increased its vote share only by a little over two percentage points

Perhaps the key aspect of the verdict is the ability of the Congress(I) to survive, despite having been reduced to the third place in the 1998 elections In India's first-past-the post electoral system, such results normally cause a political party to take a nosedive in subsequent elections But the Congress(I) lost only two percentage points in its vote share In fact, it was even able to consolidate its votes and win two seats in addition to Malda, which it retained Clearly, although the overall vote share of the Left Front in the latest round was far below its peak, the Trinamul-BJP combine could not consolidate any anti-Left votes in its favour

The Congress(I) did retain not only its share of about a quarter of the votes in north Bengal, but a substantial share of



No.	Name	Winner	No.	Name	Winner
1.	Cooch Behar(SC)	FBL	22.	Calcutta North East	Trinamul
2.	Alipurduars(ST)	RSP	23.	Calcutta South	Trinamul
3.	Jalpaiguri	CPI(M)	24.	Howrah	CPI(M)
4.	Darjeeling	CPI(M)	25.	Uluberia	CPI(M)
5.	Raiganj	Cong(I)	26.	Serampore	Trinamul
6.	Balurghat(SC)	RSP	27.	Hooghly	CPI(M)
7.	Malda	Cong(I)	28.	Arambagh	CPI(M)
8.	Jangipur	CPI(M)	29.	Panskura	CPI
9.	Murshidabad	CPI(M)	30.	Tamluk	CPI(M)
10.	Berhampore	Cong(I)	31.	Contai	Trinamul
11	Krishnagar	BJP	32.	Midnapore	CPI
12.	Nabadwip(SC)	Trinamul	33.	Jhargram(ST)	CPI(M)
13.	Barasat	Trinamul	34.	Purulia	FBL
14.	Basirhat	CPI	35.	Bankura	CPI(M)
15.	Joynagar(SC)	RSP	36.	Vishnupur(SC)	CPI(M)
16.	Mathurapur(SC)	CPI(M)	37.	Durgapur(SC)	CPI(M)
17	Diamond Harbour	CPI(M)	38.	Asansol	CPI(M)
18	Jadavpur	Trinamul	39.	Burdwan	CPI(M)
19	Barrackpore	CPI(M)	40.	Katwa	CPI(M)
20	Dum Dum	BJP	41	Bolpur	CPI(M)
21.	Calcutta North West	Trinamul	42.	Birbhum(SC)	CPI(M)

Trinamul gains both from the Left and the Congress(I)

1998	Party voted in Lok Sabha 1999		
	Cong(I)	BJP+	Left Front
Congress(I)	56	24	15
BJP+	24	94	4
JD(S)	15	10	67

The sample size for West Bengal is 795

Class-wise voting pattern in West Bengal

	BJP-Trinamul	Left Front	Cong(I)
High	37	49	13
Middle	48	38	13
Low	44	44	10
Very Low	35	55	7

Community and vote in West Bengal

	BJP-Trinamul	Left Front	Cong(I)
Brahmin	48	37	12
Baidya	41	43	15
Vaishya	54	33	13
Other upper caste	47	47	6
OBC	46	48	4
Namasudras	45	44	7
Other SC	28	63	8
Muslim	23	62	13

Left retains an edge among women voters

	BJP-Trinamul	Left Front	Cong(I)
Male	42	47	9
Female	38	51	10

Left support is highest among the middle aged

	BJP-Trinamul	Left Front	Cong(I)
Up to 25 yrs	43	47	10
26 to 35 yrs	42	48	7
36 to 45 yrs	34	52	12
46 to 55 yrs	37	49	15
Above 55 yrs	45	49	6

Left Front loses more urban voters than rural

	BJP-Trinamul	Left Front	Cong(I)
Rural	39	50	10
Urban	50	38	12

The Left Front retained its own votes to a slightly smaller extent compared to the BJP but made up for the loss by snatching some Congress(I) votes... The Congress(I) lost more to the Trinamul Congress than to the Left Front.

the votes in Greater Calcutta, much to the chagrin of the Trinamul-BJP alliance Although Mamata Banerjee and her allies maintained their dominance of the urban cluster in Greater Calcutta, they lost a seat here to the Left Front The best news for the Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance is that it has begun to make inroads into the rural hinterland of south Bengal, hitherto an impregnable fortress of the Left Front The alliance added three percentage points of votes and three seats to its tally in this region

The flow of votes as revealed by the CSDS survey shows that the Trinamul-BJP combine retained the votes that it had polled last year. It also gained 24 per cent of the Congress(I) votes of last time. The Left Front retained its own votes to a slightly smaller extent compared to the BJP but made up for the loss by snatching some Congress(I) votes. On balance, the Congress(I) lost more to the Trinamul Congress than to the Left Front Had the exodus to the Trinamul Congress been on a larger scale, the Left Front could have been in real trouble, and the contest would have taken on a clearer bipolar character

The electoral support base of the Left Front has a pro-lower-class profile, but not quite as sharply as in Kerala Although it does best among the lowest section of society, it does very well among the highest too The Congress(I) in West Bengal does better among the well-off than the poor, which is contrary to its usual profile elsewhere in the country The Trinamul Congress-BJP does best among the middle categories, thanks to the respective profiles of the two parties cancelling each other out to a large extent. The Trinamul Congress has a slight lower-class profile (it polled 35 per cent among this section) whereas the BJP performs best among the better-off sections of the population (it received 26 per cent of the votes from the middle')

Although caste-based polarisation is not as sharp in West Bengal as it is elsewhere in the country, caste still makes a difference Compared to 1998, the Congress(I) lost support among the upper castes and Muslims and yet suffered virtually no loss of support among the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) The Left Front lost out noticeably only among the Vaishyas, whose support for it fell by 10 percentage points In both these cases the beneficiary was the Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance The Trinamul Congress) was successful in mobilising support across caste and community lines Compared to 1998, its vote share among Kayasthas (an upper caste), Namasudras (a Schedule Caste), and Muslims rose by 12 9 and 15 percentage points respectively

The Left Front is most popular among middle aged voters, the formative moment in whose political consciousness was when the Left Front made its triumphant entry into State power 20 years ago

Although the Left Front is still the party of choice for rural voters, of whom 50 per cent voted for it, it has been displaced by the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine as the most popular party in the urban areas In 1998, the Left Front enjoyed a 15-percentage-point lead in vote share over the Trinamul Congress-BJP in the case of urban voters In 1999 it suffered a 12-percentage-point deficit ■

Region wise analysis of Lok Sabha elections 1999

Region	Seats	Turn-out 1999	Change over 1998	Left Front				Trinamul +BJP				Congress(I)			
				Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
North Bengal	7	72.3	-4.5	5	-1	44 8	-0 1	0	0	28 5	+4 5	2	+1	23 9	+0.3
Greater Calcutta	11	73.1	-4 5	5	+1	42.8	+1.2	6	-1	46.1	+0.2	0	0	9 8	-1 9
South Bengal	24	78.7	-3.9	19	-4	49 1	-0.8	4	+3	35.5	+3 1	1	+1	12.0	-2 6
Total	42	75.8	-4.2	29	-4	46.7	-0.1	10	+2	37.2	+2.6	3	+2	13.3	-1.9

Clear lines of cleavage in Gujarat

CSDS Team

EVEN as several incumbent State governments were taken to task by the voters in the latest round of elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party survived the anti-incumbency factor in Gujarat. It won 20 seats, improving on its 1998 tally by one seat. Congress (I) won six seats, one fewer than its 1998 tally.

There was some consolation for the Congress (I) because its vote share, relative to 1998, increased by nine percentage points. As the BJP too improved its vote share – by 4.2 percentage points – the Congress (I)'s gains did not translate into seats. The deciding factor was that the BJP had big margins to defend, which the Congress (I) did not have to do.

Gujarat was one of the few States where the Congress (I) was on a stronger footing since 1998 because Shankarsinh Vaghela, who has a significant political base in the State, had joined its fold. This paid dividends in the north, where the Congress (I) captured three seats and increased its vote share by 16 percentage points.

The sharp decline in voter turnout since 1998 may have played an important role in determining the outcome. The low turnout may have favoured the BJP.

The BJP's ascendancy in Gujarat politics occurred in the 1980s, when the party rode on successive waves of communal violence. It appears that these scars still remains. Deep social cleavages have manifested themselves as the support bases of the two parties. As expected, the BJP fares well among the upper castes and Patidars, the Chief Minister's caste, and also among the more backward sections of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). Conversely, the Congress (I) has done well among the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. The Vaghela factor worked with the peasants among the OBCs.

The divisions are evident even more strikingly with respect to class: a considerable degree of class polarisation was evident in the elections.

Gujarat thus seems to be one State where the line of partisan conflict maps the cleavage lines of social and economic conflict very closely. ■

Sharp caste polarisation in Gujarat...

	Cong(I)	BJP
Upper caste Hindu	27	73
Patidar	7	89
Peasant OBC	71	29
Lower OBC	33	67
SC	62	38
ST	68	32
Muslim	86	14

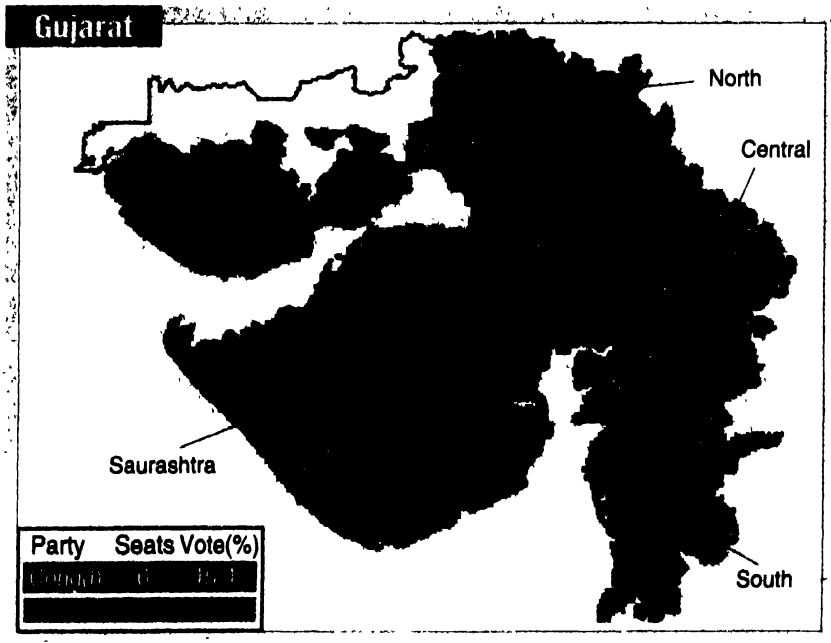
NB: The sample size for Gujarat is 482 The sample over-estimated the vote share for Congress and underestimated the vote share for the BJP.

.....and even sharper class polarisation

	Cong(I)	BJP
Very High	15	85
High	30	69
Middle	37	63
Low	56	43
Very low	76	23

Gujarat: Region-wise analysis, Lok Sabha elections, 1999

Region	Seats	Turnout 1999	Change over 1998	Congress(I) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
Saurashtra	9	43.6	-14.6	1	+1	44.2	+12.2	8	-1	54.3	+0.7
North	7	50.4	-11.5	4	+3	49.1	+16.0	3	-3	49.5	+0.4
Central	7	48.7	-11.9	1	-4	45.4	+1.1	6	+4	51.4	+12.4
South	3	44.2	-9.7	0	-1	39.6	+0.7	3	+1	56.1	+5.8
Total	26	47.0	-12.3	6	-1	45.4	+9.0	20	+1	52.5	+4.2



No.	Name	Winner	No.	Name	Winner
1.	Kutch	BJP	14.	Banaskantha	Cong(I)
2.	Surendranagar	Cong(I)	15.	Sabarkantha	Cong(I)
3.	Jamnagar	BJP	16.	Kapadvanj	Cong(I)
4.	Rajkot	BJP	17.	Dohad(ST)	BJP
5.	Porbandar	BJP	18.	Godhra	BJP
6.	Junagadh	BJP	19.	Kaira	Cong(I)
7.	Amreli	BJP	20.	Anand	BJP
8.	Bhavnagar	BJP	21.	Chhota Udaipur(ST)	BJP
9.	Dhandhuka(SC)	BJP	22.	Baroda	BJP
10.	Ahmedabad	BJP	23.	Broach	BJP
11.	Gandhinagar	BJP	24.	Surat	BJP
12.	Mehsana	Cong(I)	25.	Mandvi(ST)	BJP
13.	Patan(SC)	Cong(I)	26.	Bulsar(ST)	BJP

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Gains for the BJP

CSDS Team

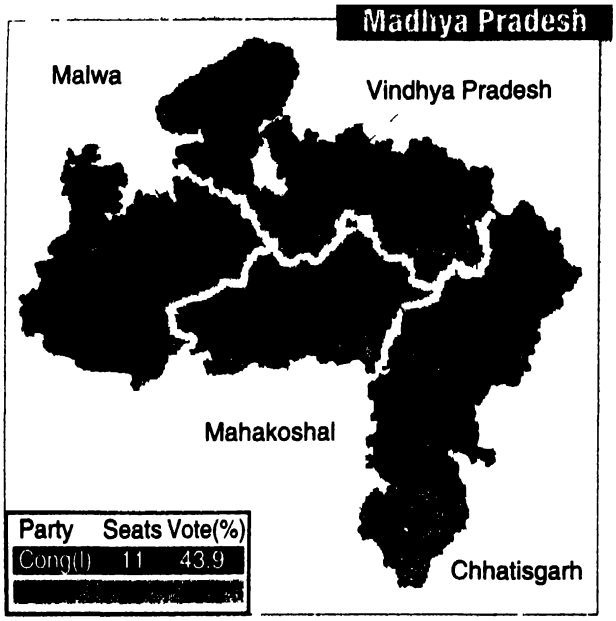
ON the face of it, the Bharatiya Janata Party dominated the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, winning 29 out of the 40 seats. However, as is often the case in first-past-the-post electoral systems, the contest was much closer in terms of votes. The BJP's 18-seat victory margin over the Congress(I) is a hefty reward for a narrow three percentage-point lead in votes. Although the Congress(I) snatched only one seat from the BJP, it managed to cut down its vote deficit by increasing its vote share by 4.5 percentage points relative to the 1998 verdict. The BJP also increased its vote share, albeit by less than one percentage point. The rise in the vote share of both major parties means a further consolidation of a bipolar system in the State, largely at the expense of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The latter, which after the 1998 elections looked likely to emerge as a party of the future, suffered a severe setback; it won just 5 per cent of the votes.

The region-wise picture reveals some minor changes in the voting pattern since the previous elections. The Congress(I) gained in Vindhya Pradesh: its strength increased from 29 per cent votes and one seat in 1998 to 41 per cent and three seats. The increase is attributable to the shift in the BSP votebank. The BJP made gains in the tribal-dominated Chhattisgarh region; its vote share increased from 44 per cent in 1998 to 48 per cent, and it won eight seats, one more than in the previous elections. Neither party recorded a significant change in its position since the last Lok Sabha elections. But there was a turnaround from the November 1998 Assembly elections, with a five-percentage-point swing against the Congress(I). The Congress(I) in Madhya Pradesh enjoys more success in Assembly elections than in parliamentary elections – unusual for a party that prides itself on its national appeal.

Caste is not the be-all and end all of Madhya Pradesh politics.

The sample size for the State is 563. The sample over-estimates the vote share for the Congress(I) and under-estimates the vote share for the BJP.

Neither the BJP nor the Congress(I) displays the kind of sharp division of social profiles that is seen elsewhere in the country, and more specifically seen when the two parties are in direct competition with each other. In Madhya Pradesh they are both essentially "catch-all" parties. However, the usual bias persists to a small extent. The BJP enjoys a moderate lead among the numerically large segments of the upper castes and the Other Backward Classes, whereas the Congress(I) enjoys more substantial support among the numerically smaller segments – the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. The BSP was relegated to a position of winning considerably reduced support from the S.Cs; it did not receive any noticeable backing from the other communities. Although the BJP fared well in the reserved S.T. constituencies (the reason for this is not that it enjoys the support of the majority of tribal voters), the CSDS survey reveals that it polled only 25 per cent of the S.T. vote. It appears that the votes of non-tribal people in the tribal constituencies have shifted to the BJP. ■



No.	Name	Winner	No.	Name	Winner
1.	Morena(SC)	BJP	21.	Durg	BJP
2.	Bhind	BJP	22.	Rajnandgaon	BJP
3.	Gwalior	BJP	23.	Balaghat	BJP
4.	Guna	Cong(I)	24.	Mandla(ST)	BJP
5.	Sagar(SC)	BJP	25.	Jabalpur	BJP
6.	Khajuraho	Cong(I)	26.	Seoni	BJP
7.	Damoh	BJP	27.	Chhindwara	Cong(I)
8.	Satna	BJP	28.	Betul	BJP
9.	Rewa	Cong(I)	29.	Hoshangabad	BJP
10.	Sidhi(ST)	BJP	30.	Bhopal	BJP
11.	Shahdol(ST)	BJP	31.	Vidisha	BJP
12.	Surguja(ST)	Cong(I)	32.	Rajgarh	Cong(I)
13.	Raigarh(ST)	BJP	33.	Shajapur(SC)	BJP
14.	Janjgir	Cong(I)	34.	Khandwa	BJP
15.	Bilaspur(SC)	BJP	35.	Khargone	Cong(I)
16.	Sarangarh(SC)	BJP	36.	Dhar(ST)	Cong(I)
17.	Raipur	BJP	37.	Indore	BJP
18.	Mahasamund	Cong(I)	38.	Ujjain(SC)	BJP
19.	Kanker(ST)	BJP	39.	Jhabua(ST)	Cong(I)
20	Bastar(ST)	BJP	40.	Mandsaur	BJP

Caste not the be-all and end-all of M.P. politics

	Cong(I)	BJP	BSP
Upper castes	44	56	0
Peasant OBC	44	53	2
Lower OBC	48	49	1
SC	51	17	32
Bhil	92	8	0
Gond	81	19	0
Other ST	64	36	0
Muslim	97	0	3

The sample size for Madhya Pradesh is 563. The sample over-estimates the vote share for the Congress(I) and under-estimates the vote share for BJP.

Madhya Pradesh: Region-wise analysis of Lok Sabha election results

Region	Seats	Turn-out 1999	Change over 1998	Congress(I) Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BSP Vote share	BSP Swing
[illegible]	11	59.4	-3.5	4	+1	46.4	+1.5	7	-1	51.2	+0.9	0.7	+0.2
[illegible]hal	7	54.5	-9.3	1	-1	45.7	+1.3	6	+1	47.5	+1.9	1.5	-1.9
[illegible] Pradesh	11	49.8	-9.8	3	+2	40.6	+11.1	8	-2	39.5	-2.9	12.8	-7.8
[illegible]arh	11	55.9	-5.7	3	-1	43.3	+2.3	8	+1	47.9	+3.4	5.0	-2.5
[illegible]	40	54.9	-6.5	11	+1	43.9	+4.5	29	+1	46.6	+0.8	5.2	-3.0

Swing in Jat vote

CSDS Team

DESPITE a good showing in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, the Congress (I) suffered a major setback in Rajasthan this time. Its tally of seats dropped from 18 to nine, while the BJP increased its tally from five to 16. The result could have been worse for the Congress (I). It actually lost 11 seats, but the deficit was reduced as Buta Singh and Shiesh Ram Ola, who had joined its fold, won their respective constituencies.

However, in terms of vote share the Congress (I) was only slightly behind the BJP. And this result thus follows the trend of the last few closely fought elections. The Congress(I) maintained its vote share, but on account of the gains made by the BJP it suffered a five-percentage-point negative swing.

The BJP made gains across the State, picking up seats in every region. The major gains came in the Jat belt in the eastern and western regions, where it won five and two seats respectively.

The standard community and class profiles prevail in the State as they do elsewhere. However, they are evident to a lesser extent than in Gujarat and to a greater extent than in Madhya Pradesh. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the Jat community was the only upper caste that went against the general pattern of support for the BJP and voted for the Congress (I). However, Jats were dissatisfied with the Congress(I)'s reservation policy. They switched to the BJP in large numbers, and this represented a 40-percentage-point swing against the Congress (I). The OBCs were divided in their support – by and large the Gujjars favoured the Congress (I), but other sections of the OBCs preferred the BJP. The Scheduled Tribes were also split, but the Congress(I) enjoyed strong support among the tribal communities and Muslims.

Rajasthan is unusual for perhaps being the only State in India where there is no gender difference in voting behaviour. While nationally the Cong-ress(I) is usually more popular among women and the BJP among men, this pattern did not hold in Rajasthan. ■

Jats swing to BJP in Rajasthan
(percentage figures)

	Cong(I)	BJP
Brahmin	38	62
Rajput	2	98
Jat	35	65
Other upper castes	34	66
Gujar	88	12
Other OBC	44	56
SC	72	28
ST*	59	41
Muslim*	92	8

The sample size for Rajasthan is 574

As usual, high class equals high votes for the BJP
(percentage figures)

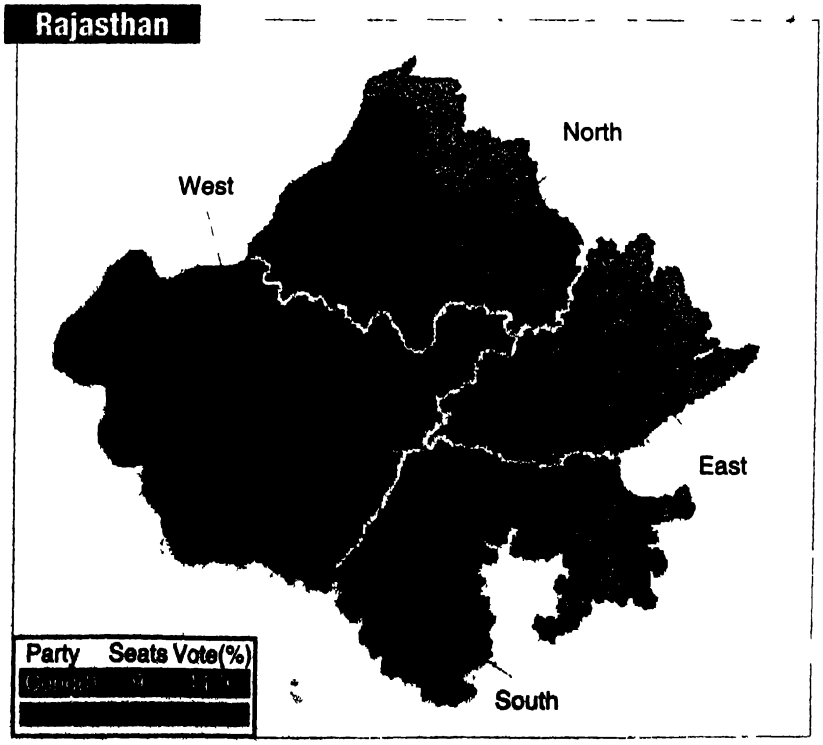
	Cong(I)	BJP
Very high	29	71
High	38	62
Middle	32	68
Low	61	39
Very low	67	33

No gender difference in vote patterns in Rajasthan
(percentage figures)

	Cong(I)	BJP
Male	46	54
Female	46	54

Rajasthan: Region-wise analysis, Lok Sabha elections, 1999

Region	Seats	Turnout	Change	Congress(I)				BJP			
		out 1999	over 1998	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
North	5	55.5	-8.2	2	-1	46.1	+6.5	3	+2	46.1	+6.9
East	8	51.5	-5.1	1	-5	40.9	-2.7	7	+5	51.3	+10.4
South	7	57.1	-5.1	3	-2	48.5	-1.0	4	+2	43.0	-1.6
West	5	53.6	-6.1	3	-1	44.3	-0.2	2	+2	46.9	+5.3
Total	**25**	**54.2**	**-6.1**	**9**	**-9**	**44.9**	**+0.4**	**16**	**+11**	**46.9**	**+6.3**



No.	Name	Winner
1.	Ganganagar(SC)	BJP
2.	Bikaner	Cong(I)
3.	Churu	BJP
4.	Jhunjhunu	Cong(I)
5.	Sikar	BJP
6.	Jaipur	BJP
7.	Dausa	Cong(I)
8.	Alwar	BJP
9.	Bharatpu	BJP
10.	Bayana (SC	BJP
11.	Sawai Madhopur(ST)	Cong(I)
12.	Ajmer	BJP
13.	Tonk(SC)	BJP
14.	Kota	BJP
15.	Jhalawar	BJP
16.	Banswara(ST)	Cong(I)
17.	Salumber(ST)	Cong(I)
18.	Udaipur	Cong(I)
19.	Chittorgarh	BJP
20.	Bhilwara	BJP
21.	Pali	BJP
22.	Jalore(SC)	Cong(I)
23.	Barmer	Cong(I)
24.	Jodhpur	BJP
25.	Nagaur	Cong(I)

One-sided contest

CSDS Team

THE Bharatiya Janata Party Biju Janata Dal alliance tightened its hold on Orissa in a largely one sided electoral tussle It won 19 of the 21 seats, three up from its 1998 tally of 16 However, this does not reflect the full extent of the BJP-BJD s dominance in terms of vote share In 1998 there was a difference of almost eight percentage points between the Congress (I) (41 per cent) and the BJP-BJD (48 7 per cent) This year the difference between the Congress(I) (37 7 per cent) and the BJP-BJD (57 6 per cent) rose sharply to 20 percentage points

The dominance of the BJP-BJD was manifest in all regions of the State The BJD won eight and the BJP two of the 11 seats in the coastal region The Congress(I) won the remaining seat, two lower than the seats it won in 1998 The BJP-BJD made a clean sweep in western Orissa, a BJP stronghold Of the six seats in this region, five went to the BJP and one to the BJD Of the four seats in south Orissa, the BJP won two, the BJD one and the Congress (I) one

The BJP-BJD combine clearly enjoyed overwhelming support among the upper castes It fared considerably better than the Congress (I) among the Other Backward Classes However, the Congress (I) still enjoys considerable support among the Scheduled Castes There is growing support for the BJP-BJD among tribal communities, which were strong supporters of the Congress(I) at one time The proportion of the tribal population is higher in Orissa than in most other States

An interesting feature of the class profile in Orissa is that there is not much to distinguish among the top three groups as all of them overwhelmingly supported the BJP-BJD (about 60 per cent) over the Congress (I) (about 30 per cent) A different picture emerges among the 'very low' classes, which showed a greater level of support for the Congress (I) It is significant that the Congress(I), despite its electoral defeat, enjoys a higher degree of support among the poorest sections The difference in preferences does not show a graded pattern but a sharp distinction between the have-nots and the rest

Despite the horrendous incident in which the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons were burnt alive, the CSDS survey reveals that the percentage of the electorate in Orissa which thinks that injustice had been done to Christians is only marginally different than the all-India average This crime, which was allegedly committed by a person with links to the Sangh Parivar, did not prove electorally costly for the BJP In fact, the BJP candidate won in the very constituency in which the incident took place

With Assembly elections coming up in the state, the BJP BJD is placed in a very strong position The Congress(I) unit in Orissa seems to be in disarray organisationally even though the Congress high command replaced J B Patnaik with Giridhar Gamang as Chief Minister

The more interesting question before the Assembly elections will be the balance of power between the BJP and the BJD Will the latter succeed in sustaining itself as a viable regional party or is it likely to succumb to the BJP? ■

Clear divergence in caste profile of the parties in Orissa

	Cong(I)	BJP-BJD
Hindu upper caste	16	80
OBC	32	66
ST	69	26
ST	47	32

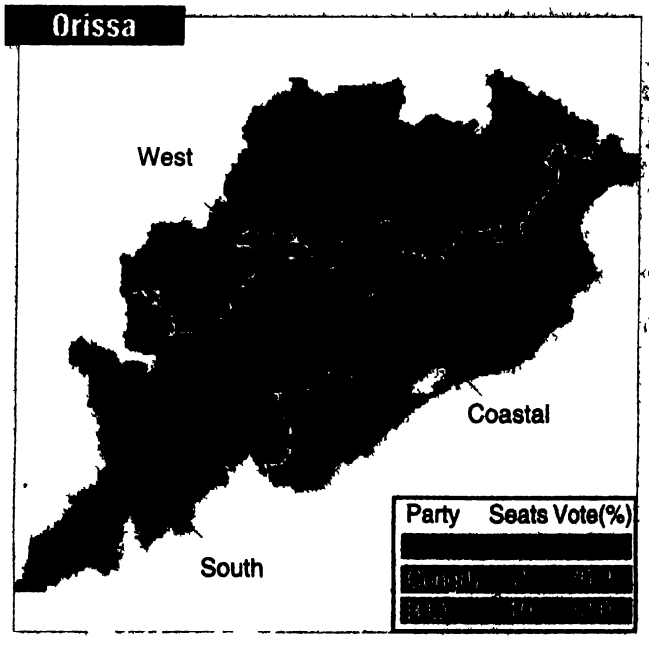
The sample size for Orissa is 365

Class profile of parties in Orissa

	Cong(I)	BJP
High	26	68
Middle	28	59
Low	34	60
Very low	51	46

Orissa: Region-wise analysis, Lok Sabha elections, 1999

Region	Seats	Turnout 1999	Change over 1998	Cong(I)+CPI Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing	BJP+BJD Won	Gain/ Loss	Vote share	Swing
Coastal	11	53 6	-4 1	1	-2	37 2	-5 7	10	+2	58 7	+10.5
South	4	57 8	-2 8	1	-1	44 5	-0 1	3	+1	53 5	+6 4
West	6	58 1	-2 5	0	0	34 3	-1 2	6	0	58.4	+7.9
Total	**21**	**55.6**	**-2.4**	**2**	**-3**	**37.7**	**-3.3**	**19**	**+3**	**57.6**	**+6.9**



No.	Name	Winner
1.	Mayurbhanj(ST)	BJP
2.	Balasore	BJD
3.	Bhadrak(SC)	BJD
4.	Jajpur(SC)	BJD
5.	Kendrapara	BJD
6.	Cuttack	BJD
7.	Jagatsinghpur	BJD
8.	Puri	BJD
9.	Bhubaneswar	BJD
10.	Aska	BJD
11.	Berhampur	BJP
12.	Koraput(ST)	Cong(I)
13.	Nowrangpur(ST)	BJP
14.	Kalahandi	BJP
15.	Phulbani(SC)	BJD
16.	Bolangir	BJP
17.	Sambalpur	BJD
18.	Deogarh	BJP
19.	Dhenkanal	Cong(I)
20.	Sundargarh(ST)	BJP
21.	Keonjhar(ST)	BJP

A new style in Indonesia

Indonesia is preparing to bury the ghosts of the past and energise its political and economic spheres under the shrewd leadership of President Abdurrahman Wahid.

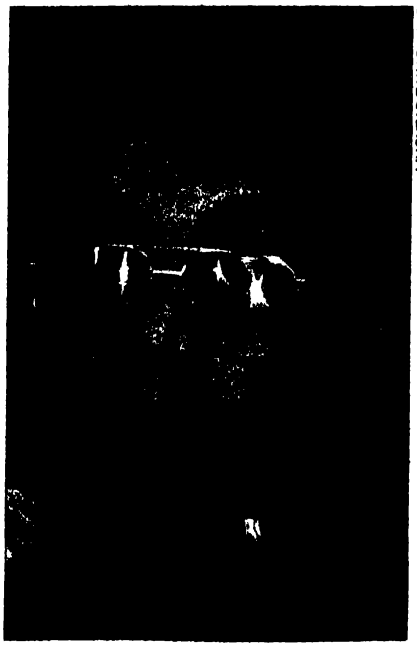
P. S. SURYANARAYANA
in Singapore

A NON-ARCHETYPAL leader for an unusual situation – this sums up the style and substance of Indonesia's new President, Abdurrahman Wahid. In October, within hours of being elected President of the most populous South-East Asian country and the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Wahid won over to his side the most popular Indonesian political leader, the charismatic but somewhat mercurial Megawati Sukarnoputri. Wahid not only got the designated electoral college to elect her Vice-President but consulted her on key appointments.

The political crisis in Indonesia that preceded the emergence of Wahid as chief executive and Megawati as the populist face of the new government was related in one way or the other to the role the military (TNI in local parlance) played in political affairs. The unpopularity of the TNI among both the elite and the masses, despite Army Chief General Wiranto's conspicuous efforts to be a democracy-friendly sentinel of stability, had left Wahid with no choice but to delink the armed forces from the levers of governance without, however, offending them. Wahid then appointed General Wiranto the highest-ranking Minister in his Cabinet and awarded him the portfolio of Politics and Security.

A few other serving military officers too were nominated to Cabinet positions, including the charge of the critical Internal Affairs Ministry, but there was not a murmur of protest from the country's neophyte democrats. The simple reason was that Wahid had signalled in no uncertain terms that he would be the real executive, aided by and discussing with key minister-consultants, despite his poor eyesight. (In mid-November, a United States-based plastic eye surgeon, B.C.K. Patel, certified that Wahid was responding well to treatment of the one eye that was functioning partially following its reconstruction. Wahid, affectionately known to millions of Indonesians as Gus Dur or Elder Brother, suffered vision damage as a result of a stroke a few years ago.)

Determined to stamp civilian authority irrevocably on all echelons of government, Wahid nominated a non-military academic, Juwono Sudarsono, as the new Defence Minister, after making sure that he would be acceptable to the TNI on account of his earlier association with it as a strategic thinker. For the first time in the history of independent Indonesia – which had been for long a presumptive national "model" of political cohabitation between the military leadership and the civilian elite – Wahid appointed a naval officer, Admiral Widodo, instead of an Army commander, the TNI's helmsman. While doing so, the new President outlined a policy to modernise and expand Indonesia's Navy, a largerly neglected wing of the TNI despite being



MUCHTAR ZAKARIA/ AP

President Abdurrahman Wahid. His conservative economics and unorthodox politics mark a departure from the old style in Indonesia.



MUCHTAR ZAKARIA/ AP

Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Wahid won her over to his side and consulted her on key ministerial appointments.



CHARLES DHARAPAK/ AP

Economics Minister Kwik Kian Gie. His appointment put at rest the clamour for national reconciliation with Indonesian-Chinese.

the largest armed maritime force in South-East Asia. His reasoning was that Indonesia had for long remained vulnerable at sea despite being the world's largest archipelago-state.

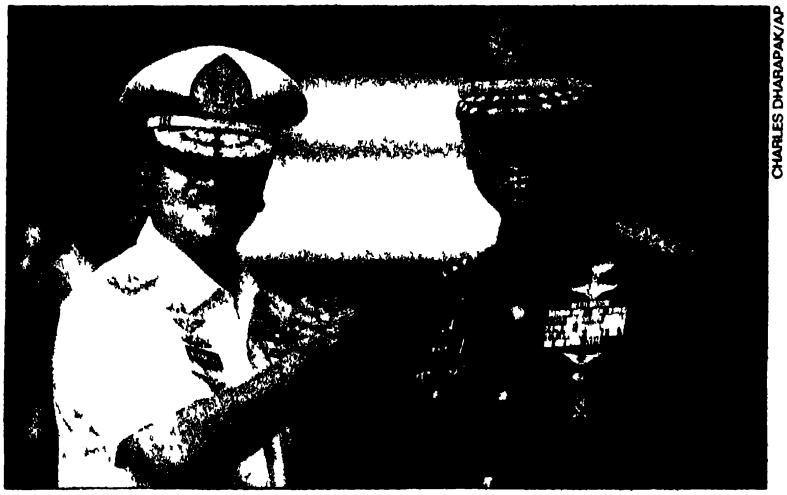
Even while taking steps to ensure the security of Indonesia's frontiers as well as peace within, by giving the TNI's past and present leadership a new niche in society without militarising politics unlike in the past, Wahid turned his focus on ways to reverse the meltdown of Indonesia's economy and give it a new structural solidity. Towards this end, he appointed an ethnic-Chinese-Indonesian, Kwik Kian Gie, a close political associate of Megawati, the Economics Minister atop a pyramid of interlinked positions. Given the dominant role that Indonesian-Chinese people have traditionally played in the country's economic sphere, despite their minority status, and also the scars of a rampage against them at the height of the popular uprising against General Suharto's long reign in April-May 1998, Wahid's choice of Kwik made much sense to the international donors, also in the light of a clamour for national reconciliation.

In another unorthodox move, Wahid invited Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister and an elder statesman of Singapore (which is almost a synonym for a singularly economics-state with little or no political diversions), to suggest ways of putting Indonesia through a financial recovery. With Lee agreeing to serve as an international expert, Wahid's task of convincing international investors about Indonesia's emerging status as a safe destination for their capital became somewhat easy. (The economic success story of Singapore was not affected by the recent financial crisis in the region.)



DITA ALANGKARA/AP

Acehnese youth take part in a rally in Sigli demanding a referendum on the issue of independence for the province.


CHARLES DHARAPAK/AP

Former Armed Forces chief Gen. Wiranto (right) with his successor Admiral Laksamana Widodo during an official ceremony to hand over his post, in Jakarta on November 4.

Unlike Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad, who engineered an economic recovery in his recession-hit country without turning to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other global financial wizards for help, Wahid endeared himself to the gurus of the capitalist market by endorsing "profit motive" and "free trade" as also other mantras of the new breed of global capitalists who talk of doing "business at the speed of thought".

FOR an Islamist-cleric with faith in Western-style conservative capitalist beliefs, Wahid stunned Indonesian and international observers alike by espousing near-revolutionary political ideas. He announced a policy option of allowing the restive people of the Indonesian province of Aceh, bordering the eastern flank of India's maritime boundary, to decide their political future in a referendum within seven months from mid-November. Of somewhat undefined scope, the referendum would be fashioned according to the wishes of the Acehnese.

In Wahid's reasoning, there would be nothing amiss in holding a plebiscite in Aceh, a radical Islamist outpost of Indonesia founded on "Pancasila" or the five principles of jus-

A diplomatic initiative

P. S. SURYANARAYANA

NOT since the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 has a diplomatic initiative by Indonesia attracted as much international attention as the latest call by President Abdurrahman Wahid for the creation of a five-power entity consisting of China, India, Japan, Singapore and Indonesia. In calling for such an informal grouping while addressing international businesspersons in Singapore on November 6, Wahid took great care to emphasise that he did not have in mind the notion of a strategic bloc of any kind.

If, however, the proposal caught the attention of the United States, as noted by some Western as also South-East Asian diplomats, the reason had much to do with Wahid's conspicuous omission of Washington in outlining the entity. In Wahid's calculus, these five Asian countries could cooperate with one another in the context of Indonesia's current quest for economic linkages. He wanted Jakarta to improve its ecomomic ties with India and China, and in his view Singapore and Japan could in some way help this process along.

While Wahid's proposal did not induce any of the countries he mentioned to revise their respective diplomatic calculations, Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said he did not get the impression that Wahid really wanted to keep the U.S. out of Asia. The comment acquired importance in the context of the conventional wisdom in South-East Asia that Washington's strengths constitute the critical mass of the region's political-strategic stability.

Western diplomatic circles surmise, behind the scenes, that the "entity" in Wahid's freelance foreign policy initiative, can at best be seen as a matrix of Indonesia's separate bilateral ties with each of the other four Asian countries in focus. In that sense, the criss-crossing areas of overlap, if any, would give them the appearance of an entity. While the idea did not, therefore, set the Pacific and the Indian Oceans on fire, it made the U.S. take note of Wahid.

There was another reason, too. Wahid expressed the hope that India and China would reciprocate his sentiments because he thought that "they believe in non-hegemonic foreign policy (and) trade policy". Sensing that this might be construed as a plea for a new zero-sum game between a definitive Asian entity and the U.S.-led West in a milieu of anticipatory "multipolarity", he made it clear that he was no less interested in keeping Indonesia's ties with the U.S. in good repair.

Wahid's choice of New Delhi as a potential player on a wider Asian plane in the present circumstances can be understood in the light of his high praise for Gandhiji's secularism as a guiding principle and for India's human resources in science and technology. Otherwise, India has hardly ever figured in Indonesia's strategic considerations except for a singular instance in the past over the expansion of India's naval prowess.

As an archipelago-state, Indonesia is acutely aware of Alfred Mahan's theory about the relevance of sea power in international commerce and politics. While Wahid has, therefore, advocated a strong navy for Indonesia, his overall initial diplomatic initiatives in inter-state regionalism are anchored in the belief that security can be attained by ensuring "national resilience" on the basis of a sound economy at home and later "regional resilience" on the basis of the shared economic interests of a group of states. ■

tice and secularism. To justify the decisions, he cited the precedent of the referendum held in August this year in the predominantly Roman Catholic half-island of East Timor which, in the event, opted to sever links with Indonesia.

Many military and political leaders in the country, including Wiranto, and also international analysts were aghast at this parallel. East Timor had never been recognised by the United Nations as an integral part of Indonesia despite the latter's annexation of that island in the mid-1970s. Aceh, on the other hand, has been a part of Indonesia since its independence from the Dutch imperialists. In his calculation, the radical Islamist separatists of Aceh will only opt to stay with Indonesia. In that sense, he wanted to take a political risk by striving for an Acehnese vote for Indonesia in order to ease the trauma of Jakarta caused by the loss of East Timor.

Many Western and some South-East Asian diplomats see this as a political drama fraught with uncertainties. While Wahid's conservative economics drew praise from them, his unorthodox politics left them somewhat uncomfortable. But there simply was no doubting the arrival of an authentic Indonesian leader on the regional stage, whatever be the international reaction to Wahid's comfort level with the legacies of Adam Smith's economics at one level and the Wilsonian self-determination in politics at another.

IN the first flush of nationalist anger over the suspected Western game plan of delinking East Timor from Indonesia, Wahid sought to visualise a new foreign policy with an Asiatic core. He struck a rapport with some Asian countries in this regard but his action alerted the West, in particular the U.S. Not surprisingly, it soon gave Wahid a chance to call on President Bill Clinton in Washington. Clinton supported the current democratic transformation across Indonesia but left it to the Indonesians to decide questions relating to a possible trial of and probable clemency for Suharto in respect of the corrupt deeds he allegedly committed during his three-decade-long authoritarian rule.

Central to Indonesian-U.S. relations is the issue of bilateral military cooperation, which was suspended at the height of the East Timor crisis on the eve of the arrival there of a U.N.-mandated multinational force. Clinton and Wahid left open the possibility of future interaction in this sphere in certain circumstances. Wahid agreed to U.S. assistance in the form of non-official conflict-resolution expertise in regard to a clarification of issues in Aceh.

In the domestic sphere, Wahid sparked suspicions among hard-core Islamists when he proposed the establishment of commercial ties between Indonesia and Israel. Even as protests grew over the Israel issue, Wahid was engrossed in visualising creative ways to conduct the country's foreign policy. His latest initiative, which held the field at the end of his economic-aid-seeking mission to Japan on November 16, has been to invoke China, India, Japan and Singapore to link arms with Indonesia in order to create a five-power entity. ■

Elusive settlement

Will the Israelis and the Palestinians achieve a breakthrough on the questions of settlements and refugees before the February deadline for a Framework Agreement?

KESAVA MENON
in Bahrain

THE Palestinians and the Israelis fire rhetorical barrages at each other almost on a daily basis. Negotiators representing the two sides meet and discuss apparently in cordial fashion with the same frequency. The mixed signals are appropriate for the most crucial phase yet in the Israeli-Palestinian interaction.

By mid-November, Israel was readying itself to complete the second of the three troop redeployments promised in the Wye II accord signed in the Egyptian resort of Sharam al Sheikh on September 4. A first troop redeployment had taken place, as promised, within a week of the agreement being signed. Although there was a dispute over the territory in respect of which the second redeployment was to take place, it seemed safe enough to predict that this would eventually be carried out perhaps a few days after the mid-November deadline. The third redeployment, the final one in the ongoing "interim stage" of the Oslo-directed interaction between the two sides, is to take place in January.

With the completion of troop redeployments, the Palestinian Authority will exercise control over civil affairs in 40 per cent of the West Bank. It will also be in charge of security affairs in a part of the 40 per cent of the West Bank, while Israel will retain an overall supervisory role in respect of security affairs in the remaining area. Sixty per cent of the West Bank will remain under full Israeli control in respect of civil and security matters. No changes have taken place in the Gaza Strip since the Gaza first phase was implemented four years ago. The Palestinian Authority is in charge over most of this slice of territory, but a few Israeli settlements remain and Israel controls security in the vicinity of, and on the approaches to, them.

In signing the Wye II agreement, Israel reconfirmed the plans to open a safe corridor between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. More pertinently, it has finally opened a four-lane highway for traffic between these hitherto separated segments of the Palestinian patrimony. The Palestinians tried unsuccessfully to make the Israelis concede control over this safe passage, and finally the two sides agreed on a face-saving compromise. As per this compromise, the Israelis actually decide which Palestinians will be allowed to cross between Gaza and the West Bank, but Palestinian officials process the papers so that Palestinians do not have to apply for or get their travel permits directly from the Israelis.

Within the next few months the two sides are scheduled to firm up an agreement on the opening of a seaport in the Gaza Strip. If this deal does come through, then Palestinians, whether living in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, will be able to ship their produce out without being dependent on the Israelis or the Jordanians. The seaport is likely to remain under some form of Israeli control like the airport that was opened earlier this year, but at least the delays and other forms of hafassment will be reduced. Theoretically it should be possible for international travellers coming by air or sea to disembark on Palestinian territory, travel through it and leave without touching Israeli soil, though it is unclear as to who has the authority to issue travel documents.

As a result of these developments, the Palestinian Authority will be equipped with many of the trappings of a sovereign state. Trappings of sovereignty, of course, do not make for the reality of it and the logic of circumstances is such that even the Authority recognises that it will not acquire full sovereign power even when its "permanent status" is fixed through agreements with Israel In this day and age when international treaties, and new doctrines, circumscribe the quantum of sovereignty available to almost any state, it could be debated whether Palestinian aspirations are not being unreasonably thwarted. But all said and done, the



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak shake hands prior to bilateral talks in Oslo on November 2.

Palestinians are going to end up with a lesser quantum of sovereignty than what most other states enjoy.

The extent of sovereignty that they will eventually exercise is one of the key issues that the Palestinians will negotiate with Israel over the next few months. It might prove to be an easier one to resolve among the several issues that the two sides have to sort out as they try to fix the nature of the relationship they will have and maintain over the foreseeable future, that is, the permanent status of their relationship. Under the Wye II accord, the two sides were to negotiate the permanent status issues before the second troop redeployment got under way. They have more or less stuck to the schedule since the negotiating teams were nominated and have already held several rounds of discussions meeting alternatively in Israel and in Palestinian-controlled territory.



MICHAEL PROBST/ AP

U.S. President Bill Clinton at a memorial meeting for Yitzhak Rabin in Oslo. The late Israeli Prime Minister's picture is in the background.

In their efforts to create a state that will have near parity with Israel in the legal dimension (they will not have parity in real power terms for the foreseeable future), the Palestinians have to achieve a number of objectives. Besides the quantum of sovereignty, the Palestinians have to win back if not the whole at least a sizable portion of the territory that they claim on the basis of United Nations Resolution 242. They also have to win the right to decide how many people they will allow to settle in the territories that they will control. Some workable arrangement in respect of Jerusalem will also have to be arrived at because about 150,000 Arabs live there: the city provides the crucial physical link between the northern and southern portions of the West Bank and it is the heart of Palestinian's cultural, intellectual and spiritual existence. Several other matters, including a fair distribution of water resources, have to be negotiated as well.

Most of the issues to be negotiated in the permanent status phase of the Oslo processes are very difficult to resolve either because they are rooted in the vital interests of the two peoples or because they carry a lot of emotional baggage. It was Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak who suggested that the two sides work through a two-phase process for the final status negotiations. With this suggestion being accepted, the two sides are to try and strike a Framework Agreement by mid-February next year and seal the permanent status by September 2000. In the Framework Agreement, the two sides will – if the talks are most positive – set out the basis on which they will settle the permanent status issues. If the negotiations turn out to be far tougher, as they are expected to be, the two sides will try to mark out the issues they can settle by September and suggest a time-frame within which the rest can be sorted out.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is accorded the protocol due to the head of a sovereign state whenever he makes a diplomatic excursion and his officials are treated like representatives of a full-fledged government. It is also more than likely that most countries will extend recognition to the Palestinian state if Arafat declares statehood in a reasonable and responsible context. Objective circumstances, however, will determine to a high degree what a reasonable and responsible context is. For instance, it is unlikely that many states would extend recognition if Arafat declares statehood before September, unless Israel indulges in gross bad faith. It is also unlikely that such recognition would be extended if an agreement is close but not clinched by September. Most important, the U.S. administration, on which the Authority has become dependent to a great extent, would not support a premature declaration of statehood.

In negotiating the quantum of sovereignty with Israel (as contrasted with the unilateral assumption of sovereignty through declaration), the Palestinians will have to take note of the "red lines" that Israel has drawn. Israel wants to restrict the Palestinian's treaty-making powers so that they do not make alliances with countries hostile to Israel. This might not be a serious problem in the immediate historical context since it is unlikely that the Palestinians would want to make an alliance with either Iraq or Iran, two countries that are intrinsically hostile to Israel. The same consideration is likely to apply in respect of the other Israeli conditions, that it will not allow the Palestinians to host a foreign army that is hostile to it (Israel) and that it will restrict the Palestinian's capacity to build their military strength because that might pose a threat to Israel's existence.

A recent statement by Arafat pertaining to the territories he hopes to regain possession of was significant for its omissions. In that statement, Arafat seemed to indicate that he had little hope of regaining those portions along the "Green Line" (the border between Israel and the West Bank after the 1948 armistice until the 1967 war) which Israel has built up as if it was its own territory. About 90 per cent of the Israelis in the West Bank live in this thickened "Green Line" and successive Israeli governments have indicated that they will not let go these areas of land. While this border is amenable to a conceivable compromise, the Palestinians will take a tougher negotiating position in respect of the 140 or so Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Barak recently dropped a bombshell when he said that in his interpretation of the relevant U.N. resolution, Israel was not obliged to withdraw from all the Palestinian territory that it had captured in 1967. According to Barak, the resolution called on Israel to withdraw from "territories" occupied in 1967 and not "all the territories" occupied then. His argument was that the language of the resolution thereby permitted Israel not to return some of the territories. Secondly, Barak said, Israel was obliged to withdraw

only from territories captured from the sovereign states of Jordan and Egypt and that since Palestinians did not constitute a state at that time, Israel was not obliged to accord them the same treatment.

This statement was perhaps a gambit at the opening of the tough negotiations to come. However, Barak has also spoken of his deep attachment to the settlements because they exist in Israel's biblical heartland and because settler families have put in much effort to build their lives there. Also, a party which represents the settlers is a key component of Barak's government. In all these respects, Barak seems to be following a policy different from that of his mentor Yitzhak Rabin. By the time of his death, Rabin seemed ready to abandon the isolated settlements to their fate. He had not gone so far as to declare that he would negotiate these isolated settlements out of existence, but he seemed ready to declare that he would make no special security arrangements for them and that they would be left to take their chances as islands in a Palestinian sea. Barak does not appear prepared to go so far, though the pro-peace camp in Israel and a probable majority in his own Labour Party would treat this as the best outcome.

Far from declaring a disinterest in the West Bank settlements, leave alone any plans to dismantle them, Barak has not done enough to roll back settlements which are illegal even according to the Israeli rule book. In the lead-up to last May's elections, the then right-wing government in Israel encouraged settlers to set up new *avdouts* (facts on the ground) by throwing up outposts on adjacent hilltops. Since then about 40 such outposts had been set up, and though the Palestinians had demanded that all of them be demolished as a sign of Israeli good faith, Barak ordered the closure of only 12.

The Barak government has also not revoked the permits granted by the previous government for further construction activity in the existing settlements; instead, it has issued fresh permits. Successive governments in Tel Aviv have insisted that such construction is needed to take care of "natural growth". But pro-peace activists have presented proof that there has been over-building in the settlements and that many units are unoccupied. It is not just the land on which housing units stand that Palestinians lose in the process. Each of these settlements is connected to a communications network which bypasses Palestinian communities. Palestinians are thereby deprived of the lands on which the roads have been laid and security perimeters marked out.

With the settlements scattered all over the West Bank, the road network effectively slices up this land into so many disjointed pockets. Unless the settlements and road network are done away with, Palestinians will at best be left in possession of so many segregated cantons. If it is difficult to see how the Palestinians will be satisfied with such an arrangement, it is also difficult to see how they will get the Israelis to reverse the situation. The U.S. administration, which could possibly have made a major input, is unlikely to do so given its own domestic political compulsions.

EVEN if a workable compromise can be arrived at in respect of territory, it will not by itself resolve the further problem of the population which is to be allowed to use that territory. About five million Palestinians live in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, not to count others scattered all over the world. Since they are classified as refugees they are entitled to return to the lands from which they were ousted, which means to sites that are now part of Israel. But it is inconceivable that Israel can be persuaded to allow the Palestinian refugees to return to Israel proper. It has taken a tough position on allowing the refugees to return even to the territories that it will hand over to the Palestinian Authority.

Given the limited natural resources available in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, there is an outer limit to the number of people who can be allowed to live there. It is also conceivable that some among the refugees will want to remain in the countries where they live now. But these considerations hardly mitigate the dimensions of this huge human problem since the host countries do not want the Palestinian refugees to remain on their land forever and Israel does not want them to return to their homes.

Moreover, at least two generations have been born since the Palestinians were first driven out of their homes and the dispute over how these descendants should be classified has not even been addressed. Israel has suggested a solution whereby these refugees would be given citizenship in the countries where they currently live, with generous financial help from the international community to them and their host governments. Since Israel's negotiations with Lebanon and Syria have hardly progressed, this suggestion hangs in the air.

While the above issues are driven by hard factual considerations, it is difficult for any outside observer even to begin to understand Israel's adamant stance on Palestinian's right to East Jerusalem. One fear, which Israel often cites in support of its argument, is that the Palestinians might block their access to holy sites in and around the Walled City if East Jerusalem were to be handed over to them. Since the Walled City contains Christian as well as Jewish sites (as also Muslim) and since international opinion will no longer countenance cultural vandalism, it is inconceivable that the Palestinians would be able to get away with blocking pilgrims from reaching their shrines.

Even if Israel wanted to retain control over the sites in and around the Walled City, it can probably be done without retaining control over the rest of East Jerusalem. The Walled City, the Mount of Olives (including the Jewish cemetery on it) and so on are close upon the borders of West Jerusalem and can probably be detached from the rest of the city without much of a problem. The facts that Israel cannot wish away are that a large population of Arabs (many representing the social heart of the Palestinian community) lives in East Jerusalem; the city provides the transportation hub between the two portions of the kidney-shaped West Bank; major educational and medical institutions are located there; and it is just as difficult for Palestinians to conceive of their state without a part of Jerusalem for its capital as it is for Israelis.

This is basically an emotional issue for the Israelis and as such it can possibly be finessed. There is a proposal to declare Abu Dis, a suburban village to the north-east of the city, as a part of Jerusalem. Palestinians would be allowed to establish the centre of their administration in Abu Dis, Arab-populated wards of Jerusalem would be attached to the control of the Abu Dis centre, and this newly created entity could be called Al Quds (the Arab name for Jerusalem) and accorded the status of national capital.

As the Israelis and the Palestinians race towards the February deadline for a Framework Agreement, the prospects look bleak for any breakthrough on the questions of settlements and refugees. The prospects for statehood in limited form appear to be the brightest while at least some creative thought is being applied to the question of Jerusalem. ■

Shades of green

Will Europe's Green parties continue their ascent to power and serve as an effective check on governments or will they be swallowed up as the Green agenda is all but hijacked by other political parties today?

SHIRAZ SIDHVA
in Paris

WHAT happens when the environmentally passionate idealists and anti-nuclear pacifists of the world are faced with realpolitik? They learn very quickly that they have to water down their idealism in order to accommodate to the rough and tumble of being in government.

That is precisely what Europe's Green parties are experiencing, as more and more of them cross over from the ranks of the Opposition to participate in government. Gone are the days when the Greens were flower-children or flag-waving libertarians who preached vegetarianism and pacifism. Today, they have found common cause with the Centre-Left, which is back in power in more than a dozen of the European Union's 15 member-states. The Green parties are increasingly setting the tone at the national level, sharing power at the highest level, notably in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and Finland. There are 47 members of the Green group in the European Parliament, an increase of 20 members from the previous one. The Greens have increased their strength in elections in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Finland, Austria, Ireland and even Spain, where their presence was negligible in earlier parliamentary elections.

As Europe's free-marketeers make way for Social Democrats across the board, there is a growing acceptance of the fact that economic growth can be achieved without sacrificing socialist values. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in France, where Lionel Jospin's government is arguably the most popular in Europe. The French economy is in splendid shape, and though the rate of unemployment remains higher than that in Germany, where the economy is faltering, the figure is at its lowest in six years.

Taking some of the credit for nudging Europe towards this new socialism are the Green parties. Born out of the pacifist and environmentalist movements of the 1970s, these 'alternative' parties now have to deal with the reality that they are in the mainstream. While most governments predictably end up allocating only the Environment Ministries to Green party members, as in France, Italy, and Finland (this is not necessarily a bad thing, though limiting), Germany actually has a Green as Foreign Minister, one of three Greens in Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's Red-Green coalition.

THE transition from the fringes of politics to centrestage has not been easy for the Green parties. There has been much soul-searching among the party's original leadership, and the Greens themselves have had to change to adjust to the new situation. Nobody could have realised this more acutely than Joseph (Joschka) Martin Fischer, Germany's popular Foreign Minister. The former factory worker and taxi driver, whose Green ideology was honed by the anti-War protests of the 1970s, was confronted with a major test earlier this year. As Foreign Minister, Fischer had to break away from the natural habitat of the Green politician. He has had to abandon his scruffy jeans and his resolve never to sport a tie.

Gone are the days when the Greens were flower-children or flag-waving libertarians who preached vegetarianism and pacifism. Today, they have found common cause with the Centre-Left, which is back in power in more than a dozen of the E.U.'s 15 member-states.

In May this year, Fischer faced the unenviable task of persuading the diehard Greens in his party to back off from their decision to withdraw support to the government following the Kosovo bombings. He passed the test: his colleagues grudgingly conceded that it was better to stay in power, even at the cost of compromising with their loftiest principle of pacifism.

Barely a year in office as the junior coalition partner of the Social Democrats led by Schroeder, Germany's Greens have found that sharing power at the highest level has its own peculiar problems. The electoral setbacks suffered by Schroeder recently may have masked the disarray in the leadership of the Greens, but members admit that many of the party's policies are outdated and need serious reform. "Our leadership is weak, our membership divided, and our organisation uncohesive," said a senior Green party leader attending a seminar in Paris. "We have to rethink our role," she said. "It is not enough to have power - we have to be able to use that position to achieve our goals."

Although they are arguably the most influential Green party in Europe, the German party's morale has tumbled with the dwindling electoral fortunes of the Social Democrats. Old-timers in the party fear that it is fast losing the identity it painstakingly cultivated from the 1970s. Some leaders complain that the party had to share the blame for some of Schroeder's unpopular economic and social reforms, which, in fact, it actually supported. And although it has threatened to leave the coalition time and again, it is for the first time in the party's history that it has tasted power. "We may be worse off if we split up with the Social Democrats at this point," said the Green party leader, who asked not to be named. "It is better to stay in power and make ourselves heard."

While Schroeder relies on the Greens to stay in power, their troubles would not be over if they were to go it alone. According to psephologists, the Green party's share of the national vote has plummeted from 10 per cent in 1997 to only 5 per cent now, the threshold below which parties are not entitled to seats in State or national parliaments.

THE Greens of France have less clout than their German counterparts. Jospin leans less heavily on Les Verts (The Greens, the French party's official name) to stay in power, and there is only one Green Minister, Environment Minister Dominique Voynet, in his Cabinet. And yet the party has remained as vocal as it can get in the circumstances, and has threatened to withdraw support whenever the government stepped out of line on issues that are important to the Greens.

There have been tensions ever since the French Greens first tasted power when Jospin included them in his government in June 1997. At a special summer session in the end of August, the Greens gave vent to their spleen as Jospin vacationed on a small island off the Atlantic coast. They felt cheated that they were given only a single position in the Ministry though they won nearly 10 per cent of the vote in the European elections in June They scored better than the Communists, the second largest group in government, who have three Ministers. Yet, their pleas for increased ministerial representation have fallen on deaf ears.

But more central to their concerns is the nuclear issue and the way the French Government disposes of nuclear waste. "We are more concerned about the lack of response to our demands on the nuclear energy issue than about representation in the Cabinet," insists Yves Cochet, a prominent leader of Les Verts and a Vice-President of the Assemblee Nationale, the French Parliament. "We know that our influence in France is greater in proportional terms than the number of seats we have in Parliament. And though our influence in the government is not as much as we would desire, we manage to give it some orientation."

According to Cochet, having a Green Environment Minister has made all the difference to the country's waste management and recycling policies. The Greens, along with the Socialists and the Communists, have been pushing for a 35-hour work week and have had their way, though Jospin might rightly want to claim credit for it. The bold experiment may not be the cure for the unemployment problem (there are nearly three million unemployed persons in France), but it may provide a way to restructure the French workplace and introduce productivity and flexibility without inducing social unrest that is characteristic of France.

But the Greens are angry that they were ignored on vital issues inside the ruling coalition. They are particularly concerned about the development of the next generation of nuclear power stations, the European Pressurised Reactors (EPRs). France's 56 nuclear reactors (one has been closed down) provide 78 per cent of the country's energy, one of the highest rates of nuclear dependence in the world. As these reactors become obsolete, France will be faced with the choice of scrapping them and depending on other sources of energy, or replacing them with a new type of reactor.

One concern of Green political analysts is that environmentalism has remained the preoccupation of the rich. Despite the spread of Green parties across Europe, they dominate mostly the more prosperous, industrialised north.

The EPR project, which the Greens are fighting, is a Franco-German joint venture, to be constructed by Germany's Siemens and France's Framatome, and will start operation by 2010. "The nuclear lobby in this country is very powerful, but we will fight it every inch of the way, " said Denis Baupin, the Green party spokesman. "This is one issue we cannot possibly compromise on, and a very fundamental one for the party," Baupin added.

The Greens want France to follow the example of Belgium and Germany, which have opted out of nuclear power. Les Verts sees this issue as the red line that it cannot possibly allow the Government to cross and still share power. "If the decision is to build new plants, we will be forced to pull out," Baupin said. The Greens are angry that Jospin's sole gesture to placate them was to freeze the construction of new nuclear plants.

Another issue that the Greens are at loggerheads with the government is about the *sans papier* (without papers)or the legalisation of over 60,000 illegal immigrants in France, who entered the country without their papers in order. While the Greens believe the immigrants should be legalised and allowed to remain in the country, the government has proclaimed that it is "out of the question". Voynet already clashed with the Prime Minister last year on the issue of amnesty to these immigrants. She renewed her attack on the government in mid-November. Immigration is a highly emotive issue in the country, with the Right parties predictably taking the hard line, and the Left rooting for the legalisation of these "paperless" people.

The French Greens have also been vociferous in their support of farmers who have been campaigning against McDonald's fast food outlets and the sanctions slapped on French luxury foods by the United States in retaliation to Europe's refusal to allow the import of meat from hormone-treated animals from the U.S.

Cochet is confident that being in government does not mean eschewing the idealism associated with the Greens. "One leg is in government, the other leg is in society," he says. "We have real contact with real people, and we cannot disconnect from that. And being in government means we have to take some responsibility for the decisions being taken there."

The Greens lay great stress on the power of the people to change things, and may prove more successful in local politics than in the national arena, although it is too early to tell, given that their involvement in national politics is too recent. Residents of a remote mountain village in Tuscany, Italy, are battling against the construction of high-voltage power lines that threaten the historic landscapes where little has changed since the time of Michelangelo and Dante. Edo Ronchi, the Green Environment Minister, is being forced to propose new legislation to protect these landscapes. "The Greens have a history of making a difference," says Fabio Roggiolani, the Green party spokesman in Tuscany.

CAN Europe's Greens really change their world? Will they continue their

ascent to power and serve as an effective check on governments, or will they be swallowed up, as the Green agenda is all but hijacked by other political parties today? Most mainstream political parties, whether Left or Right of Centre, agree that the environment needs to be protected The Green doctrine has lost its rebellious character and is becoming almost boringly conventional Transport Minister Isabelle Durant, one of two Green Ministers in the Belgian government, aptly terms it the "banalisation" of green politics

The goals of the Greens are based on the symbiosis between man and nature, individual freedom and equality, nonviolence and civil democracy But many parties respect these values today and accept the fact that the transition must be made to a humane and ecologically sound society The Green bywords of 'responsibility for the planet, solidarity, and citizenship", their fight against nuclear power to protect the environment, and their concerns about balancing the rela tionship between the world's rich and poor nations, with a redistribution of work and wealth, are no longer issues that are unique to the Greens

This has meant that the Greens in some countries have been left out of power, with nothing to distinguish them from their counterparts in the socialist or other leftist parties In Norway for instance, the socialist Left has taken over the environmental vote, leaving the Greens without much support For some Greens, this is a vindication of what they have always fought for "It's not just us crazy Greens anymore who are worried about issues such as global warming and genetically modified foods,' says Jacques Clement, a long-time Green party supporter "As long as we have made people aware of issues that matter to us, our battle is won "

Another concern of Green political analysts is that environmentalism has remained the preoccupation of the rich. Despite the spread of Green parties across Europe, they dominate mostly the more prosperous, industrialised north and have hardly any backing in countries such as Greece or in southern Italy, or even in Eastern Europe, where environmental concerns have been given short shrift in the years of communism.

And yet, there is hope. Small Green parties have mushroomed across the former eastern bloc as well and will some day take root and be forces to contend with, like their counterparts in the west. ■

The end of a trial

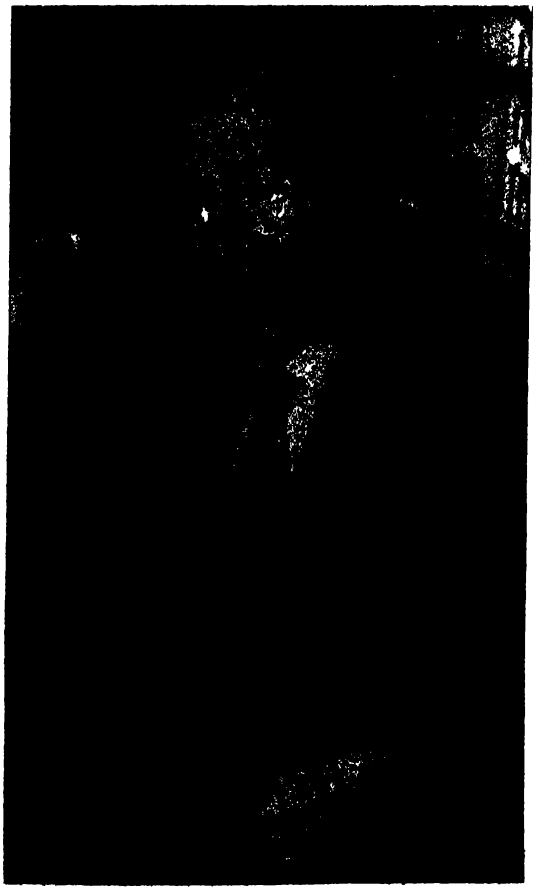
Former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti has been acquitted of the charge of Mafia links, but the chances of a return to power of his Christian Democratic Party appear slim.

BISWAJIT CHOUDHURY

THE end of autumn brought deliverance for the 80-year-old Giulio Andreotti, former Prime Minister of Italy After seven years of trial, on charges of association with organised crime and collusion with Mafia clans, Andreotti was acquitted by the court at Palermo, Sicily The judges found Andreotti not guilty because the "facts do not exist" A month earlier, a court in Perugia had acquitted him of the charge of ordering the murder in 1979 of Mino Pecorelli, a journalist, who the prosecution had contended was about to publish damaging information concerning Andreotti

'I am always the same me," Andreotti jokingly told photo journalists after the verdict It was also a reminder of the way in which he had borne himself through the years of trial submitting to the courts to display his respect for the justice system It is difficult however, to imagine that the political credibility of Andreotti has been restored, because it was not he alone but a whole class of political leaders that was swept away in the dramatic changes in Italy at the turn of the 1990s.

When instances of large-scale corruption by politicians were exposed by what came to be called in Italy as the judicial revolution", Andreotti s own trial being a part of it the political parties that were the most affected were the Christian Democrats (D C) of Andreotti and the Socialists both of which, in alliance, had almost uninterruptedly dominated Italian politics for over 25 years until they were decisively rejected by the electorate in 1993 Another accused, former Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, lives in Tunisia as a fugitive from trial in Italy



ANDREW MEDICHINI AP

Giulio Andreotti in Rome on October 23 after a court in Palermo, Sicily, acquitted him of charges of colluding with Mafia clans.

ANDREOTTI was one of the most influential politicians during the entire period of the First Republic, which was installed after the War and which ended with the eclipse of the old political elite in the 1990s He led seven governments as Prime Minister and was a Minister in several others before the Christian Democrats crumbled under a crisis of credibility and mass disenchantment The system had endured for almost half a century with a succession of 50-odd governments

What was unique about the Christian Democrats of Italy in comparison with any political party in Western Europe was that it remained the dominant partner in every one of these governments. The Communist Party, the second largest political party after the Christian Democrats, had 30 to 33 per cent of the vote share but remained permanently in the Opposition as a casualty of the extraordinary stability of the system. The one-party dominance resulted in a high degree of fusion between the party and the state, which in turn ensured the permanence of Christian Democrat power.

The murky consequences of this long relationship – patronage, systematic corruption through high public office, links with the Mafia, all of which collectively came to be known as "Tangentopoli" or "Bribestown" – began to unravel in the 1990s when the judicial revolution gave the final push to bring down the party and end the era of the First Republic.

Former Communists, who head a government for the first time in their new manifestation as the Left Democrats, have defended the judges and their drive against corruption and the Mafia.

Andreotti was something of a symbol of the permanence in power of the Christian Democrats. Through his continued presence in successive governments, his familiar image among those in power was one of a reminder that nothing changed. In this sense, the story of the trial of Andreotti would read like a part of the history of post-War Italy, particularly of the turbulent years of the 1970s when he was thrice at the helm of government.

The 1970s were the years of the student and trade union movements, of savage leftwing and rightwing terrorism. It was also the time when the Communists nearly broke the barrier of government through the 'historic compromise' with the D.C. Enrico Berlinguer, the Communist Party secretary, proposed a new political alliance with the D.C. to meet the crisis created by the protests, the terrorism and an economic recession. He was particularly concerned about the dangers of an authoritarian reaction that was evident in the 'strategy of tension' employed by the extreme Right sometimes with the covert involvement of members of the secret services, to set off bombs in public places in order to sow panic and create the conditions that are conducive to an authoritarian regime.

The guiding spirit of the 'historic compromise' among the Christian Democrats was the dynamic strategist Aldo Moro. His kidnap and murder by the Red Brigades in 1978 was the most telling blow dealt by terrorism. While the full truth about Moro's assassination has not come to light, the documents that Pecorelli, the murdered journalist, had threatened to publish were allegedly about the Moro affair. The Communists finally did not join the government but they had saved the democratic state. In the shadowy world that had threatened democracy, leftwing and rightwing terror and the Mafia seemed to have come together. The charges against Andreotti mention instances when the Mafia and the Red Brigades were said to be in contact with each other.

The greatest danger to the authority of the state had come from the Mafia. From its origins in rural Sicily last century, the Mafia has adapted well and grown to become a state within a state. It has a record of eliminating those who have pursued it, as is evident from the murder of two anti-Mafia judges, Falcone and Borsellino, in the early 1990s and of General Dalla Chiesa, who was in charge of anti-Mafia operations in Sicily.

An Italian institute of social studies, CENSIS, has estimated that between 12 and 15 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) comes from criminal activity. The Mafia and its counterparts, the Camorra in Naples and the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, have spread their influence in the civil society of south Italy and diversified into sectors such as the building industry.

The case against Andreotti was that during his regime the Mafia had penetrated right up to the very top, and that he had met clan bosses such as Santapaola and Toto Riina. Although the real links between the Mafia and political power have never been allowed to emerge, years of anti-Mafia investigations have established how collusion between the Mafia and the administration worked at the intermediary level of local leaders, who were themselves part of the factions at the national level. Salvo Lima, the Christian Democrat party secretary at Palermo who was killed by the Mafia in 1992, was said to be Andreotti's link with the Sicilian clans.

The pattern of clientelism that the Christian Democrats managed to institutionalise in southern Italy operated in the Mafia's case in the form of lucrative contracts awarded from state resources for the development of the south, and the Mafia's help to ensure that the turnout of voters in favour of the Christian Democrats. No receipts were given, nor were documents signed, for the Mafia is a secret society. In the local tradition it does not have a name but is referred to simply as the Cosa Nostra, meaning "our affair". Its members are called 'men of honour', and transgressing the rules of silence means death. In recent years the state's campaign against the Cosa Nostra has been aided by the testimonies of the *pentiti* (repentants), former men of honour who could testify to the Mafia's secret structures. In fact, the major burden of proof against Andreotti rested on the testimony of former mafia boss Tommaso Buscetta.

Now that the courts have not accepted the testimony as sufficient evidence, there is a clamour by politicians not only against the *pentiti* but against the judges whose work has contributed much to Italy's recent political transformations. The Leader of the Opposition, former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, said: "The verdict has to signal the beginning of the end of the season of judicial revolution that has intervened like a cancer into our political life." Berlusconi, entrepreneur and media baron, entered politics in the aftermath of the 1990s transformations and the collapse of the Christian Democrats with many of the latter's votes shifting to Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia. His company, Fininvest, is under investigation for alleged bribing.

Former Communists, who head a government for the first time in their new manifestation as the Left Democrats (D.S.), have defended the judges and their drive against corruption and the Mafia. Walter Veltroni, the party secretary, described the post-verdict climate thus: "I perceive a great desire for a restoration of the 1980s. It is as if a part of the political system has considered everything that has happened since the end of the 1980s as a troublesome parenthesis in the so-called normality of Italian life, a parenthesis to be removed as quickly as possible." ■

Staying with the monarchy

Australians vote against a republican form of government and reject a proposal to recognise Aboriginal communities as the "nation's first people".

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Singapore

IN a vote that marked a defining moment in Australia's history, the 12.3 million eligible voters of the country rejected on November 6 by a 55-45 per cent vote differential a republican form of government that was offered for their consideration. A yes vote in the referendum, in which voting was compulsory, could have enabled Canberra to renounce the British Crown as its constitutional head of state and choose a system of periodically electing an Australian as President with just as much ceremonial powers as Queen Elizabeth II now enjoys.

The result, however, did not eclipse the campaign-time argument that the republicans would have favoured a more radical option of choosing a native President in a direct election – if such a proposition had been put to vote. In the event, the monarchists had the last laugh. The republicans reasoned that the verdict reflected the people's opinion that they did not want a "politicians' republic".

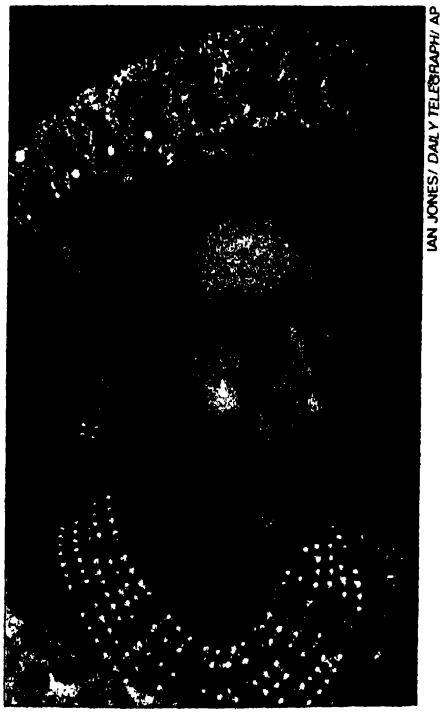
Voters were required to decide whether or not to go in for a system under which Australia's two Houses of Parliament could, at a joint sitting, choose an Australian citizen as the country's President by a two-thirds majority. This alternative to retaining an external monarch as head of state was rejected. Nevertheless, the republicans wanted to snatch a victory of a different kind from the jaws of defeat – and they succeeded in doing so.

The verdict claimed a royalist victim when, signalling a departure from tradition, Prime Minister John Howard agreed to allow the Governor-General, a resident representative of the British Queen in her capacity as the constitutional head of state, to inaugurate the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

The Olympic Games are the next major international event on the Australian calendar, and they are expected to define and showcase the country's identity on the world stage. In the perception of many Australians, the Prime Minister should continue with tradition and inaugurate the Games himself, especially after Canberra had retained the monarchy as an article of faith. However, Howard announced on November 11 in Canberra that he would not inaugurate the Games: he said his decision was motivated by a desire to ensure that there be no controversy about the inauguration.

Asserting that his decision was in "no way related to the issue of a republic", Howard said: "The Australian people have spoken on that, and that issue is off the agenda now." That was Howard at his best, putting on a brave monarchist face.

Now, Kim Beazley, the Leader of the Opposition and a puritanical republican, has vowed to keep the anti-monarchy issue on the national agenda, if only because opinion polls, as distinct from the referendum verdict, reflected a popular preference for a people-oriented republican model that no government had so far put up for consideration.



IAN JONES/ DAILY TELEGRAPH/ AP

Queen Elizabeth II. Australians have voted to retain the British Crown as their constitutional head of state.

One other issue was put to vote on November 6, but it was almost eclipsed by the debate on the monarchy. Australians were asked to state whether they would approve a proposed preamble to their 1901 Constitution in order to acknowledge the Aboriginal communities and a more distinctive indigenous group known as the Torres Strait Islanders as "the nation's first people". This proposal too was rejected. Even a casual acquaintance with the history of the evolution of modern-day Australia from the times when it was a British "penal colony" would suffice to show that the proposal related to an issue that weighed heavily on the nation's conscience.

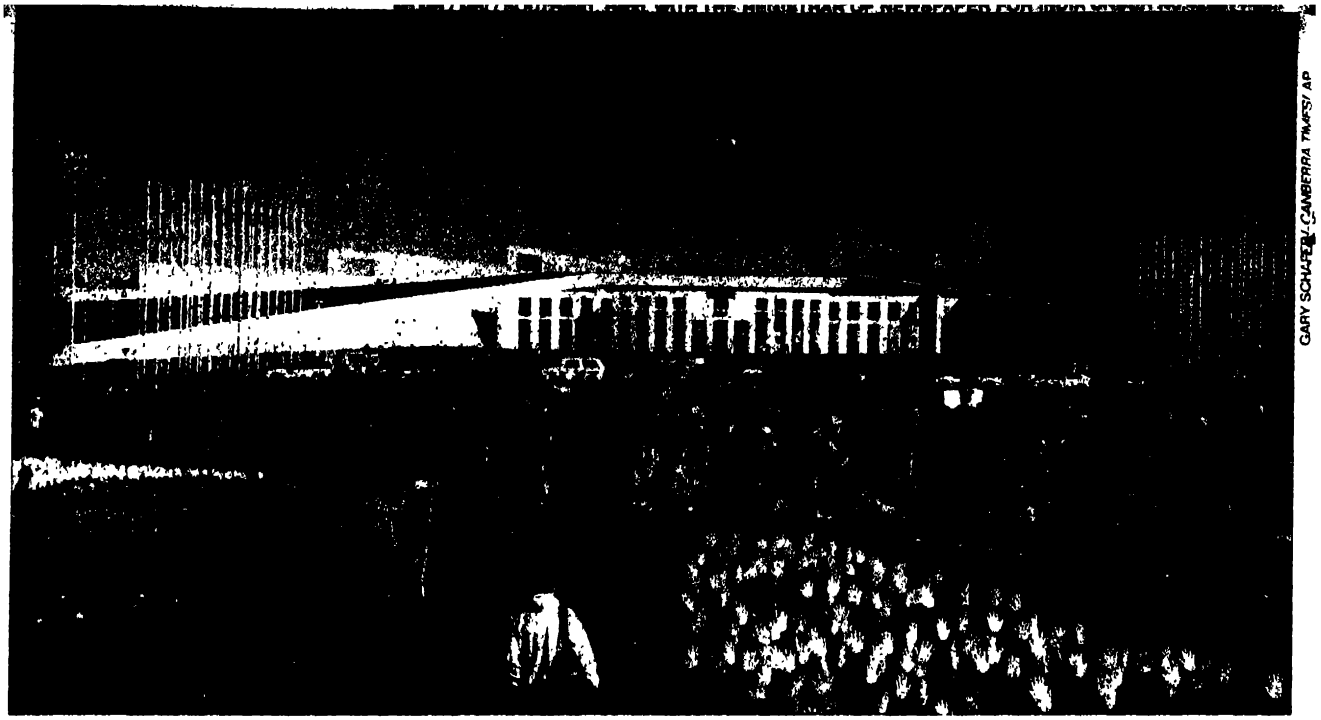
The proposed preamble would also have acknowledged the "deep kinship" of the Aborigines "with their lands" and the importance of their "ancient and continuing cultures which enrich the life of our country".

It would further have recognised the importance of the contributions made by non-white migrants of Asia-Pacific origins and the value of the environment as an asset, and would have commended the role of Australian war veterans.

The idea behind the proposed preamble was to enumerate the "core values" that would bind future generations of Australians to a vision that could facilitate the country's transition to a post-modern society which protects and cherishes multicultural values.

Howard was upset that amidst the heat and dust and the passions raised by the republican debate the people had rejected the preamble plan without considering it carefully.

However, the Aboriginal communities, who constitute 2.1 per cent of Australia's population of 19 million, were themselves not overly inspired by the expression of noble sentiments in the proposed preamble. Aboriginal leaders expressed regret that they had not been consulted while drawing up the fine print of the draft preamble that was presented to the voters. In their view, the draft had not acknowleged the land rights of the Aborigines, which form a polit-



GARY SCHAFER/ CANBERRA TIMES/ AP

Outside the National House in Canberra, a demonstration in July 1998 by Aborigines and their supporters in protest against a bill that sought to restrict the land rights of the indigenous people.

ically controversial issue, as also the real identity of the original inhabitants of the Australian continent.

The defeat of the preamble proposition is in some ways, but not explicitly, linked to the far-Right views propounded by Pauline Hanson, leader of the One Nation Party. Pauline Hanson's political platform is that Australia belongs to the original white settlers and their descendants of Anglo-Saxon and other European origins. Her One Nation Party was, of course, roundly defeated in the "millennium" national parliamentary elections held in October 1998. However, a year later, it is evident that her brand of politics has not altogether lost its appeal in Australia, at least on the margins of public discourse.

The Asia-Pacific question, in a mode that is not linked directly to the Pauline Hanson factor, was a defining paradigm (even if only behind the scenes) in regard to the basic republican issue. During the referendum campaign, the republican protagonists of Asia-Pacific origin, such as Jason Li, as well as white monarchists seemed to agree that the monarchy issue cut across racial lines. However, the referendum result, as perceived in some neighbouring Asian states, seemed to indicate just where lay the heart of the archetypal Australian – not yet a truly cosmopolitan persona, as some Canberra politicians have spoken about. The latest Australian vote in "the last of the century" was, in this perspective, seen as a continuing reaffirmation of the primacy of the Anglo-Saxon orientation of the average Australian.

It is debatable whether this view, which has not been openly articulated by any government in the Asia-Pacific region, should worry Australian policy-planners at all as they seek to carve out a greater role for Canberra in regional and international theatres, consistent with their perceptions of its strengths. Of considerable interest to Australia's Asia-Pacific neighbours is Canberra's latest military intervention in East Timor on behalf of the United Nations and the Howard Government's willingness to lead, if so assigned by the world body, a new peace-keeping force to help that sovereign-state-designate find its feet.



ROB GRIFFITH/ AP

Arriving at a polling station in Sydney to vote in the November 6 referendum, Prime Minister John Howard, a confirmed royalist, ignores a republican supporter who tries to hand him a campaign pamphlet.

During the run-up to its engagement in East Timor, a tiny and impoverished enclave with potential strategic relevance, Australia crossed quite a few diplomatic landmarks. These included its failed proposal for a European-style Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia and the 1995 Australia-Indonesia Agreement on Maintaining Security (AMT), which was recently disavowed in some measure by Jakarta in anger over Australia's intervention in East Timor. These realities should also be seen in the context of Howard's frequent affirmations of faith in Australia's security linkage with the United States (the latest such reference being the one that he made while discounting fears about a backlash of the referendum vote in the Asia-Pacific region).

Given the strong U.S. orientation in Australia's foreign policy, the vote in the referendum may seem somewhat anachronistic, despite the reasoning that Australians did not feel the need to re-fix their Constitution because it had not broken down in the first place. Not surprisingly, however, a convert to the republican cause, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, has said that the British "monarchy can't do anything more for Australia" and that, as "a more adult nation", Australia should "move on". But there is no sign yet of a fast-track to a republic. ■

A mandate for democratic rectitude

The issue of the military coup in Pakistan dominated the deliberations at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in South Africa.

M S PRABHAKARA
in Durban

THE Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) met for the first time in South Africa, in Durban, from November 12 to 15 Given the important role that the Commonwealth as a structure has played in the struggle against apartheid, even if under pressure from the majority of its members outside the so-called ABC (Australia, Britain and Canada) group of countries, it was appropriate that the 50th meeting of the heads of Commonwealth governments, the last in this millennium, took place in South Africa

As is now the practice, the Commonwealth leaders took off over the weekend (November 13-14) to a retreat' at the exclusive Fancourt Hotel and Country Club near George The media were ostentatiously barred from intruding on the informal interactions that the leaders were supposed to be having at the retreat But since the relations between the political leaders and the media have always been symbiotic, 'pools' from the media were provided access to the retreat

THE theme of CHOGM 1999 was "Globalisation and People-Centred Development" Although matters of economic development of Commonwealth countries in the unforgiving context of globalisation constituted the main agenda, the political developments in Pakistan dominated much of the deliberations

The deliberations revolved mainly around two issues First, what action the Commonwealth proposed to take, further to the decision taken on October 18, in an automatic application of the Millbrook Action Programme (named after the retreat in Millbrook during the Auckland Commonwealth summit of 1995) in the Harare Declaration to suspend Pakistan from "all councils of the Commonwealth". Second, the substance of the Report to the Secretary-General of the four-member Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which made a two-day visit to Pakistan (October 28-29), and whether its widely leaked recommendation, substantially not very different from the decision taken by the CMAG on October 18, in the wake of the coup, suspending Pakistan from 'all councils of the Commonwealth' would be enlarged by CHOGM to a suspension from the Commonwealth as a body and, further as an extreme measure, expulsion from the Commonwealth Another issue was whether the recommendation of CMAG that "Pakistan be given two years to make demonstrable and sustained progress towards the restoration of democracy should be adopted as it stood or whether CHOGM would modify it

In the event, CHOGM's decision on Pakistan remained in essence, though not in its entirety, substantially the same as that taken immediately after the coup, though there is a difference in emphasis The statement of October 18 from Marlborough House, London, read thus

"CMAG unanimously condemned the unconstitutional overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Pakistan as a serious violation of the Commonwealth s fundamental political principles as enshrined in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration The Group decided therefore that the Pakistan military regime should forthwith be suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, pending the restoration of democracy in the country

The CMAG further called upon the military regime in Islamabad to set without delay a timetable for the restoration of a democratically elected government

The Group also called upon the regime of General Pervez Musharraf to uphold the safety well being and legal rights of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, other Ministers and all others who have been detained

On the other hand, the decision on Pakistan as presented in the final communique of CHOGM said

'Heads of Government condemned



The new Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon of New Zealand with outgoing Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku, at a news conference on November 12. At centre is South African President Thabo Mbeki.

the unconstitutional overthrow of the democratically elected Government of Pakistan on October 12, 1999. They believed that no legitimacy should be accorded to the military regime and called for the restoration of civilian democratic rule without delay. They endorsed CMAG's decision to suspend the military regime in Pakistan from the councils of the Commonwealth, pending the restoration of democracy in the country. Heads of Government requested CMAG to keep the situation in Pakistan under review and be prepared to recommend further measures to be taken by the Commonwealth if progress to democracy is not made speedily."

The two new points in the final communique are the omission of a reference to any time-frame for the restoration of democracy and the call for the immediate release of "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif".

TO the extent one could make out, India did not openly exert itself to influence the stand of CHOGM on Pakistan. In his brief and only intervention on the Pakistan issue, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee made in the first executive session, asked for an undiluted application of the Milbrook Action Programme. He noted that while the four member Ministerial Mission had called for "demonstrable benchmarks of progress (which) would include within the first year of the period of review the reform of electoral process and institutions including the establishment of a fully independent electoral commission", the fact of the matter was that institutions of democracy did exist in Pakistan, "including an independent Election Commission which conducted and supervised the 1997 General Elections to the satisfaction of the Commonwealth Electoral Observers Groups".

This was truly one occasion when India really did not try to exert itself overmuch to 'isolate' Pakistan. Indeed, Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh told the Indian media that India had not even tried to take the 'Asian seat' on the CMAG, as a matter of policy.

Sources other than official ones and off-the-record Indian briefings confirmed that outrage over the coup was widespread, and that this and was most forcefully articulated by the heads of government of Nigeria and Bangladesh, both of whom had direct and personal memories and experiences of military regimes. During a media briefing, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria (the only head of government to address the media directly) spoke feelingly of his sadness over the coup and dismissed suggestions of a possible consensus in CHOGM about 'good' and 'bad' military regimes, the regime in Pakistan coming under the former category. At almost every media briefing, questions relating to the stand of the Commonwealth on the Pakistan developments predominated. Indeed, at the media briefing addressed by Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the CHOGM Secretary-General, on November 11, the majority of the questions dealt with the situation in Pakistan.

A RELATED and far more important issue that dominated CHOGM '99 was the future role of the CMAG. The question before CHOGM was whether the CMAG, whose Report to CHOGM '99 (October 1, 1999), the second report of the CMAG on the 1991 Harare Declaration, had recommended (in Chapter 5) a significant enlargement of its mandate to enable the CMAG to deal with situations where "there is not a complete derogation from democracy and constitutional rule, but where is a clear-cut breakdown of democracy, sustained abuse of fundamental human rights, or otherwise serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth (sic) fundamental political values."

As instances, the recommendation cited three scenarios:

* "If national elections are postponed beyond the constitutional life of the government without the proper observance of all the prescribed constitutional provisions."
* "If a government bans or impedes, on a systematic and sustained basis, the legitimate political activities of opposition parties, groups, individuals or the media."
* "If there is compelling evidence, corroborated by other recognised and independent national or international observers, of a government's systematic and widespread violation of the fundamental human rights of citizens through the abrogation of the rule of law or the independence of the judiciary."

In such eventualities too, as in situations where democracy and constitutional rule had been clearly overthrown through military intervention, the Report recommended that the CMAG be "seized of the situation" and endeavour to promote the Harare principles "in all appropriate ways".

This recommendation, envisaging an enlarged role and mandate for the CMAG, which received wide support from non-governmental organisation (NGO) lobbies and civil society structures, however, watered down to just one paragraph in the final communique:

"Heads of Government commended the role played by CMAG as a custodian of the Harare Principles. They agreed that CMAG should continue to address serious or persistent violations of those Principles and that its future mandate should be considered further by the Commonwealth High Level Group."

The 'High Level Group' (HLG) is a new structure that has been established by CHOGM '99 "to review the role of the Commonwealth and advise it on how best to respond to the challenges of the new century". To be chaired by South African President Thabo Mbeki in his capacity as Chairman of the Commonwealth (a new position, making the Queen both in form and in terminology the ceremonial head of the Commonwealth) the 10-member HLG includes the heads of government of Australia, Fiji, India, Malta, Singapore, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. It is to submit its report to the next CHOGM summit, which is to be held in Canberra in 2001.

Given the comprehensive nature of the HLG's primary mandate, its secondary task of considering the 'future mandate' of the CMAG is unlikely to receive its most urgent attention. The pattern of formulating apparently radical-sounding proposals and shelving them by seeking more time to study them, or forming another committee to study them, is not exactly new.

However, it would be unfair to attribute the shelving of the proposal to enlarge the mandate of the CMAG to bureaucratic lassitude alone. The proposals, made by the CMAG itself, are far-reaching and have important and unforeseeable implications for the concept of sovereignty of nation-states. Indeed, the anomaly is inherent even in the Harare Declaration, especially in the vagueness of the crucial formulation about 'good governance'. It does not take much imagination to see how such a formulation may easily degenerate into the most malignant kinds of intrusion into the sovereignty of nation-states by countries and structures with an agenda of re-colonisation of the world through self-appointed vigilantes of democratic rectitude and good governance. ■

Crackdown in Pakistan

The Musharraf regime turns the heat on politicians and others who have looted the nation's wealth, but its final intention is as yet unclear.

AMIT BARUAH
in Islamabad

PAKISTAN'S military regime has launched a major operation against bank loan defaulters. There is popular support for the operation, which aims to revive the ailing financial institutions and seeks to bring to book people who have looted the wealth of the nation. According to an official communique, this is the first such campaign since the country came into existence 52 years ago.

Cronyism, which has been a feature of the local culture, straddles the fields of politics and finance in Pakistan. The foundation for this culture was laid during Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's regime between 1977 and 1988. With the end of martial law in 1985 and the return of an elected government in 1988, it was expected that Pakistan's rulers would pay greater attention to the needs of the people. Instead, the governments run by Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto enriched themselves at the expense of the masses as the Army watched from the sidelines. However, the fact that Gen. Pervez Musharraf's regime is looking for Admiral Mansoor-ul-Haq, who was the Navy chief under Benazir Bhutto, tells its own tale.

Sharif's penchant for grandiose schemes landed banks and financial institutions in deep trouble. Banks are yet to overcome the problems created by the "yellow cab" scheme launched during his previous tenure. However, it is the "big fish" that have created the real problems for the economy. Nearly 90 per cent of the national budget goes to service debts and meet defence expenditure, leaving very little by way of funds for development needs. If Pakistan is to come out of the economic mess, it is essential that the government generates revenue.

Apart from loan defaulters, the military regime has targeted those who have defaulted payments on their utility bills. A report in the Urdu daily *Pakistan* said that the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) had to recover Rs.3 crores from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, Rs. 3.25 crores from Radio Pakistan and Rs. 7.5 crores from the Heavy Mechanical Complex.

The deadline for the the month-long repayment period ended on November 16 and the banks and financial institutions had recovered Rs.8 billion of outstanding loans and Rs.2 billion in utility payments. At least 30 persons, including former Ministers belonging to various political parties, were arrested in a crackdown on defaulters from November 17. A press release issued by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), set up under a presidential Ordinance, listed Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shahbaz Sharif and former Ehtesab Bureau Chief Saifur Rehman among the defaulters. The release added: "Some persons like Asif Zardari... are already in jail while Benazir Bhutto, wanted in a number of cases, is a proclaimed offender and outside the country."

Sharif, who is accused of hijacking and attempting to murder the Army chief, Gen. Musharraf, along with other passengers on a Pakistan International Airlines aircraft on October 12, was also booked under the new Accountability Ordinance. He was produced before a court in Karachi on November 19; he could face the death penalty if convicted on the charges of hijacking, attempt to murder and criminal conspiracy. Under the new Accountability law, a person convicted of corrupt practices can face up to 14 years in jail and be disqualified from holding public office or contesting elections for 21 years.

The law stipulates that the NAB must investigate the case within 75 days, after which it is transferred to a special civilian court, which must decide the case within 30 days. An appeal has to be filed in the High Court within 10 days of the Accountability Court's verdict. The final appeal must be disposed of within 30 days.

Chairman of the NAB Syed Amjad Hussain, who is at present a serving Lieutenant-General, can authorise the detention of any person for 90 days. No person can be released without his written orders. The NAB has also been given the powers to freeze property. Interestingly, the Ordinance will enable the military regime to investigate cases of corruption and corrupt practices dating back to 1985, when martial law was formally lifted by Gen. Zia and the procession of civilian governments began. The Ehtesab Act of 1997, enacted when Nawaz Sharif was in power, only permitted investigations from 1990 onwards.



ZIA MAZHAR AP

Surrounded by police and security personnel, Nawaz Sharif at a court in Karachi on November 15.

Current Affairs Editor of *The News*, Imtiaz Alam, wrote recently that the military operation against defaulters had been even-handed and politicians from both sides of the political divide were targeted. However, he added: "The notable exceptions are the serving armed forces personnel, the judiciary, the bureaucracy and technocrats employed by the previous government." Action against a few defaulters, according to him, would not eradicate the root causes of corruption. "But it may set an example by aiming at top ex-officials and politicians who had escaped so far. The best course would be to keep the swift and short surgery limited while focussing on long-term structural and institutional remedies." He lauded Gen. Musharraf for initiating the

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Pressure on Pakistan

AMIT BARUAH

USING harsh language to denounce the October 12 coup in Pakistan, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Durban, held from November 12 to 15, approved Pakistan's continued suspension from the Commonwealth councils.

In response to the Commonwealth statement, the Pakistan Foreign Office said that the erstwhile British colonies had ignored "ground realities" in Pakistan as well as the CMAG report. According to the authorities in Pakistan, the CMAG report acknowledged the "strongly felt desire for change in Pakistan" but did not adequately address the failure of Pakistan's democratic regimes to provide "just and honest government".

The Foreign Office said: "The summit communique has lost sight of substance and dwelt on the form of democracy." It added that CHOGM did not take into account the declared determination of the Government "to move expeditiously and simultaneously on the twin tracks of reform and democratisation". The statement added that "Pakistan would continue to interact with the Commonwealth exclusively on the basis of reciprocity, the norms of diplomatic propriety and our national interests."

The Durban statement will create problems for Pakistan's military regime in its search for international legitimacy. The flying visits made by the Army Chief, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Turkey showed that the search for legitimacy is very much on. The military regime correctly believes that it needs recognition in the right quarters and should remain engaged with the international community. The Commonwealth statement denying "legitimacy" to the military regime must be particularly unsettling for it.

It needs to be seen what kind of approach leading members of the Commonwealth, such as the United Kingdom, plan to adopt in bilateral dealings with Pakistan. If the Commonwealth declaration is to be taken seriously, it could affect bilateral dealings between member-nations and Pakistan. In the face of the Commonwealth's tough stance, Pakistan too will look for a new strategy of engagement. It will try to develop and rebuild democratic institutions at all levels, including at the grassroots.

Although Pakistan has articulated this position formally, it will need to work out an arrangement within the Commonwealth. This club of nations is conscious of the fact that having taken a position on democratic principles in Africa, it must apply the same to Pakistan. According to the Millbrook Action Programme, countries in violation of the Harare declaration of the Commonwealth, particularly in the event of an unconstitutional overthrow of a democratically elected government, should return to democracy within a reasonable time-frame.

The action programme speaks of a "stipulation of up to two years as the time-frame for the restoration of democracy where the institutions are not in place to permit the holding of elections within, say, a maximum of six months". While formal institutions to hold elections are in place in Pakistan, their credibility and independence are another matter.

Pakistan is also miffed at India's approach at the Commonwealth summit. New Delhi saw the summit as an occasion to pursue its own agenda and undermine the military regime in Pakistan with which, for the moment, it does not propose to have any dealings. A statement issued by the Pakistan Foreign Office said: "All friendly countries are dealing with the Government of Pakistan led by General Pervez Musharraf....the Indian leaders spared no effort to malign Pakistan at the Commonwealth summit seeking stronger action against Pakistan. Having failed in their ill-intentioned exertions, they are now giving vile twists to the Commonwealth decisions. This is deplorable." ■

process, but argued that "he must also know how to conclude it at the earliest... without getting bogged down under the burden of the unachievable."

The only voices of dissent are from the religious Right, who are uncomfortable with the General's choice of candidates to the apex National Security Council (NSC) and the Cabinet. Most of the appointees are Western educated, except for an Islamic scholar inducted later. Jamaat-e-Islami chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed has been quoted as saying that those who themselves had plots worth crores of rupees in different cities were not fit to check others' accountability. This was a potshot at Gen. Musharraf, who made public his assets, which include plots of land in different cities. He also said that Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz was an employee of an American bank (Citibank) while Omar Asghar Khan, who ran a non-governmental organisation (NGO), lived on foreign aid. Such persons, the Qazi claimed, could not act in the national interest.

Late in 1998, the Jamaat leader, while addressing a congregation in Islamabad, described the Army's Corps Commanders as "crore commanders" – a description that provoked a sharp rejoinder from Rawalpindi. So far, the General has not found it necessary to dance to the tune of the religious gallery and this has displeased the religious Right, of which the Jamaat is an important constituent.

At a recent press conference in Islamabad, Lashkar-i-Taiba chief Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, however, indicated that his group would not enter into a confrontation with the regime. Nevertheless, he extended an "invitation" to Gen. Musharraf to base Pakistan's law and Constitution on the Koran and the Sunnah. He said that in Egypt and Algeria Islamic elements were branded "terrorists" and the state acted against them. He said that in Pakistan the Lashkar, which had acknowledged its military action in Kashmir, had no intention of getting into a conflict with the government. The Lashkar chief is more interested in persisting with the "Kashmir *jehad*". Given the nature of this task, it is impossible for the Lashkar to operate without the logistical support of the Pakistan Army.

The Lashkar chief has articulated an "escape route" to buy peace with the government while continuing with the "*jehad*" in Kashmir and building up the organisation's strength within Pakistan. Such a formula will help silence critics who want a "pure" Islamic system to take root in Pakistan.

If Gen. Musharraf's belief in a tolerant Islam is genuine, he will not only have to encourage that feeling within Pakistan, but also try to halt the "*jehadi* forces" that are using Pakistan as a base to export Islamic militancy. ■

Pirates on the prowl

The Indian Navy and the Coast Guard help secure a hijacked ship in the Indian waters. Is there an LTTE angle to the incident?

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Mumbai

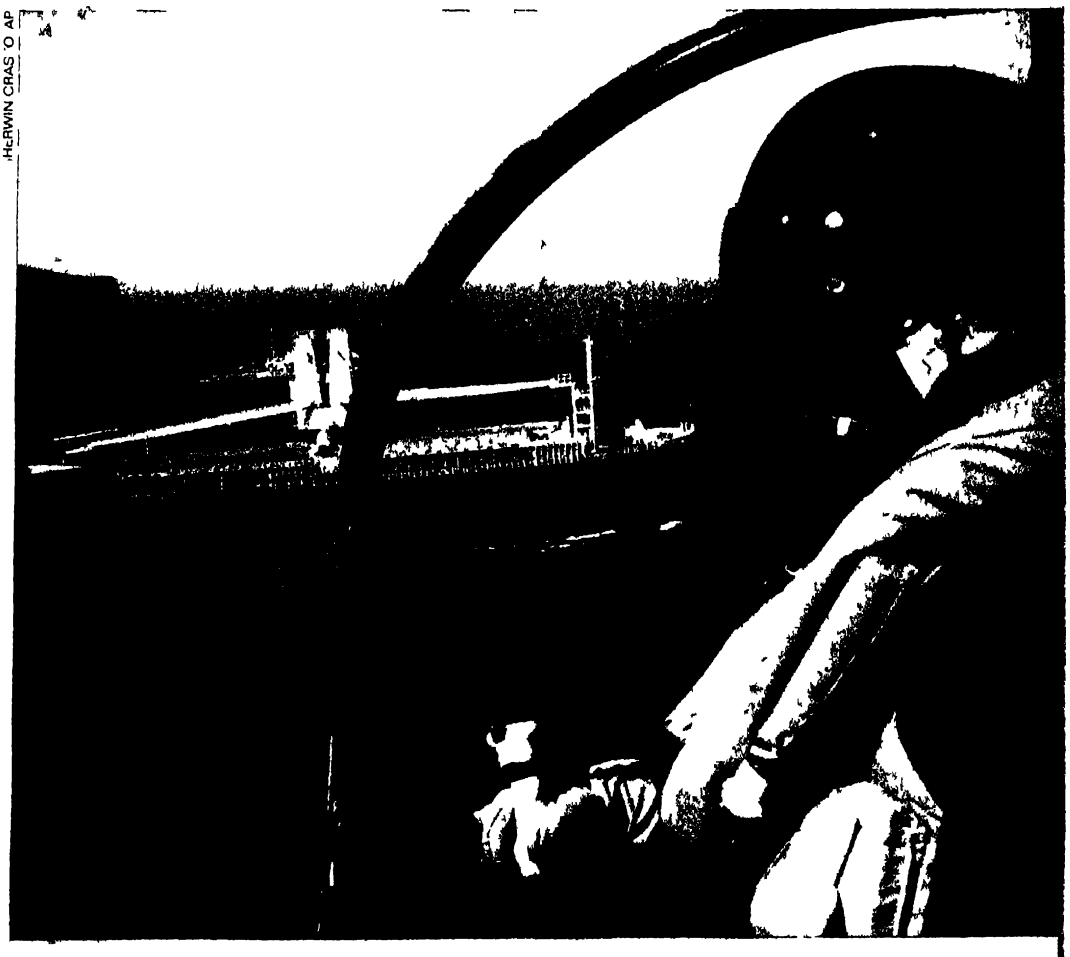
ON October 22, the 8,900-tonne M V *Alondra Rainbow* disappeared The Panamanian-registered ship had left the port of Kuala Tanjung in Sumatra, carrying 7,000 tonnes of aluminium ingots for delivery at Milke, Japan Radio contact was lost a few days later *Alondra Rainbow*'s crew of 17 were found 11 days later by the Japanese Maritime Security Agency, floating in a life raft off the south Thailand coast after having been jettisoned The Japanese owned ship had been hijacked by armed pirates, who had taken it out into the Arabian Sea

It would not have been surprising if the *Alondra Rainbow* had never been seen again Dozens of hijacked ships routinely disappear in the pirate infested seas off South-East Asia – the Malacca Straits in particular – and the South China Sea (In 1998, 192 ships were hijacked and 61 crew members killed by pirates in these areas Officials have pointed to a steady rise in piracy through this year too) But prompt action by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard has led to the recovery of *Alondra Rainbow* and the arrest of the pirates. The operation to secure *Alondra Rainbow* is being hailed by security officials in South-East Asia as a model of the kind of international cooperation needed to fight maritime hijacking.

News of *Alondra Rainbow*'s disappearance was released to merchant ships in the region through the Piracy Reporting Centre in Kuala Lumpur, part of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) The IMB put out details of the ship's shape and configuration, asking any vessels that spotted it to report the matter News came from the merchant vessel M V *Al-Shuadda*, which sighted the ship, headed northwest, 96 km southwest of Kanyakumari The IMB notified the Indian Coast Guard which sent a Dornier aircraft to investigate By November 13, the aircraft and the Coast Guard ship *Tarabhat* had made contact with the ship off Ponnani, Kerala

For two days, the pirates on board *Alondra Rainbow* traded small-arms fire with *Tarabhat* and the Dornier, refusing to halt The ship's engines were pushed to the limits reaching a speed of 14.5 knots This was enough to outstrip *Tarabhat*, and the Navy's missile corvette, *INS Prahaar*, was alerted on November 15 *Prahaar*, which was on routine exercises in the Arabian Sea, headed south to cut off *Alondra Rainbow* near Goa But despite a fire having broken out on the ship after the engines overheated the pirates refused to stop At 7 15 a m the next day *Prahaar* fired its heavy guns across *Alondra Rainbow*'s bows

Before they surrendered, the 15 pirates made a desperate effort to sink the ship opening the inlets to its sea chest and several valves meant to keep water



JH-RWIN CRASTO AP

M.V. *Alondra Rainbow*, seen from an Indian Coast Guard helicopter off Mumbai on November 20.

out. It took sustained operations by teams of divers and experts from *INS Delhi*, *INS Gomti* and the Coast Guard ship *Veera* to keep the merchant ship afloat. *Alondra Rainbow*, which the pirates had repainted to carry the name M.V. *Megha Rama* and given fake Belize registration, was towed into Mumbai on November 20. The arrested pirates will now face interrogation by Navy Intelligence and the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.), and legal proceedings to return the ship and its cargo to its legitimate owners will commence.

Coast Guard officials said that part of *Alondra Rainbow*'s cargo may have been sold in Cambodia as part of an arms deal between the pirates and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Reports suggested that at the time of the ship's detection, it was carrying only 4,000 tonnes of aluminium ingots. While no evidence of LTTE complicity was available, some Coast Guard officials believe that linkages between South-East Asian insurgent movements and the Sri Lankan terrorist organisation make such a deal possible. IB officials, however, are less than enthused by the theory, and believe that the hijacking of *Alondra Rainbow* was merely a crime for profit.

HIGH-SEAS hijacking is growing alarmingly, a phenomenon some believed to be fuelled by the economic recession in South-East Asia. In June, the United Kingdom's Shipping Minister, Glenda Jackson, called attention to International Maritime Organisation (IMO) statistics which showed that attacks on ships on the high seas had increased by 15 per cent over the previous 18 months. Ships were advised to exercise special caution between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. and to maintain continuous radio contact with other vessels on 2182 megahertz while travelling off South-East Asia, Somalia and the island of Socotra. IMO officials expressed concern that several recent hijackings involved the use of automatic weapons, and increasingly resulted in crew fatalities.

Merchant ship cargo, often valued at millions of dollars, has provoked increasingly gruesome crimes. On March 5, the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department of China announced the arrest of 20 pirates for the mass murder of 23 Chinese sailors the previous year. The sailors had been shot dead on November 16, 1998, and their bodies thrown overboard from their Hong Kong-registered ship, which had set sail from Shanghai. The bodies were found at sea in December 1998. The ship was then reflagged, repainted, and handed over to a new crew. China faced severe criticism from the IMB, in February, for its failure to prosecute members of a pirate gang caught red handed, and some marine journals charged elements in the country's Navy of being complicit in such crimes.

But the March arrests show that in recent months, China has been coming down heavily on maritime hijacking. In January, port authorities at Zhangjia in Jiangsu province of China while inspecting engine markings on the Honduran-registered *Sanei-1*, discovered that it was in fact the Panamanian-registered freighter *Tenyu*. *Tenyu*, owned by the Japanese shipping company Masumoto Kisen KK, had been carrying aluminium ingots worth 500 million yen when it left Indonesia for South Korea on September 27, 1998. Its 14-member crew – two South Korean and 12 Japanese – were never seen again. Chinese police officials who interrogated Tenyu's Indonesian crew found that the sailors had no knowledge of the ship's past.

Chinese maritime authorities also picked up seven suspects in connection with the disappearance of the bulk carrier *Cheung Son*, Panama-registered again, in late December 1998. The mineral-ore laden ship had vanished while sailing towards China through the Taiwan Straits. Nothing was known for certain about its 23-member crew until fishermen found three bodies off the South China coast. The Hong Kong authorities identified the three bodies as those of members of the *Cheung Son*'s crew. The deaths prompted Noel Chung, regional manager of Piracy Reporting Centre, to call for "strong government action to wipe out piracy in Asian waters before it gets out of control".

Chances, however, are that even first-rate transnational cooperation, of the kind that led to *Alondra Rainbow*'s recovery, will not end marine crime much. For one, customers for a ship's cargo are easy to come by. In June, armed pirates in specially equipped speedboats stormed a Thai tanker carrying 2,060 tonnes of gas oil, a fuel used by ships. Twelve members of the crew were imprisoned in the ship's cabins for two days and then ordered overboard into a motorboat with a faulty engine. They drifted in the rough seas for 14 hours before being rescued by a passing ship. One sailor was held hostage because he knew how to operate the ship's valves. The attack, which took place off the Malaysian resort island of Tioman, was one of a string of similar enterprises capitalising on the ready market for gas oil and petrol.

A spectrum of commodities attract pirates. A fortnight after *Marine Fortuner* left the Chinese port of Nantong on March 1, and headed for India with over 6,000 tonnes of soda ash, the ship was hijacked by 20 heavily armed pirates. An IMB report on the hijacking produced results; port authorities in the city of Fanghchenggang discovered that technical data of the Honduras-registered *Nuovo Tierra*, which docked for maintenance work in May, was identical to that of the missing ship. In this case, all 14 crew members confessed to the Chinese police, their involvement in the hijacking. The Taiwanese-owned ship was returned to its owner, but the cargo had long been disposed of.

JUST how the *Alondra Rainbow* affair ends remains to be seen. Coast Guard Deputy Inspector General A.K. Mahajan said that his organisation would "try to find out whether the pirates have any link with the Inter Services Intelligence or the LTTE". In the so-far improbable event that they do, India's security establishment will have one more serious cause for concern. I.B. investigators are certain to focus on possible links between the hijackers and insurgent groups in South-East Asia, particularly Myanmar. But even if no such connection is found, *Alondra Rainbow*'s hijacking could mean trouble for India.

As the Chief Staff Officer in charge of the Western Naval Command's Operations, M.P. Taneja, pointed out, the *Alondra Rainbow* affair is the first reported incident of piracy in Indian waters. But with the thinly-policed Andaman Islands perched over South-East Asia's troubled waters, and pirates evidently looking for fresh markets in West Asia, both the Coast Guard and Navy will have to work hard to ensure that the seas around India do not become a major transit route for pirates. IMB official, Captain P. Mukundan, speaking to Singapore's *Shipping Times* in Kuala Lumpur, hailed the Indian operation as a "perfect example of cooperation". Indian maritime security officials can only hope that much more operations of this nature will not be needed in the near future. |

A RAVAGED REGION

After the killer cyclone, disease and famine stalk coastal Orissa.

SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
in Orissa

COASTAL Orissa remained grim two weeks after the October 29 cyclonic storm had devastated vast areas of it. The death roll mounted by the day as several affected areas, which had been rendered inaccessible, were accessed. The official toll as of November 15 stood at 9,524, the district-wise break-up being: Jagatsinghpur 8,119; Puri 287; Cuttack 392; Kendrapara 242; Nayagarh 3; Khurda 84; Bhadrak 92; Keonjhar 27; Dhenkanal 50; Jajpur 158; Balasore 48; and Mayurbhanj 7. Unofficial estimates put the toll above 50,000.

According to official estimates, 1.26 crore people in 12 districts have been affected. As many as 12.48 lakh houses have been damaged, and 15.7 lakh hectares of paddy crop and 32,956 hectares of other crops destroyed. Moreover, most of the paddy fields have been rendered uncultivable by the saline water carried 15 km inland by massive tidal waves.

State Revenue Minister Jagannath Patnaik, who is in charge of the relief operations, told *Frontline*: "If immediate steps are not taken, we will be saddled with a drought-like situation. We are giving top priority to developing a strategy for rabi cultivation." However, owing to the large-scale destruction of cattle, the State faces an acute shortage of draught animals. The Government planned to procure bullocks from the unaffected regions of the State and also from Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab. Tractors, not commonly employed in ploughing operations in the State, were also being mobilised. Negotiations were on to procure seeds from Maharashtra and Gujarat. "We have invited horticulturists to help us out in areas where saline water has ruined the land. We are willing to change the pattern of cultivation if necessary," Patnaik said.

The State government had sought a Central assistance of Rs.10,000 crores. The Centre granted Rs.200 crores. Patnaik said that the assistance extended was insufficient as rehabilitation work alone would require Rs.2,500 crores. The Government plans to approach the World Bank for low interest loans for housing, electricity and infrastructural projects. "One of our top priorities is to rehabilitate the people who have been rendered homeless. HUDCO (Housing and Urban Development Corporation) has evolved a Rs.190-crore housing scheme. We plan to construct cyclone-proof houses," the Minister said.

ALTHOUGH the water level had receded in most areas, several villages in the Ersama block of Jagatsinghpur district, such as Padmapur, Bhitarandhari, Dhinkia, Noagaon, Bagadia, Balitutha, Gandikipur and Kunjakothi – were still inundated. Stagnant water and rotting bodies and carcasses posed a major threat to the survivors. Relief materials were air-dropped in these areas. Unofficial reports stated that 37 villages in Ersama had been washed away by tidal waves. Bijay Nayak, who represents Ersama in the State Assembly, said: "I am sure that in Ersama alone more than 20,000 people have died. More than 50 per cent of them are Bengalis who came from Midnapore."

P.K. Pani, Additional District Magistrate of Jagatsinghpur, said: "We are unable to enter some areas in Ersama because of the overpowering stench of rotting bodies and stagnant water. More than 14,000 hectares of agricultural land there has been destroyed and rendered unfertile. We are staring straight at a drought."

Unofficial reports stated that the cyclone had claimed more than 5,000 lives in adjoining Balikuda. The Army cleared two roads to Ersama. In areas that were inaccessible, Army personnel supplied drinking water by boats. "We lower our boats east of Ersama and through a creek, deliver relief materials," Brigadier R.S. Rawat, who is in charge of relief operations by the Army, said. An Army team of 5,000 men planned to clear another road to Ersama via a bridge 5 km away. "Approaches to the bridge from both sides are blocked. We are clearing them," Rawat said.

The Army also planned to open a 30-bed hospital in Ersama. Three Army hospitals were functioning at Balikuda, Tirtol and Kendrapara. Two more were to be opened in Mahakalpara and Ersama. A team of Army doctors and volunteers from Pune, stationed at Balikuda, visited Ersama to treat patients. The Army cleared a stretch of 1,712 km of road, subsidiary roads and railway tracks; evacuated 24,201 people; treated 16,319 patients; and distributed 5,922 packets of food and 60,600 kilolitres of water. With the job of providing immediate relief over, the Air Force operated two aircraft to drop relief materials in Ersama and Balikuda, which remained inaccessible. The Air Force delivered a daily average of 27 tonnes of food materials.



V. SUDERSHAN

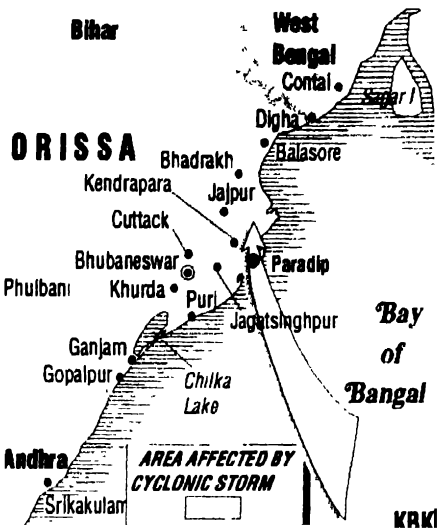
Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang.

The Army and volunteers of organisations such as the Anand Marg, the Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) and Christian missionary organisations were involved in the disposal of corpses and carcasses. The Government has instructed District Magistrates and gram panchayat chiefs to burn the bodies. "We are providing them as much petrol, diesel and other material required for this," Patnaik said. Of the 3.5 lakh head of cattle killed in the cyclone, about 75,600 have been disposed of.

Defence Minister George Fernandes, who heads the Central moni-

toring team, announced in Bhubaneswar on November 12 that a cyclone reconstruction authority would be formed to deal with the current crisis as also similar calamities that may occur in the future. The authority, comprising representatives of both the Central and State governments, would tackle long-term issues arising out of natural disasters.

Meanwhile, other Congress(I)-ruled States have adopted various districts affected by the cyclone. Puri has been adopted by Delhi, Kendrapara by Karnataka, Jagatsinghpur by Maharashtra, Bhadrak by Rajasthan, Jajpur by Madhya Pradesh and Keonjhar by Goa. The Orissa Government insists that the Congress(I) governments would merely supplement the relief materials and manpower already available and not adopt any district. However, Goa's Minister for Agriculture Sanjay Bandhekar told *Frontline*: "We will adopt Keonjhar. We will first assess the damage and then send officials to rehabilitate the people." The Goa government has set up a special cell for relief, and all administrative officers, Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of



Parliament in Goa have been asked to donate a month's salary to a relief and rehabilitation fund.

Senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers of Orissa resent the policy of adoption. "This will give rise to friction between the administrative officers of Orissa and other States," a senior officer said on the condition of anonymity. He said that this was a political gimmick adopted by the Congress(I) ahead of the Assembly elections in order to project a picture of solidarity. "The man who is truly the knight in shining armour is Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who is monitoring all relief work from Hyderabad instead of politicising matters by visiting Orissa," he said. Apart from sending 2,000 government employees to undertake relief work, Chandrababu Naidu assigned experts from different departments, such as engineering, medicine, and urban development, to the affected areas.

Not all IAS officers were happy with the planning and execution of relief works. Pratap Mukhopadhyay, Member, Board of Revenue, and the second senior most officer in the State, said: "A crisis such as this cannot be controlled from one place. Senior officers should have been deployed immediately to the affected areas as on-the-spot decisions had to be taken. Junior officers in the ranks of District Magistrates and Additional District Magistrates often hesitate to take them."

He said that the disaster was as much man-made as it was natural. The persistent depletion of forests in the coastal belt



SUNIL MALHOTRA/REUTERS

Khandadhar village. The storm brought down innumerable trees and destroyed thousands of houses in coastal Orissa.

for the last 20 years had resulted in an ecological imbalance, he pointed out. The cyclone had swept away whatever little forest area was left and another cyclone of similar intensity would occur, he said. "It is a vicious cycle." Another senior officer expressed his displeasure at the way relief materials were distributed. "Two truck loads of lemon rice that came from Andhra Pradesh was dumped at the Kalinga stadium and it lay there for over 48 hours. The rice got spoilt and had to be destroyed," he said. He further said that more than 15,000 polythene covers were waiting to be distributed.



HIMANGSHU WATTS/TRS

Villagers outside their makeshift home in Paradeep. A spectre of starvation looms over the coastal belt of Orissa.

THE port town of Paradeep almost returned to normalcy with the clearing of the roads and the restoration of water supply. As of November 13, five of the eight berths were filled. "We have achieved 50 per cent utilisation and hope to achieve 100 per cent within 100 days," Port Trust Chairman Santosh Mahapatra told *Frontline*. He said: "There is marginal silting of the channels; where there should be 14 metres of water there is 12 metres. But this can be desilted soon. We are waiting for an improvement in power supply in order to load iron ore from the port plant. The damage to the port, estimated at Rs.65 crores, has not been much, considering that the port was set up at a cost of Rs.2,000 crores. What has been lost are the roofs of some godowns and office buildings, the electrical systems and 60 metres of the security wall around the port."

Electricity and water supply have been restored in most parts of Bhubaneswar. The animals in the Nandankanan Biological Park did not receive proper food and attention and as a result a number of camels are reported to have died. The Central zoo authority released Rs.20 lakhs for the immediate needs of Nandankanan. According to official estimates, Rs.4 crores is required to get the zoo back on its feet. With the cyclone destroying most of the bamboo shoots - the prime food for elephants - herds of elephants from the Wildlife Sanctuary are raiding villages such as Chandaka, Andharua, Kantaban and Jokalandi.

NOTWITHSTANDING the State Government's claim that no epidemic was likely to break out in the cyclone- and flood-affected areas as precautionary measures had been taken, cases of gastroenteritis, cholera and diarrhoea were increasing. Official reports stated that 35 deaths had occurred owing to diseases and that nearly 5,000 persons had been admitted to hospitals. Cuttack reported 22 diarrhoea deaths and two cholera deaths, and 987 people were afflicted by diarrhoea in the district.

On November 13, a Sadbhabana Health Care Team from Gujarat, consisting of 150 doctors, arrived in Bhubaneswar with medicines meant for distribution in the affected districts. State Health Secretary Meena Gupta said that besides health teams from other States, 311 doctors and 515 paramedical workers had been deployed to treat the victims. She also said that Orissa had received 106 truckloads of halogen and paracetamol tablets and intravenous fluids.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was actively engaged in providing medical relief. It deployed eight medical teams, comprising medical and paramedical officers from New Delhi, Hyderabad, Jamshedpur and Durgapur, in Jagatsinghpur, Ersama, Astarang, Bhadrak, Cuttack, Kendrapara and Jajpur. These medical teams were also distributing drinking water. A team of international doctors supplied medicines required for one lakh people for a period of three months.

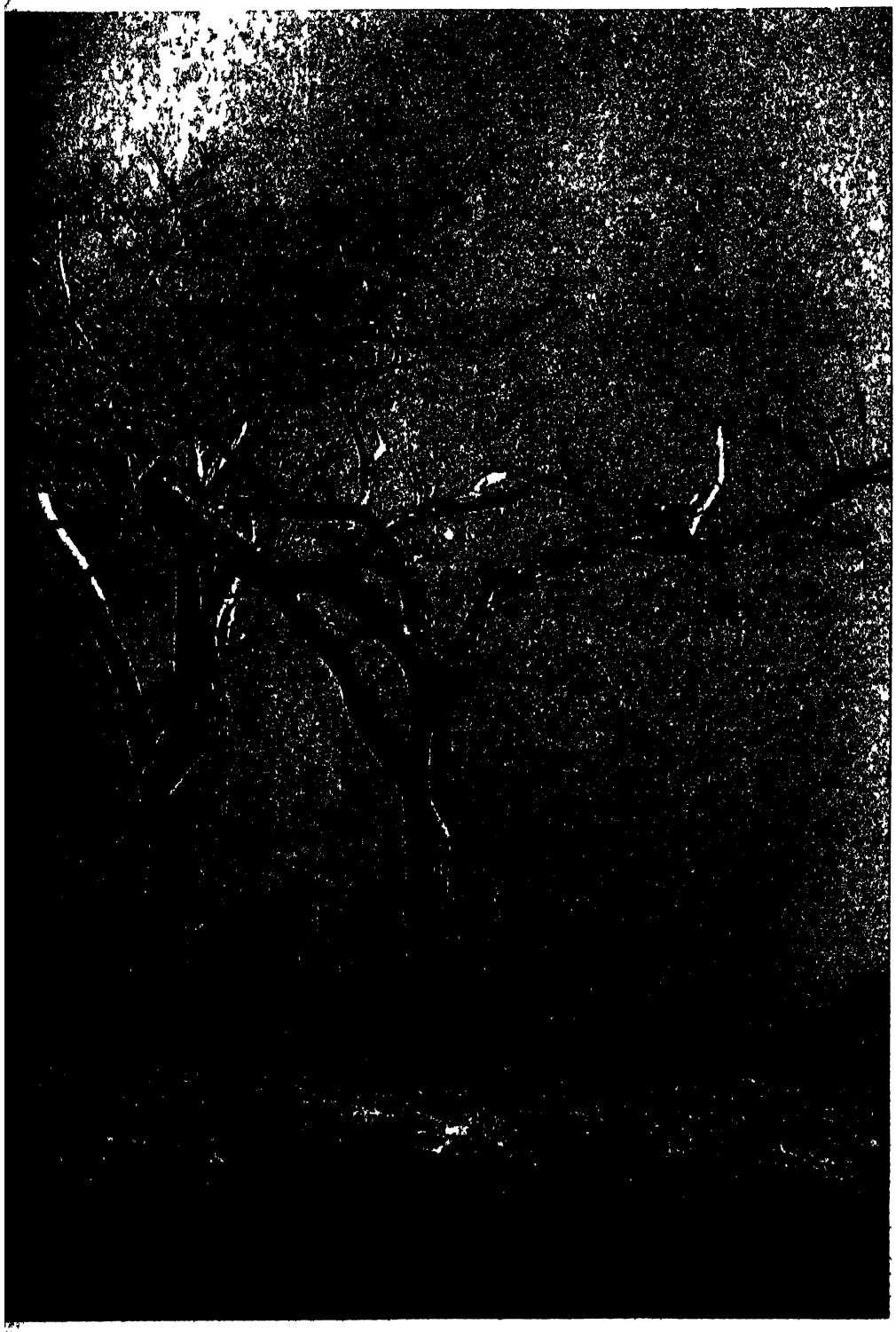
The United Nations has contributed in a big way. It has already provided medicine and relief materials worth $1.8 million. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has provided 420 tonnes of medicines and other relief supplies. The World Food Programme, which had earlier promised $200,000, has increased the grant to $375,000. The U.N. Population Fund will provide assistance worth $170,000. The World Health Organisation will extend $100,000 in order to set up an emergency surveillance system to control epidemic.

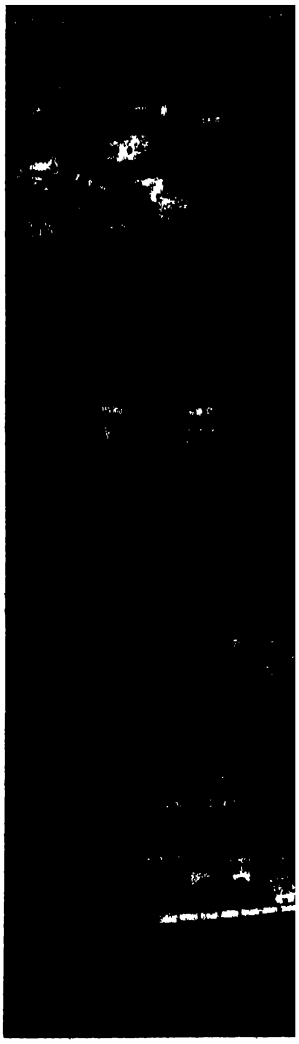
The previous Finance Commission had made provisions for a National Calamity Relief Fund, which would meet the requirements of a State in the event of a natural calamity of "rare severity". That fund has long been exhausted, but the Centre has nevertheless made available to Orissa more than Rs.500 crores by way of financial assistance.

Yet all these efforts may just not be enough to infuse life into coastal Orissa. With the State administration still grappling with the immediate problems of distributing relief materials and medicines and restoring public utilities, a detailed assessment of the damage to private and public property has not been possible. According to informed sources, when such an assessment is finally done, the financial burden may be awesome. "If in the final assessment 10 lakh houses are found damaged, Rs.5,000 crores would be needed to repair them at Rs.50,000 a house." This burden is apart from financial requirement to provide infrastructure such as roads, power lines and water supply installations. ■

DISASTER

AFTER THE STORM



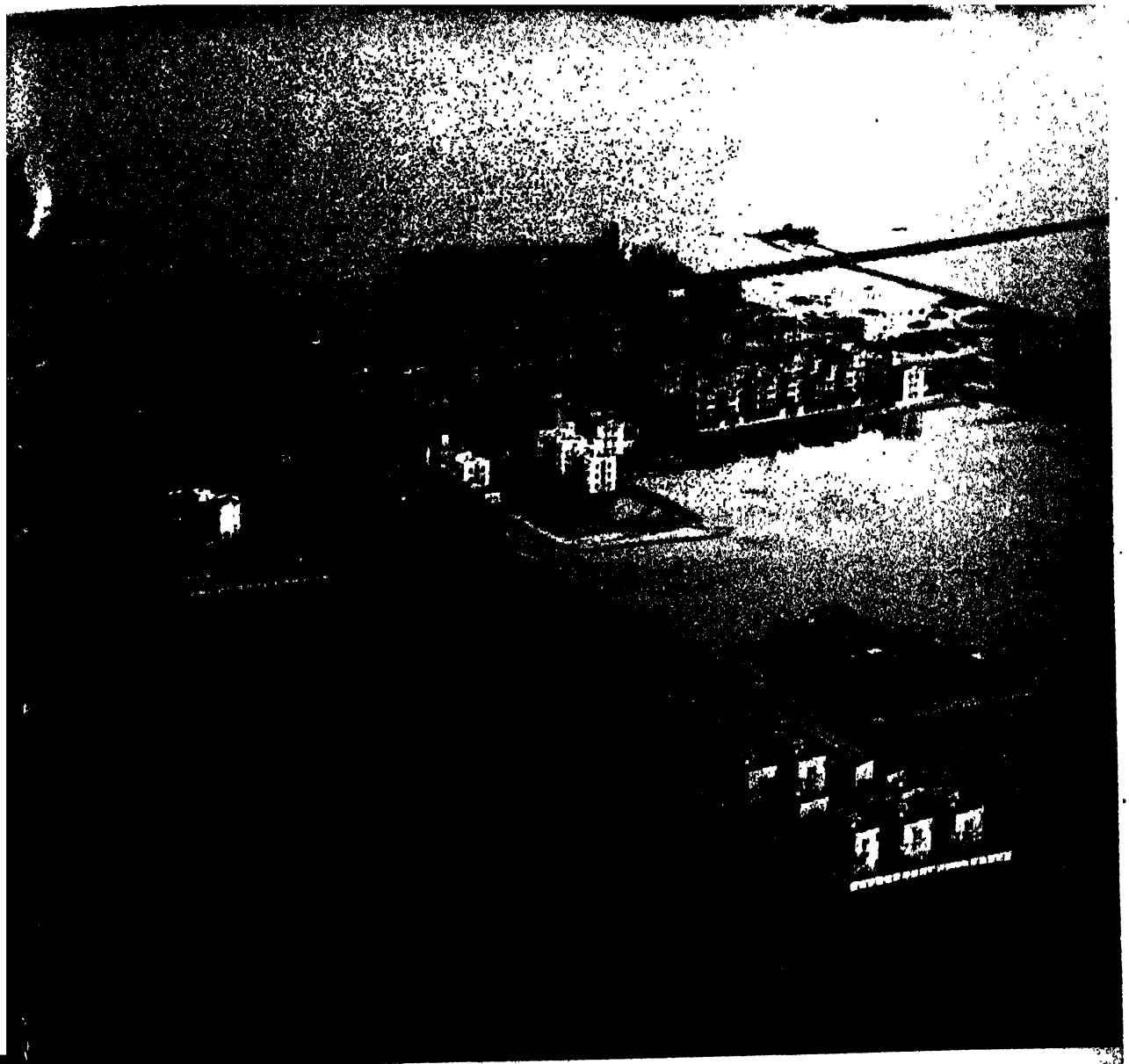


PARTH SANYAL

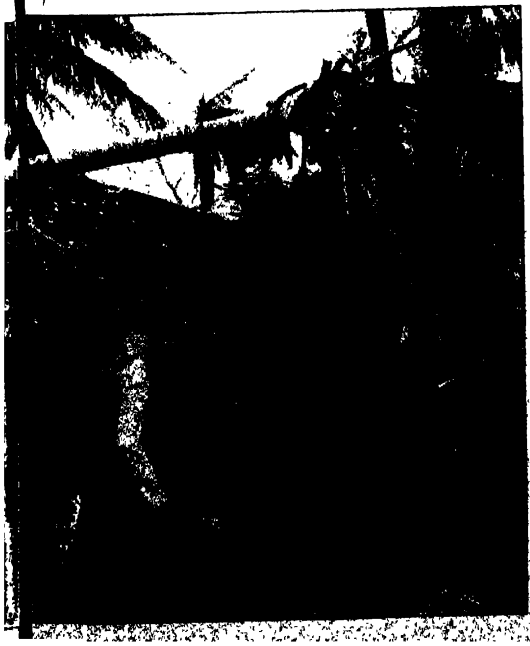


C V SUBRAMANYAM

In Erasama block of Jagatsinghpur district, rotting bodies and carcasses pose a major threat to survivors of the super cyclone. (Above right) An aerial view of an inundated township in Paradeep. (Right) Villagers in Madhyasasan, 40 km from Bhubaneswar, try to mend their hut with the sparse material available and (far right) a man examining a television set in Erasama block.



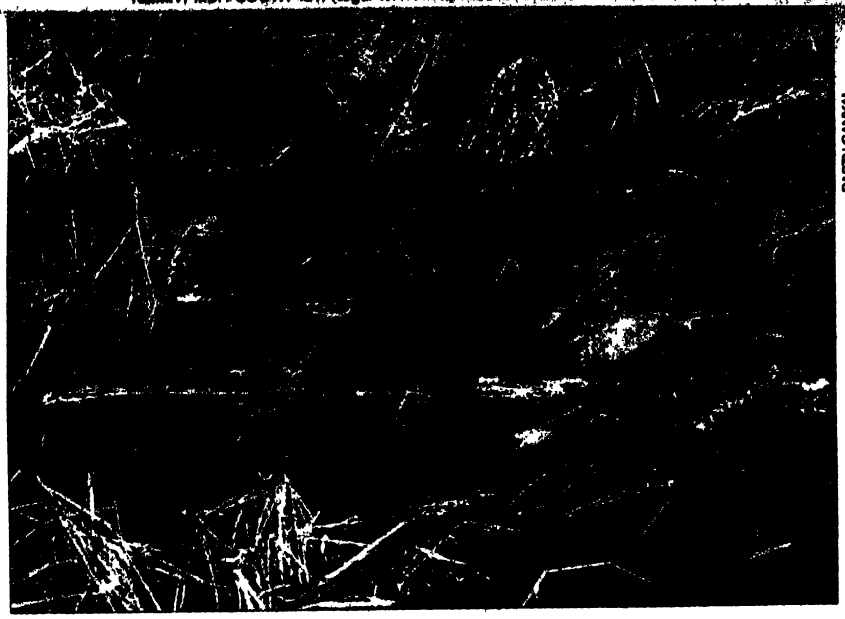
SUNIL MALHOTRA/ REUTERS



PARTH SANYAL



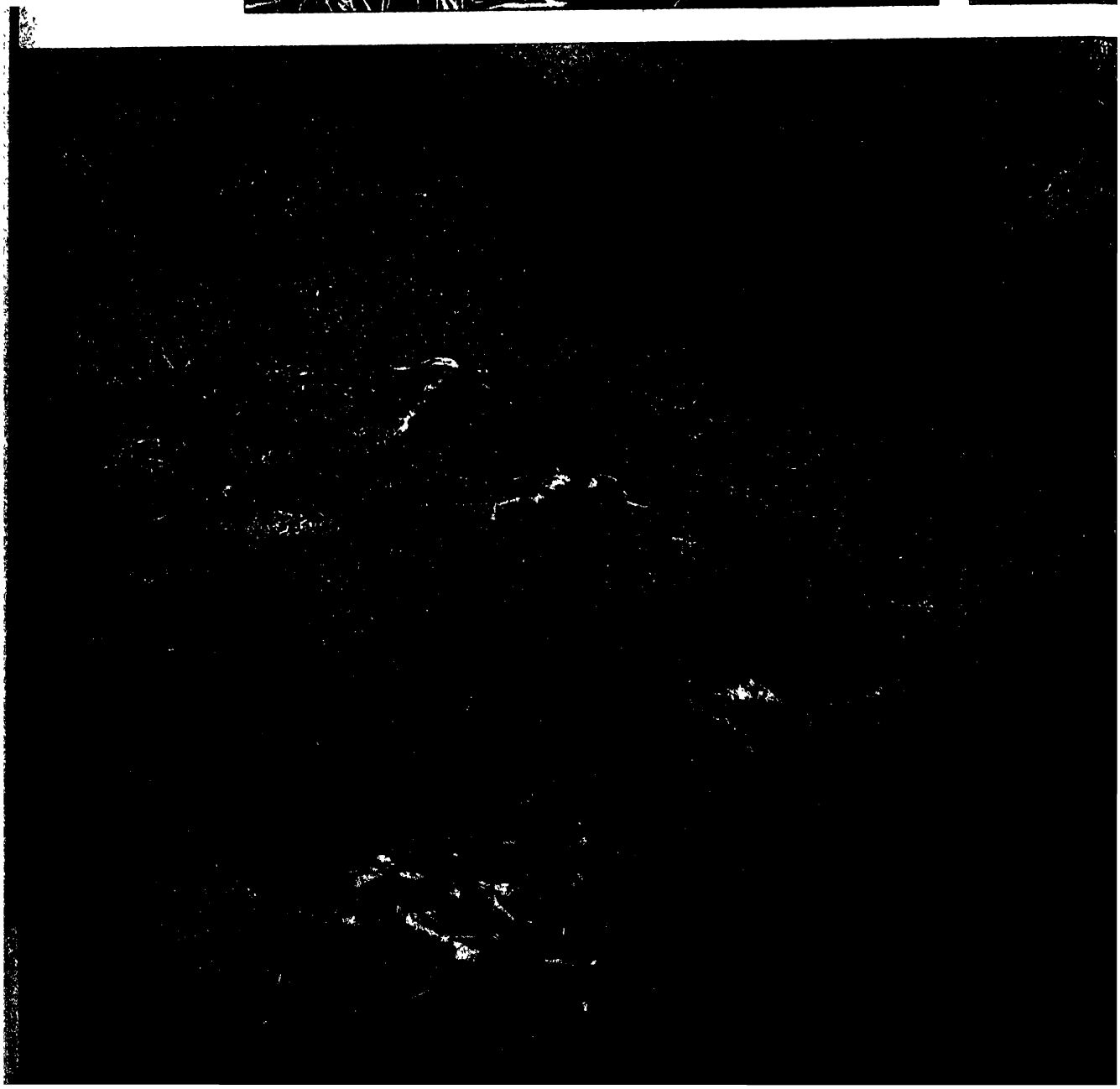
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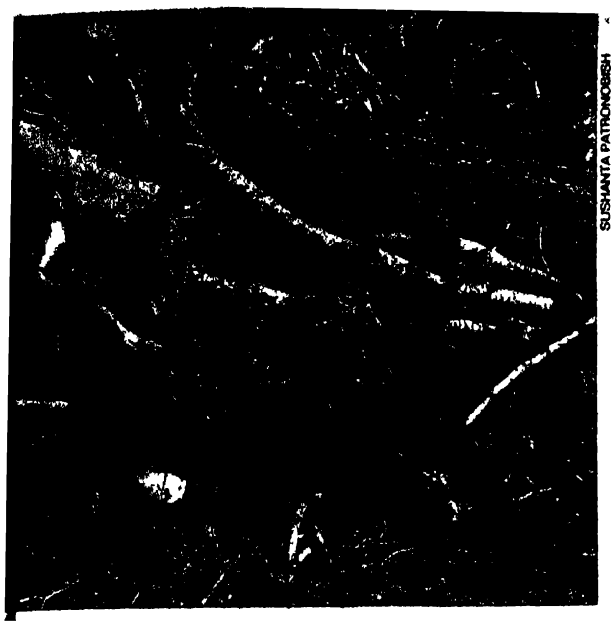


PARTH SANYAL



A body lying in a paddyfield in Jathibari. (Below) Bodies of members of a family lie scattered in the inaccessible Ersama block.

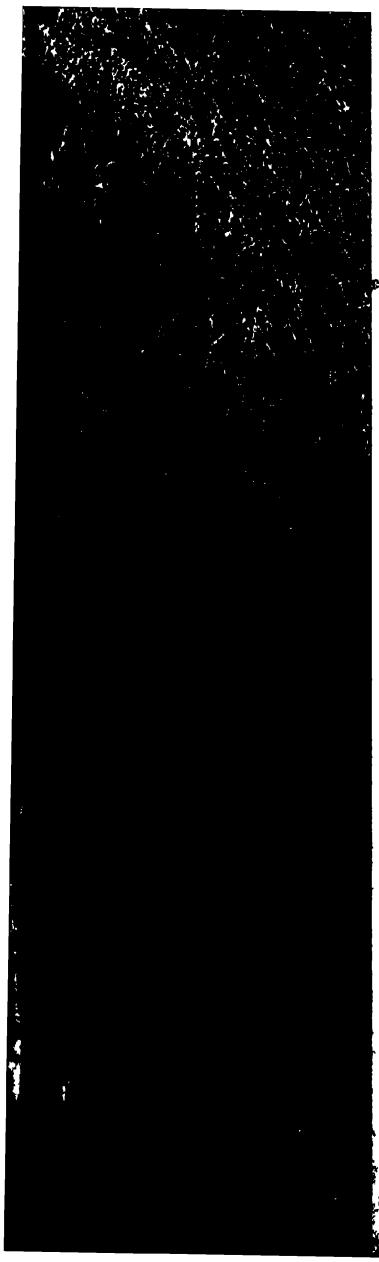




SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

One of many bodies lying unattended. (Below) Members of voluntary organisations pull out a carcass from a canal in Jathibari village of Ersama block.

PARTH SANYAL SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH











At a health clinic in Jagatsinghpur district. (Above right) After days of starvation, some villagers enjoy a meal. Several voluntary organisations arranged to provide food to the victims. (Right) Setting up a make-shift shelter in Paradeep. (Far right) Paramilitary personnel remove a man suffering from diarrhoea to a health clinic.

HIMANSHU WATTS/ REUTERS



SUSHANTO PATRONOBISH

Army personnel engaged in relief operations. (Below) In Jathibari village in Ersama block, volunteers cremate putrefied bodies.

PARTH SANYAL



A crippled economy

The cyclone has hit Orissa's already parlous economy hard, and there are no reliable estimates of the losses in the various sectors even weeks after the disaster.

SANTANU SANYAL
in Orissa

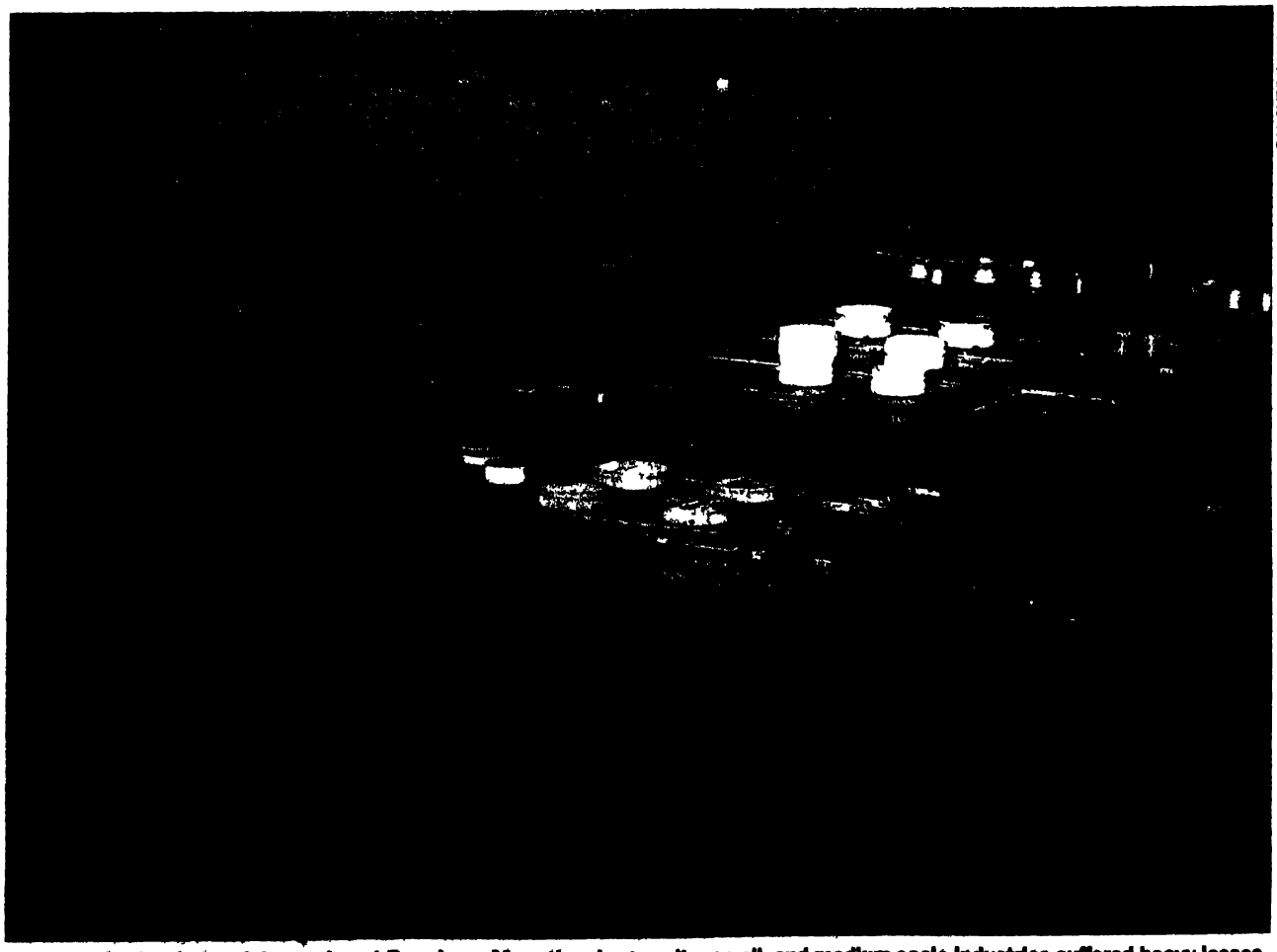
ORISSA S economy is in a shambles There is hardly any sector that has not been hit hard by the October 29 cyclone No reliable estimates of the extent of loss were available more than two weeks after the disaster as the government agencies were concentrating their energies on the distribution of relief materials and the disposal of bodies However, preliminary projections indicated that the impact could indeed be enormous

On November 10, poultry farmers submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang, drawing his attention to the damage caused to the poultry sector The memorandum put the loss, which included the destruction of birds hatcheries, feed mills and sheds, at Rs 40 crores According to preliminary estimates more than 1,000 poultry farmers, located mostly in the districts of Ganjam, Berhampore, Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, lost their means of livelihood Altogether, more than 15,000 people engaged in this sector have been hit

The resumption of agricultural operations may take time The total crop loss is estimated at Rs 1,750 crores The cyclone left more than 24 lakh hectares of farm land inundated About 15 lakh ha suffered a loss of between 50 and 75 per cent of standing crops In the absence of mechanised farming, the loss of draught animals – more than two lakh head of cattle have been killed – could hamper cultivation in future

Coconut and betel leaf cultivation has been badly affected Coconut trees on several hectares of plantations, mostly along the coast came down and betel leaf plantations in the districts of Balasore, Puri and Bhadrak were inundated The State, which produced a surplus of coconuts, will now have to depend on supplies from Andhra Pradesh Tamil Nadu and Kerala to meet its domestic requirement The destruction of betel leaf plantations entails a business loss of Rs 25 lakhs a day in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack alone Certain varieties of betel leaves grown in some pockets of Balasore district, which are exported, cannot be produced before six months

The cyclone also destroyed vegetable crops on one lakh hectares – 15,000 ha each in Puri and Jagatsinghpur, 34,000 ha in Kendrapara and 14,000 ha in



C V SUBRAMANYAM

What is left of an industrial complex at Paradeep. More than large units, small- and medium-scale industries suffered heavy losses

Cuttack. The average crop yield was eight to 10 tonnes a hectare. The damage to mushroom cultivation has affected 700 families in Nimapara (Puri district), Bhubaneswar and Khurda.

The State's rich dairy sector has also suffered severe losses Besides the death of milch cows and the destruction of dairy farms, a large number of chilling plants and more than 200 artificial insemination centres were damaged. At least 500 milk cooperatives need assistance to restart their operations. The Orissa Milk Producers' Cooperative Federation (Omfed), which collected more than one lakh litres of milk a day and supplied it to Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri, among other places, will now depend on supplies of milk powder from other States to maintain normal deliveries. The daily collection of milk dropped to around 10,000 litres. Omfed is likely to procure milk from Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), in association with the Anand Milk Producers' Union, despatched 200 tonnes of milk powder and 200 tonnes of cattle feed. The NDDB also sent vaccines and life-saving drugs for animals.

According to the State Small and Medium Entrepreneurs Association, nearly 700 small- and medium-scale units, which employed about 70,000 to 80,000 people, have been devastated in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. The figure is expected to rise when information from other districts arrives. The association has urged the State government to provide interest-free loans of up to Rs.10 lakhs to the affected units and declare a five-year moratorium on loan repayment by them. Units with a paid-up capital of more than Rs.10 lakhs should be helped with grants and soft loans, it said. About 400 small-scale and 24 medium-scale units that survived the cyclone were looted by anti-social elements, it said.

In the Paradeep port area, fishing activities have come to a standstill. About 300 fishermen were killed; nearly 60 per cent of the 11,000 country boats were destroyed, marking a loss of about Rs.24 crores. In addition, 2,500 mechanised boats and 400 trawlers sank, causing a loss of another Rs.30 crores. About 500 trawlers, mostly belonging to fishermen from Andhra Pradesh, sank at Paradeep port. The export of marine products from Orissa has hence suffered a setback.

ELECTRICITY supply and telecommunications services are yet to be restored in the 12 affected districts. Cesco, an undertaking of AES Corp, of the United States, had planned to give power connections to all applicants by November 14. The plan has gone haywire. AES Corp, which runs a power distribution system in eight districts of Orissa, has sought a tariff hike to offset the losses, estimated at Rs.300 crores. Cesco plans to appeal to the State government for compensation. If the government declines to oblige it, it will approach the State-level power regulatory authority, the Orissa Electricity

Paradeep's problems

SANTANU SANYAL
in Paradeep

THE Paradeep Port Trust (PPT) authorities knew what was coming, thanks to the Internet. They lost no time in taking measures according to a contingency plan formulated by the Union Government in the wake of the cyclone havoc at the Kandla port two years ago.

"We did not rely much on the forecasts by the Meteorological Department, which were general in nature. Instead, we started surfing the Net and at least two sites gave us a clear picture of the projected route, movement and intensity of the impending storm. We were on the alert," PPT Chairman S.K. Mohapatra said.

"Having lived in Paradeep for more than 30 years, we have learnt one thing: never take a cyclone warning signal lightly," Dilip Misra, PPT Traffic Manager, said.

The first priority was to force the berthed ships out of the port. There were six such vessels. Five of these were moved to mid-sea where the effect of the storm on them would be less severe. The vessels returned to the port after the Navy declared the navigation channel clear for traffic on November 6.

A sixth vessel, Spar Opal, which was loading steel coil, refused to sail out. Its moorings snapped and it was pushed from one berth to another, but it suffered no major damage. As it happened, the vessel's onboard satellite telephone system was the only means of communication Paradeep had with the outside world.

Eight vessels were waiting outside the port for berths. All but one left as soon as the cyclone struck.

No piece of major equipment at the port was damaged. Mohapatra said that the port authorities did everything possible to protect the equipment. The projecting parts of large equipment were lowered and fastened with bolts and the equipment was removed to safer places. However, some losses were inevitable. For example, the roofs of the transit sheds were blown off. Sea water damaged transformers and electric motors. Sand-casting has reduced the depth of the channel by about two metres: the channel has to be dredged. Navigational lights are gone, so are the pylons.

What has caused the most concern is the damage to the railway tracks between Rahama and Paradeep on the Cuttack-Paradeep section of the South Eastern Railway. The movement of bulk items such as coal and ore to and from the port has been hampered. Bulk items constitute more than 95 per cent of the port's traffic. Coastal shipment of thermal coal for the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) and other consumers could be resumed as nearly 2.5 lakh tonnes of ground stock was lying at the port. Thermal coal accounts for seven million tonnes of the port's total throughput of 13 million tonnes. The TNEB's share in the thermal coal traffic is more than five million tonnes.

The problem that coking coal importers such as the Tata Iron and Steel Company (Tisco) and Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) faced was even greater. The imported coking coal lying at the port premises cannot be evacuated unless the railway lines are repaired. To solve the problem, Tisco chartered a vessel to ship it to Haldia for onward movement by rail. Thus, part of the coking coal stock was shifted, though at a cost.

"We estimate the loss of port property at Rs.80 crores," Mohapatra said, pointing out that several private firms that undertook port projects on contract had complained of a combined loss of Rs.20 crores. "We will request the Centre to provide funds to meet the additional expenditure," he said, adding that the suspension of normal port operations entailed a loss of income of about Rs.60 lakhs a day.



At the Paradeep port. Ahead of the cyclone, the port authorities had almost all the ships moved out of the berths to mid-sea.

Rebuilding work to facilitate early resumption of normal operations took a back seat as the port authorities were forced to devote themselves to relief work. A large number of people living in shanties on port lands and the residents of villages close to the port were badly affected. Moreover, the port authorities had to coordinate the relief work undertaken by various government and non-governmental agencies. For this reason, they could not pay continued attention to the work on the Asian Development Bank-aided coal handling plant. The commissioning of the plant will now be delayed by at least six months.

Although the Navy deployed seven vessels and cleared the navigation channel, work could not resume. Even two weeks after the cyclone, Paradeep had no power supply. Since the public sector Paradeep Phosphates Ltd (PPL) was hit badly, the berth dedicated to it did not receive vessels.

Absenteeism, in view of the cyclone and the scare of ammonia leaks, was another factor that stood in the way of the resumption of normal work. Rumours of leaks in the PPL's ammonia storage tanks (the plant had released small quantities of ammonia in order to ensure the safety of the tanks) led to a virtual exodus of workers. Significantly, only one port employee died: he lived in a thatched hut, having sublet his official quarters.

Several fishermen living along the Paradeep coast were killed. Although not employed by the port, they used the fishing harbour, which is part of the port complex. As soon as the cyclone warning was received, the port authorities had urged the people living in the shanties in the port area to move under pucca structures. Most of them allegedly ignored the warning.

THE PPL bore the brunt of the cyclone. Its phosphoric acid and sulphuric acid plants were damaged. Between 5,000 and 6,000 tonnes of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) worth about Rs.6 crores, stored in silos, was destroyed. The boundary walls of the plant and the township collapsed. Attempts were being made to resume DAP production in November itself. However, H. Mishra, Chairman and Managing Director, told *Frontline* that the acid plants would not resume production immediately. An assessment of the loss suffered by PPL would take time. The condition of the equipment would be known only after power supply was restored, Mishra said.

Mishra appealed to the Centre for special assistance. The appeal, it is learnt, has not gone totally unheeded. The Centre has before it a financial restructuring proposal for PPL. However, the sanction of grant would depend on the assessment of loss. As per the proposal, the accumulated loss of about Rs.256 crores would be knocked off from the book of accounts. The present equity size of Rs.214 crores would be reduced to Rs.2.14 crores and the loan of Rs.230 crores converted into equity. The interest on the loan too has to be waived by way of book adjustments. "Once the restructuring plan is implemented, PPL will start afresh, on a clean slate," Mishra said.

The loss suffered by the DAP plant of Oswal Chemicals & Fertilisers is put at Rs.100 crores. The two-million-tonne plant, estimated to cost Rs.2,000 crores, was due for commissioning in November. Now the commissioning has been deferred until January. Abhay Oswal, its Chairman, said that the exact extent of the loss would be known after the insurance company assessed the extent of the damage. The project's prime consultant, United States-based Jacobs, Humphreys and Glasgow, was involved in the assessment exercise.

The company, Oswal said, did relief work in 180 villages under 47 panchayats, with a total population of four lakhs. "We distributed about 1,000 tonnes of foodgrains and we will distribute another 3,000 tonnes," he said. Saris, dhotis and materials for shelters had also been distributed. The Oswals propose to spend Rs.10 crores on relief work and have involved their employees from all over the country in the operation. "We have a commitment to the people of the place where we have put up such a huge plant with so much investment," Oswal said. ■

Regulatory Commission, with a request to pass the burden on to the consumers. Power consumers are angry with Cesco's plan. The loss, they say, is largely owing to the failure of the company to insure its assets. Some consumers have threatened to take the matter to the streets. "Why should the consumers and the State government be made to pay for the loss suffered by a private concern," asked one consumer. Interestingly, some sections of the State government are for compensating Cesco suitably and have accordingly taken up the issue with the Central government. (see Column by Jayati Ghosh on page 76)

The loss to the telecom circle is estimated at Rs.50 crores, with a large number of telephone exchanges washed away and microwave towers – at Nimapara, Paradeep, Kakatpur and Jajpur – uproot-

ed.

The local chambers of commerce have estimated the loss to industry, big and small, at Rs 500 crores They emphasise the importance of early normalisation of the affected units This process could be accelerated if an interest holiday is declared for one year on loans issued by commercial banks, according to them. They also want the repayment period should be extended Fresh working capital should be made available to industry at a concessional rate and the requirement of margin money on fresh loans should not be insisted upon, the chambers have suggested

Following the cyclone havoc, the Reserve Bank of India and the Union Finance Ministry directed all banks to provide immediate assistance to the affected people to help them raise new crops and purchase farm implements, seeds, fertilizers and insecticides Banks and other financial institutions were told to extend loans to rebuild houses

The State government has sought a Central assistance of about Rs 350 crores to reconstruct about 1 2 million dwelling units. It has also urged the authorities concerned to build houses under the Indira Awas Yojana The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has announced that it would provide Rs.187.5 crores towards the reconstruction of about 75,000 dwelling units

Sharda Singh, Chairman and Managing Director of UCO Bank and convener of the State-Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), led a team of senior bankers and top executives of financial institutions to Orissa and held meetings with the Chief Minister, the Finance Minister, the Chief Secretary and other senior officials in order to assess the kind of assistance the banking sector would be required to provide to raise new crops, rebuild houses and restart businesses and factories in the small and medium sectors The Government at that time did not have a correct estimate of the losses or the kind of assistance that would be required These aspects are likely to be finalised at an SLBC meeting in the near future.

Another factor causing concern is the financial situation of the State government. Doubts have been expressed in certain quarters that the money received for relief and rehabilitation might actually be used to pay the salaries to government employees. The critical financial situation of the Government had earlier forced the RBI to clamp restrictions on overdraft. The restrictions have since been lifted. ■

■ COLUMN

Cyclones, power and social responsibility

A multinational company seeking to triple power tariff in already suffering coastal Orissa, claiming that the cyclone has hit its facilities, which had been left uninsured, raises questions regarding the rationale for and pattern of privatisation in the country, and consequent monopolistic practices that impinge on the lives of ordinary people.

THE cyclone that ravaged the coast of Orissa was one of the worst to affect the subcontinent in this century The scale of devastation that has occurred is unimaginable already the official death toll is close to ten thousand people, although the situation has been so dire that no formal enumeration of the dead has yet been undertaken More than 20 million people are said to be affected, and agriculture and industry in the region have been ravaged

Around ten lakh houses are said to have been damaged, many beyond repair, as well as more than 30 lakh *kutcha* houses, rendering millions of people homeless Nearly three lakh farm animals were killed, the extent of the crop area affected (with standing crops destroyed) exceeds 12 lakh hectares, and preliminary estimates of property loss range upwards of Rs 1,000 crores

Calamities as extreme as this will take years if not decades to recover from, even in terms of the most minimal reconstruction and repair. Quite apart from the enormous loss of human life, simply replacing physical infrastructure in a State that was already one of the most absolutely poor and backward in the country is a task of huge proportions. The enormity of the requirement of providing immediate relief has clearly exposed both public and private agencies as being inadequate, and lakhs of people in at least nine districts continue to be in great distress, deprived of the most basic amenities and sometimes even of the means of survival

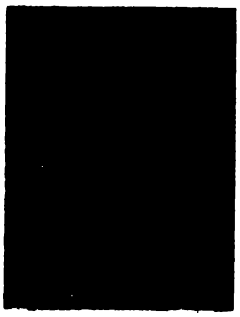
In the wake of such a major disaster, the natural expectation is that all sections of society, especially those with the finances to make a difference, would step forward to contribute to the recovery and reconstruction effort This expectation is even higher *vis-a-vis* large industrialists and multinational companies (MNCs), which are increasingly prone to publicise their sense of "social responsibility" This is why some recent news reports of the response of at least one multinational company comes as a shock, even to hardened critics accustomed to expecting the



SHERWIN CRASTO/ AP

Lineemen repair power cables in Jagatsinghpur, two weeks after the cyclone.

worst from such quarters.



JAYATI GHOSH

ACCORDING to a news report in a major national newspaper (*The Indian Express*, November 11), a major multinational company which owns majority share in the power transmission and distribution company supplying the coastal districts, has demanded full compensation for its losses from the government, failing which it would triple the cost of electricity to consumers in the affected areas.

The United States-based multinational AES Corporation currently holds 51 per cent of the stock of the Central Electricity Supply Company (Cesco), which supplies power to consumers in the affected coastal districts of Orissa. The president and chief executive officer of AES, Dennis Bakke, came to India to review the post-cyclone situation, and apparently discovered that Cesco had sustained losses of around $60 million (Rs. 300 crores) due to the cyclone.

As a result, said Bakke, the company was asking the Government of India to bear the losses. If it refused to do so, Cesco would be forced to approach the relevant price-setting body, the Orissa Electricity Regulatory Commission, for a tariff revision which he estimated could be as much as three times the present tariff. Obviously, the company felt that if the government does not share the burden, then the people would have to bear the cost.

In the wake of the cyclone, many public and private companies have declared concessions to the affected people, who are already reeling under very adverse material circumstances. Thus, the Department of Telecommunications has announced special concessions to consumers in the region. In the case of electricity, the supply of which has been so badly disrupted, it would be expected that consumers who are already suffering because of no or low provision would at least be spared the burden of higher prices. Indeed, total restoration of earlier levels of electricity supply in the affected districts is expected to take as long as six months.

However, any such concessions are obviously not under consideration by Cesco. Bakke argued that the company is under financial stress because of poor revenue collection, making it difficult, in the management's assessment, to give any relief to consumers. Perhaps more significantly, there is no legal obligation for the company to do so. The majority shareholding in Cesco was purchased from the public sector Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, which continues to hold 49 per cent of the shares.

Under the terms of the agreement of sale, there was no contractual provision about covering its losses arising from any calamity. Further, remarkably for these obsessively risk-averse multinational companies, no disaster insurance cover had been taken for any such eventuality; in fact, the company claims that it was in the process of taking out insurance on its infrastructure when the cyclone struck. Since it had clearly been inefficient in insuring itself in time, it would choose instead to make its customers – including some of the poorest people in the world living through a major catastrophe – pay for its lapse.

EVEN if we set aside the inevitable knee-jerk reaction that this is likely to evoke in terms of the perfidious behaviour of MNCs, there are some important issues that arise in this context. The first issue relates to the whole pattern of privatisation of the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity that has accelerated in many States in recent times. Many observers have noted that in several States this process has been characterised by a piecemeal approach, vagueness, secrecy and lack of transparency in the legal follow-through, and a tremendous lack of public participation and therefore of democratic accountability in the final institutional framework that has resulted.

The haste to privatise came from a perception that public sector companies were unable to deliver not only because of bureaucratic interference but also because they could not be professional in their approach in terms of efficient provision and recovery of costs. But the pattern that now seems to be followed in many cases in this sector is that private investors (usually multinational investors) will pick up all the profits (in some cases, even guaranteed profits) while the government exchequer bears all the risks. So taxpayers end up funding even though the essential idea inherent in private entrepreneurship is that profits are rewards for risk-bearing.

It is now apparent that another source of trouble in dealing with natural monopolies such as electricity provision is that when the private sector is given control then monopolistic practices are also much more likely. In such circumstances, at the very minimum, the regulatory devices need to be very carefully specified and comprehensive. But this is clearly not so yet in India.

The current experience in Orissa illustrates one way in which this can become extremely problematic. In this case, the people of the State, especially in the coastal region, seem to have lost out because of the electricity companys attempt to make them pay for a major natural calamity which has already caused them huge dispossession. The State Government has lost out because it does not get the advantage of revenues even as it is forced to take on losses if it does not want consumers to be charged more. It is difficult to understand, therefore, why the entire process was necessary at all.

The entire privatisation process has been sold to the country on the argument that this would help the government get out of things that the private sector can do better so that the government can concentrate on what the private sector will not do. This episode shows that like so much else in the language of liberalisers and of globalisation, there are poignant gaps both in language and its interpretation in reality, which can be appropriated by those in power.

Perhaps this is why Union Power Minister P. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, talking about power and the Orissa cyclone in a conference involving the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission and the United States Energy Association on November 2 (*Business Line*, November 3) could offer no more wisdom than that the Orissa Electricity Regulatory Commission and the privatised distribution and generation companies "will have a challenging task ahead of them in the reconstruction of the State with a human face".

That statement was made before Bakkes made his comments quoted above. If the past and present practice of post-liberalisation governments is any indication, it is possible to predict that the face of the present BJP-led Government will be much more "human" to multinationals than it is towards those Indians who happen to find themselves in a crisis as in Orissa. ■

Towards e-governance

Implementing e-governance in the country may be a long way off, but some States are making efforts to move in that direction.

ANUPAMA KATAKAM
in Bangalore

NO country can today afford to avoid keeping pace with the growth and spread of information technology, let alone ignore it. No wonder then that the Indian Government is trying to build its own computer networks, which will perhaps usher in in the new millennium an administration that is organised and effective in providing the citizens services that are long overdue.

Electronic governance appears to be the keyword today in most administrative departments. And now, with a Ministry for Information Technology formed in the Union Government, the concept of government departments becoming fully computerised might actually work. At a recent national conference on e-governance (as it is called) in Bangalore, IT Secretaries from 32 States and Union Territories participated in discussions which led them to announce that they were "committed to providing a one-stop, non-stop, efficient, effective, responsive, transparent citizen governance through the use of information technology."

Nevertheless, the outcome of the three-day conference was disappointing. Held against the backdrop of BangaloreIT.com, a five-day international exhibition on computers, the conference was attended by the country's who's who in IT. That being the case, a more significant "declaration" was expected. However, the decisions were bereft of specificity, and the plans lacked timeframes (see box).

Apart from networking government departments, e-governance throws up several questions of transparency, accountability, technology and logistic feasibility, of whether these will benefit the common man. *Frontline* spoke to officials and experts on some of the issues that surround this concept.

ELECTRONIC governance is used as a synonym for an information technology-driven system of governance that works better, costs less and is capable of servicing people's needs. It is also broadly defined as the use of information technology for efficient delivery of government services to the people and to business and industry. A double-pronged term, e-governance involves the computerisation of government departments and the networking of all government departments, and linking them, as also district and taluk offices across a state, with the State headquarters.

According to Karnataka's IT Secretary Sanjoy Das Gupta, the objective of electronic governance in India goes beyond mere computerisation of government offices. It fundamentally means changing the way the government operates and implies a new set of responsibilities for civil servants, businesses and the public. According to him, plans such as online services will give the average citizen access to government services, with faster responses at more convenient hours. These services include providing information, collecting taxes, granting licences, administering regulations, and paying grants and benefits.

It may seem almost impossible to revolutionise India's bureaucracy which is notorious for its red tapism, but projects have already been successfully executed. Andhra Pradesh went high-tech to a considerable extent almost two years ago, and Kerala follows close behind. Karnataka has ambitious plans in this regared; Chief Minister S.M. Krishna has promised to put them into effect in two years' time.



SAGGERE RAMASWAMY

At a railway reservation counter. The Railways have proved how computerisation can revolutionise a public utility.

Announcing some of Karnataka's plans, Krishna said at the inauguration of the conference that every Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, and chief executive officer of zilla parishads would be provided with video-conferencing facilities by December. The government plans to provide a computer laboratory and Internet connectivity to every high school; however, no timeframe has been specified. Five per cent of the Plan budget for every department will be earmarked, for a period of five years, toward promoting IT development in its offices. The Chief Minister also said that a bottom-to-top approach should be taken. "The less fortunate and ordinary man needs to be helped immediately," he said.

ANDHRA PRADESH IT secretary R. Chandrashekhar asserted that the ideas would work; he said his State government had proved that the plan could

make a difference to the ordinary people. "It is not just for the literate and the well-to-do, but also for people who need information about, say, housing schemes or rants available," he said.

Andhra Pradesh has already implemented four programmes. The Computer-Aided Administration of Registration Department (CARD) project was the first to be implemented. It ensures efficiency in the registration of documents, by providing help in ascertaining the market value of property and calculating stamp duty, transfer duty and registration fees. The project is likely to cover about 29,000 revenue villages in 23 districts. "Previously it used to take days, even weeks, to get information; now it takes between 10 and 30 minutes," Chandrashekhar said.

On November 1, 1999, the State's Formation Day, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu launched the video-conferencing facility in the State, linking most of the districts to the State capital, Hyderabad. Known as the Andhra Pradesh State-wide Area Network (APSWAN) and the Andhra Pradesh State Secretariat Campus Network (APSCAN), the projects had been in the pipeline for quite sometime. APSWAN is envisioned as the backbone network for voice, data and video communications throughout the State. In the first phase, Hyderabad was linked to Vijayawada and Tirupati besides 23 district headquarters using 2 Mbps fibre optic links provided by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). APSWAN will eventually be extended to all mandal headquarters and then to all villages in the State, Chandrashekhar said. The Local Area Networks (LANs) that are in operation in various government offices will be linked to APSWAN while all offices in the State Secretariat have been connected to various district headquarters through APSCAN. Eventually, all government offices in the State capital, the District Collectorates and the various offices at the district level will become part of the network. Approximately Rs. 100 crores will be spent over a period of five years for the project.

The TWINS or Twin Cities Network Services Project will operate a chain of integrated Citizen Service Centres. Chandrashekhar said that the aim was to integrate all the administrative services and make it a single office ultimately. Whether one wants to get a driver's licence or to make a payment, it can be done at a single window at these centres. Currently at the pilot stage, the project will start with 20 services from six departments. The State government hopes that these service centres will eventually grow in numbers, like public telephone booths. This will generate more employment opportunities and put at rest any notions that technology will cause retrenchment, he explained.

Chandrashekhar said that Andhra Pradesh was able to establish a high level of connectivity across the State with the assistance of the Department of Electronics (DoE). Therefore, it will not take long for all the districts to be connected. He expects that the project will be implemented in about six months' time.

KERALA launched a Rs.43-crore Information Kerala Project last year. This will computerise and network relevant applications for 1,214 local bodies, Kerala's IT Secretary Aruna Sundarrajan said. Starting at the local level, they had developed software for the payment of welfare pensions, she said. A citizens' database has also been created by local bodies and elected panchayat members. Easy access is a key factor, however. The database can be used to procure information on building licences, licence fees and taxes. People living in rural areas can find out what quotas they are entitled to, what schemes are applicable to them, or, in the case of land records, where they are located and whom to contact. "E-governance is going to benefit the common man only when he walks into a government office and finds that he does not have to wait in a line for licence renewal forms or that payment does not mean running from pillar to post," she said.

Aruna Sundarrajan said that in Kerala, the IT work completed so far included the linking of 152 development blocks to a networked computer project. The network provides electronic mail identities for each block and helps monitor projects at the block level. All treasuries/sub-treasuries in the State will be connected by next month. Three treasuries, five sub-treasuries and extension counters in Thiruvananthapuram district are already online. In addition, work on the Secretariat Wide Area Network (SWAN), linking the offices of Ministers, secretaries and State departments, is under way, according to her.

PROFESSOR Roddam Narasimha, Director, National Institute for Advanced Studies, told *Frontline* that "to be completely effective, e-governance needs to have a strong infrastructure." Presenting a paper on "E-governance - A Blueprint," he said network and connectivity in the country were relatively poor, but as India had the technical skill and know-how in the field there was no excuse for not achieving goals. Moreover, he said, DoT had good fibre optic cables that would be used for electronic transmission. "Begin with them and continue finding solutions," he said.

Narasimha believes that computer accessibility is possible if a computer that can be made widely available is built. Unless computers reach every section of the population, e-governance will not work, he says. Half the components that are offered in computers today are not needed by the average customer. If we can make a computer without the frills – one

The declaration

The following is the declaration made at the conclusion of the national conference on e-governance:

1. The focus of governance has to shift from being "government centric" to "citizen centric".
2. Information technology (IT) provides an opportunity for large-scale delivery of quality services.
3. The use of IT must facilitate efficient delivery of government services to citizens and business. The goal is to provide services to anyone, anytime, anywhere through a variety of channels at a reasonable cost.
4. There is a need to re-engineer the process of government in order to achieve synergy with IT.
5. Human resource development of the existing workforce in order to inculcate appropriate skills and attitudes is a critical factor.
6. Government, industry and community must join hands in e-delivery of services, especially in social sectors.
7. A sound communication infrastructure is essential for ubiquitous access.
8. A conscious effort should be made to harmonise IT with regional requirements.
9. IT should be innovatively used to ensure that no section of society is deprived of the benefits accruing therefrom.
10. The Central Government should provide support for capacity building in IT in the States. ■

Technology options

ANUPAMA KATAKAM

THERE are several technology options available in order to instal a complete computer network in a State. Dr. N. Chandrasekharan, Director, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) has done a study on the computerisation of government departments in Andhra Pradesh. The following are some of his observations:

* Video conferencing is going to become obsolete. State governments should wait for wireless technologies which have been very successful in the United States and in Europe.
* Extremely high bandwidths are required for networking, and until the necessary infrastructure is installed, governments should not embark on computerisation. "For e-governance to succeed, a citizen should become a netizen by being able to garner uninterrupted and sumptuous bandwidth."
* In the last three decades, the world has moved away from Cobol-based solutions to Client-Server, and now to Network Centric Multi-tier solutions.
* A database server will help as it acts as a central source of data access for a group of end-users, which can vary from a small number to thousands. When several users access the same data source, rules must be established for reading, inserting, deleting and updating data records in order to guarantee the integrity of data.
* When one moves from mandal level to district level to State level, users will need to be able to connect to local databases, remote databases and Application Server databases, by specifying database names. A system administrator will be required to provide assistance with the System Database directory.
* Security is among the most important concerns. Access to data is controlled at many levels. Typical database users need to be configured in order to be grouped under database administrators, system administrators, transactional processing personnel and decision support users. The access privileges also vary.
* Technology is a double-edged sword. It is a vital tool but it can also cause immense harm. Users along with developers will tamper with the system. Security, in fact, should be a primary concern.
* Governments have to learn to digitise documents quickly and effectively. That way information will be easily accessible.
* Finally, it is step-by-step procedure. Governments have to rehaul the physical system of the administration and also to rethink the strategy and the whole philosophy behind administration. ■

that costs between Rs.5,000 and Rs.10,000 and has only word processing, a modem that provides access to the network and the ability to calculate along with the option of using it in an Indian language – the demand will be in millions and State governments will have the answer to the present predicament, he explains. "Make the information user-friendly, computers widely available, perhaps place them in schools and colleges, and even the most computer illiterate will be able to access information."

Time-frames to implement electronic governance are short, Narasimha says. The entire network can be in place in two years, and it is not terribly expensive. He estimates that it would cost Rs.150-200 crores to interconnect all large towns in a State like Karnataka. India, he says, is ready but needs to untangle its bureaucracy.

Although Narasimha is not part of the official task force, the government often consults him on technology-related issues and policies. A larger issue, he says, is the disparity between the village and the city. Once the villager or even a less fortunate citizen who lives in urban areas but have had no education is made aware of his rights, public pressure will mount and the government will have to take steps to make information readily available, according to Narasimha.

When the people learn that at the push of a button, they can access information on developmental works, court documents, ration quotas, licences, poll lists and land records, and pay bills, they will understand the value of information technology.

Speaking on the fundamental concepts of e-governance, Dr. N. Chandrasekharan, Director, Centre for Developing and Advanced Computing, said that the core of e-governance was eliminating middlemen and corruption. Once people know that information could not be monopolised, they would demand access to it.

Chandrasekharan does not believe that the Central or State governments are handling the technology in the right way. He feels that the Indian government is ill-prepared to face the "revolution", as he calls it. "Those who make policy do not consult scientists and technocrats. Unless they hold discussions with the architects of the system, the most appropriate tools in advanced technology will not be used, he said.

Private industry may be able to bail the government out but it must always be kept in mind that where there is profit to be made, the best interests are not always looked after. Chandrasekharan, who argues that the most powerful technology may not installed, says that in that case India will never be able to exploit the full potential of information technology without the advice of scientists.

The best technology, according to Chandrasekharan, is Web-based. "Without Web connectivity, any plans for e-governance is a non-starter." He pointed out: "It is an overwhelming task to put everything online, and although the government has started discussions and a few pilot projects, I don't think the government realises the scale."

While the task may be huge and India has a long road ahead, the silver lining, as Chandrasekharan and other officials pointed out, is that there appears to be a will and a desire to seek change. The first hurdle, they said, was the mindset. Once people within the government and outside it realised the benefits, there was and is a positive attitude to using technology. The Railways, they say, are a standing example of what computerisation has done for the people.

Even if the resistance to technology is fading, implementing electronic governance in India as a whole could still be far away. Some of the concepts even appear utopian. After all, will a peasant in a remote village whose land records have been stolen be ever told that his documents are available in a machine? Yet if e-governance works, it might open an era in the country. Transparency, accountability and the right to information will change the nature of government functioning. ■

The question of nuclear yield

BARC scientists present the proof.

In the wake of the five nuclear tests at Pokhran on May 11 and 13, 1998, some questions were raised about their yield levels. Some Western seismologists said that the total yield of the three explosions on May 11 was between 10 and 15 kilotonnes, while that of the two tests on May 13 was 100 to 150 tonnes. Then doubts were raised about whether one of the three devices exploded on May 11 was really a thermonuclear device, or a hydrogen bomb as it is called. In response, Dr. R. Chidambaram, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), and Dr. Anil Kakodkar, Director, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), asserted that the total yield of the five explosions was around 60 kilotonnes. (*Frontline*, June 9, 1998 and January 15, 1999). Dr. Chidambaram and BARC scientists also asserted that it was a thermonuclear device that India had exploded.

In October 1999, questions were raised about whether the two sub-kilotonne tests on May 13 had fizzled out, that is, whether the explosion had occurred at all. *The New York Times* wrote in October 1999: "Had India faked explosive tests? Were they flops? Or had small blasts eluded the eavesdroppers?... Though opponents of the treaty point to the Indian claim as a test ban embarrassment, the emerging consensus among nuclear experts is that what failed that day was not global monitoring but the pair of explosive devices."

In January 1999, in an article titled "Nuclear Energy in India," Dr. Chidambaram stated that the sub-kilotonne devices, whose yield is less than one kilotonne (1,000 tonnes), were also fission devices. But designing a sub-kilotonne device was more difficult than designing a standard fission device. "In a sub-kilotonne device... where one goes marginally super-critical, one cannot afford to make a mistake. In the case of a mistake, one may have a fizzle. In the case of the May 1998 tests, all the three sub-kilotonne tests gave a perfect match between the calculated and the measured yields, which is important. In case one signs the CTBT, one cannot carry out tests, which release any nuclear yield. If one can predict accurately the yield of a device whose yield is only a few hundred tonnes, one can also guarantee the design of an experiment where the fissile material in its optimum configuration will go close to criticality and still stay sub-critical. Thus, our sub-kilotonnes tests have also given us a capability to carry out sub-critical tests, if we consider them necessary. We have, however, no plans at the moment to carry out sub-critical tests..."

In order to sustain an informed debate on the subject, *Frontline* reproduces here an article written by scientists of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay, in *BARC Newsletter*, September 1999. The authors of the article are **R. B. Attarde, V.K. Shukla, D.A.R. Babu, V.V. Kulkarni and Anil Kakodkar.**

THE five nuclear tests conducted during May 11-13, 1998 at Pokhran included three sub-kilotonne devices, in addition to a thermonuclear device and a standard fission device. One sub-kilotonne device was tested on May 11, while on May 13, two sub-kilotonne devices were tested. This report gives some of the results of gamma radiation logging measurements in bore holes at the sites of the sub-kilotonne tests as well as the post-shot radioactivity measurements on the samples extracted from these sites.

Gamma radiation logging

Gamma radiation logging was carried out in the bore holes drilled at each of the test sites. The equipment used for this purpose was developed at the Radiation Safety Systems Division, BARC. The equipment consisted of a measuring unit and a detector probe unit that were coupled by a long cable wound on a cable winch. The main detector probe consisted of two energy-compensated Geiger-Mueller (GM) tubes. It covered six ranges, from 0-2 microGray to 0-200 milliGray. (The actual ranges were 0-2 microGray, 0-20 microGray, 0-200 microGray, 0-2 milliGray, 0-20 milliGray, 0-200 milliGray.)

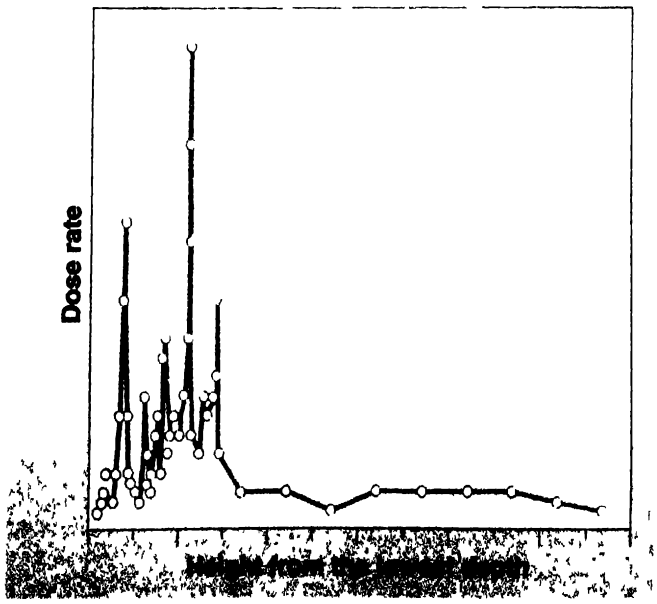


Figure 1. The gamma dose rate at the test site of the 0.5 kilotonne device on May 13, 1998.

An inside look at the world outside



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The measuring unit incorporates necessary high voltage supply for detectors, a count rate meter, scaling circuits and an audio circuit All the readings were displayed by the linear 50 division meter. The audio facility was quite useful in monitoring the health of the instrument during logging Before and after each logging, the instrument was checked with a test source The instrument was initially calibrated at the BARC for all the ranges – at different points in each range – using various source strengths

These measurements have shown the presence of gamma emitters at all the test sites Figure 1 gives the variation of gamma dose along depth at the test site of the 0 5 kilotonne device

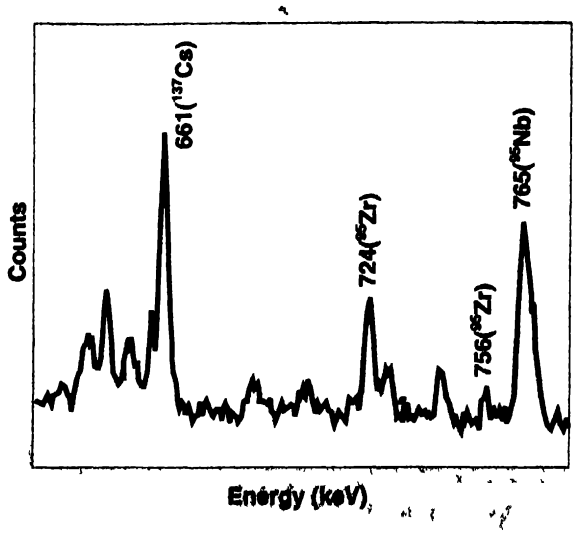


Figure 2. The gamma spectrum of a sample from the test of the 0.3 kilotonne device.

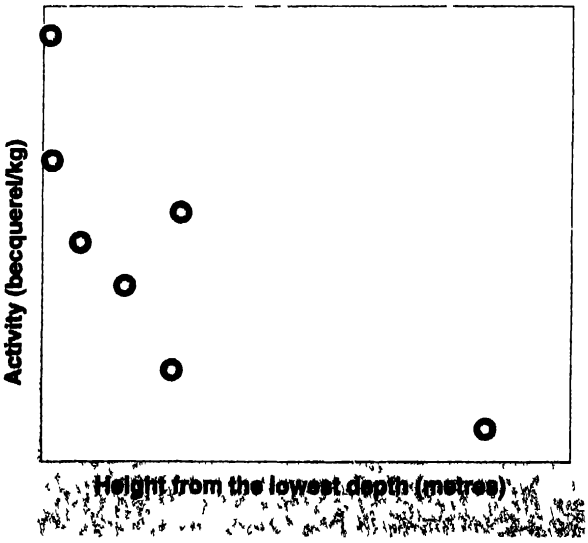


Figure 3. Variation of ^{137}Cs activity with depth for the 0.2 kilotonne device.

Identification of radioactive species

The samples extracted from bore holes at all the test sites were assayed for radioactivity content at the Environmental Assessment Division of the BARC The samples were powdered and dried. The homogenised samples were stored in plastic containers of 8 cm height and 7 cm diameter each For the assessment of radionuclides, two high resolution gamma-ray detectors with efficiency levels of 20 per cent and 30 per cent with respect to a 7 5 cm x 7.5 cm thallium-activated sodium iodide detector (a versatile detector for radiation) coupled with a multi-channel spectrometer consisting of 8,000 channels, were used. This detector is capable of giving a high-resolution spectrum. Europium-152 sources (as gamma radiation) were employed as standards for efficiency calibrations of the detectors in the specified geometry.

Figure 2 gives a typical gamma spectre of a sample collected from the test site of the 0 3 kilotonne device. The spectra clearly show the presence of fission products such as Cesium-137, Zirconium-95 and Niobium-95. These isotopes are otherwise not present in nature. Their presence in samples is a signature of nuclear fission.

Figure 3 shows the variation of ^{137}Cs activity with height, from the lowest point at the test site of the 0.2 kilotonne device. ■

On matters of style

WILLIAM SAFIRE

On November 1, the president of the United States lost his capital. This is not about the burning of the Executive Mansion by the British on August 24, 1814, just after James Madison took flight from the nation's capital and his wife, Dolley, cut the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington out of its frame and took it with her for safekeeping.

Rather, I refer to the recent Triumph of the Lowercase (or, as we are now encouraged to put it, the triumph of the lowercase). In the latest, eagerly awaited *New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* – subtitled (curiously, all in initial caps) "The Official Style Guide Used by the Writers and Editors of the World's Most Authoritative Newspaper" – the capital letter is decisively taken down.

We are guided: "It is *President Lamm* (without a given name) in a first reference to the current president of the United States." Note: not "the current President," with a capital *P*.

From now on, even when referring to the specific person holding the highest office in the nation, *Times* style is to lowercase the *p*. The Associated Press stylebook has been doing this for decades (which is why I sometimes refer to the a.p.), but I like the respect shown to the particular president marked by the capital *P*. My preferred style, no longer stylish: "'This is an attempt to bumfuzzle,' said the President."

The same lowercasing is in store for *founding fathers* (an expression coined by Warren G. Harding, the 29th president). *The Times* further suggests desexing the alliterative phrase to *founders*, though I can't think of any who were mothers. Inconsistently, *The Times* holds fast to the capitalisation of *Fourth Estate*; that's got to go.

So it's "God save the king", not "the King". Speaking of God, the faithful will be happy to see that the Supreme Being retains his capital. But note that I just wrote "his capital" – lowercase *h*, not "His capital" or, as some would insist, "Her capital". *The New York Times* stylebook entry: "God (Supreme Being). Lowercase *he, him, his, thee, thou, who* and *whom* when the reference is to God, Jesus, the Holy Ghost (or the Holy Spirit) or Allah."

I go along with this judgment, though I may pay for it on judgment day, because of a parenthetical remark in a letter written in the last century by Herman Melville to his literary mentor, Nathaniel Hawthorne: "You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage?"

Signs of the times can be seen in the entries dropped and added between editions of the stylebook. Gone are *Molotov cocktail, women's liberation, monkey wrench, Novocain* and *zymurgy* (a word for fermentation that hasn't been used or abused in decades). In are *voice mail, postmodern, euro* (that unified currency is lowercased, though *Eurocurrency* is not, to differentiate U.S. dollars held in European banks), *feng shui* and *into the breach*.

About that last: Apparently, too many reporters have been using that phrase instead of Shakespeare's "Once more *unto* the breach." And the Bard's usage is also neatly defended in the entry for *gild the lily*: "An accepted phrase for overembellishment, but writers who wish to delight the exacting reader will *use* Shakespeare's actual words, from '*King John*': 'To gild refined gold, to *paint the lily*.'"

I think Allan M. Siegal and William G. Connolly, authors of the new stylebook, had this column in mind on *gilding the lily*, because an exacting readership is what I've got.

In jocular jousting with the arbiters of style in New York, I win a few and lose a few. *Speechwriter* is now a solid word, and *catalog* no longer ends in *ue*. *Data* is now accepted as singular, and I'm thinking of starting a fight about *media*, which should be as singular as *fourth estate*. (If the copy editor has capitalised that, I've been sabotaged.)

The first entry I turned to was *American Indian*. For years, I have been insisting that I am a *native American*, having been born in the United States, and resisting the seizure of that compound by aboriginal Americans.

The Times says that "American Indian(s) remains the most widely used term for the native people of North America" and notes that *Native Americans* is rejected by some Indians because the U.S. government uses the term to include Eskimos, Aleuts, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. The book's solution: Use the term preferred by the people written about.

Fights I have lost so far: *Ms.*, though not an abbreviation, takes a period. Nicknames, at least those for bad guys, are still in parentheses, not quotation marks, and so I cannot refer to Willie "the actor" Sutton's nocturnal pioneering in automatic teller machine withdrawals. *Pee* is still disallowed (show me a little kid who asks to urinate), and *versus* is still preferred to *vs.*, though *v* is OK for court cases. Even though my word processor defaults to *stories*, that word is frowned upon except at bedtime: "The preferred word for a newspaper or magazine report is *article*."

Siegal and Connolly grimly insist on putting an apostrophe in decades: We're coming to the end of the *90's*. They have a reason: Many publications omit such apostrophes, but they are needed to make *The Times'* all-cap headlines intelligible and are therefore used throughout the paper for consistency. That means that you, dear reader, are free to drop that apostrophe if you don't use all caps in your headlines.

STYLE is not a set of rules; it is a group of conventions to reflect an attitude and set a tone. "In approaching the mechanics of usage and grammar," write Siegal and Connolly, "this manual reflects *The Times's* impression of its educated and sophisticated readership – traditional but not tradition-bound. ...Throughout, the goal is a fluid style, easygoing but not slangy and only occasionally colloquial."

The best thing about this institution's language arbiters is their sense of place – neither on the ramparts nor on the cutting edge. For that reason, I would cheerfully plunk down $30 for the *New York times manual of style and usage*, though I would capitalise a few of those words and put an apostrophe after the *Times*. ■

New York Times Service

Wit and wisdom

A. G. NOORANI

Name-Dropping: From F.D.R. On by John Kenneth Galbraith; Houghton Mifflin Co.; pages 194.

WERE it not for his solid reputation as a teacher and writer, John Kenneth Galbraith's ready and irreverent wit would have led people to dismiss him as a delightful gadfly. Even those familiar with his record of wise counsel during many a crisis might be forgiven for regarding this slim volume as a self-indulgent memoir by a 91-year-old celebrity. They would soon find themselves proved wrong as they turn its pages. There is a fund of good sense, even wisdom, spread over the book. It is more than serious; it is sad. An aspect to his personality that emerges, despite the well-deserved reputation for arrogance, is a deep, abiding commitment to friends and to friendships and an endearing sensitivity to warmth in others.

Galbraith set out to describe the political personality of the ones he writes about: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his wife Eleanor, Albert Speer, the Nazi wizard, Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lyndon B. Johnson, Chester Bowles and, more briefly, some others, especially from the British Labour Party. But he abandoned the idea and decided, instead, to write on how they "appeared to their contemporaries, of whom I was one". The author is conscious of the risks it entails. "Reminiscences and anecdotes, as they tell of one's meetings with the great or the prominent, are an established form of self-enhancement." Critics might dub the exercise name-dropping. Hence, the self-deprecatory title of the book.

There are flashes of insight and of wisdom and admissions and revelations that astonish the reader. Galbraith repeatedly praises Dwight D. Eisenhower as "one of the underestimated Presidents of our time. A Republican, he accepted the social legacy" of the New Deal era and confirmed it. "He also left the deathless and death-defying warning as to the military-industrial complex." The warning was delivered in his Farewell Address as President in 1959.

Ronald Reagan and Galbraith were founders of Americans for Democratic Action, a liberal voice in the U.S. "Ronnie, as he was known, left us when his screen career diminished and he began giving well-paid lectures on, as it was then denoted, the free enterprise system. His regression, we always said, was not from any commitment to newly acquired belief; it was only for the money."

Galbraith thought of writing a chapter on Churchill and de Gaulle but, having met them only after the War was over and for "no deeply operative purpose", he felt that to make anything of those encounters would, indeed, have been name-dropping.

The book wins the reader's attention as well as respect as it wends its way since its great hero is F.D.R. One cannot but recall Walter Lippman's attack on the candidate for the Presidency in January 1932 which neither friend nor foe allowed him to forget for the rest of his life. Charming but slippery, Roosevelt was "a highly impressionable person without a firm grasp of public affairs and without very strong convictions.... He is an amiable man with many philanthropic impulses, but he is not the dangerous enemy of anything... a pleasant man who, without any important qualifications for the office, would very much like to be President" (Ronald Steel: *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, Vintage, 1981; pages 291-292.)

There is a fund of good sense, even wisdom, spread over the book. It is more than serious; it is sad... It wins the reader's attention as well as respect as it wends its way since its great hero is F.D.R.

There is a word in Urdu which is difficult to translate into English. *Mardum-shanaasi* is a talent for sizing up persons, for assessing character. A whole decade and more earlier, the sage Oliver Wendell Holmes passed a judgment which endured after the phases of both demonising and hero-worship of F.D.R. were over – "a second-rate intellect, but a first-rate temperament." F.D.R's skills as a political leader of acumen are described well in this book. So also the mindset of Big Business which bitterly opposed him. It was the sense of lost prestige that mobilised privilege. The state would assume a role in shaping the economy that once belonged to the rich exclusively. "This antagonism became a considerable source of strength for him as well." Before long, some of the leading lights of the business community were co-opted to work for the President.

It fell to Galbraith, as a director of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, to interrogate Albert Speer who began as Hitler's architect and became the czar of arms production in 1942. The experience left a deep impact on Galbraith's mind, of which he became very conscious during the Vietnam years. "There is grave doubt that the strategic long-range bombing of Germany effectively shortened World War II. That war won by the troops on the ground." His co-director, George Ball, thought the same way. What effect could bombing have on "the vast rural reaches of North Vietnam... they were, above all, agricultural, not military, targets?"

Speer was adroit under questioning, combining professions of innocence with disarming confessions. When he died, after serving his 20-year prison sentence, "he was, on balance, a well-regarded figure". Unlike him, other Nazi leaders were drug-addicts or alcoholics or both. The head warden of the prison remarked: "Who would have thought we were fighting the greatest war in history against that bunch of jerks?" Hitler proved his ineptness by attacking the Soviet Union and declaring war against the U.S., in unique fulfilment of a treaty obligation (to Japan).

Galbraith, surprisingly, is "not wholly in sympathy with much of this discussion" on Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. He "did not have a choice", the author avers dismissively and wrongly. An ardent Democrat and a party activist, Galbraith worked actively for Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy. He left the Stevenson team to work for Kennedy and Robert Kennedy's for McCarthy. Objectivity eludes him more than once. J.F.K. had played a dirty and well-recorded trick on Stevenson in the aftermath of the Cuban

missile crisis. Galbraith slurs over it. The disaster that was Nehru's meeting with Kennedy and other admirers among his aides is authentically recorded in the memoirs of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (*A housand Days*) and of Theodore C. Sorensen (*Kennedy*). Both were published in 1965. Kennedy became convinced "that India's potential role in world affairs had been overestimated by its admirers". One gets a misleadingly watered-down version in Galbraith's account (p. 140). This is attributable to his deep regard and affection for Nehru. One is amazed to learn that Nehru was flattened by and owned up Malcolm Muggeridge's famous comment on Nehru: "You realise, Galbraith, that I am the last Englishman to rule in India." Neither of the two realised, of course, that his was unjust to Nehru.

Nor is Galbraith realistic about India's influence on the course of global politics. He, however, rightly criticises Pokhran-II as a "mindless, useless and even disastrous recourse to the testing of nuclear weapons. India became a minor player in the nuclear arms race" (p. 134). This comes from a committed friend of India.

He has a dig at our politicians' "enduring appetite for oratory" and proceeds acidly to remark: "In Western democracies, those listening to a lengthy speech think of the more interesting things they might be doing; they are hoping for the end. In India, public address is a welcome alternative to idleness, even greater boredom. (The often appalling Indian motion pictures serve the same function.) Accordingly, the longer the speech, the more it is appreciated. This, Nehru fully understood. Galbraith clearly did not understand Nehru's own weakness for verbosity. His remarks on Mountbatten are justifiably scathing: "Nothing in the twentieth century was so badly handled and with such disastrous consequences as Mountbatten's policies on India's independence..."

These vignettes, written with urbane wit and felicity of style, make for absorbing reading. It is as a dissenter that Galbraith will ever be known in all discussions on U.S. foreign policy. His views on policies towards the Third World and the USSR have been vindicated by time. The trait in the U.S. State Department he particularly singles out for criticism is widely shared by others as well, our Ministry for External Affairs included. It is "institutional rigidity, which holds it firmly on course even when it is visibly wrong... this rigidity, with its strong commitment to error, has prevailed in both past and present times..." ■

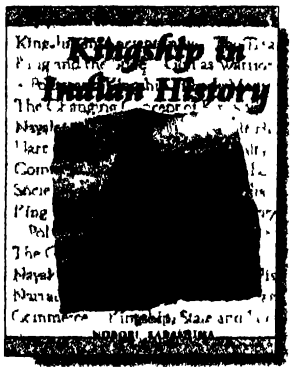
■ BOOKS

A perspective on Indian kingship

PARVATHI MENON

in Indian History: Japanese Studies in South Asia No.2, Noburu Karashima (ed.); Manohar, New Delhi, 1999; pages 271, Rs.500.

THE Japanese Association for South Asian Studies, established in 1988, gave formal expression to the growing body of India-related research and writing in the universities and research institutes in Japan. Drawn from across the social science spectrum, Japanese scholarship on India shares a rigorous empirical approach. Indeed, the historical component of this tradition, its strongest perhaps, could almost claim the status of a 'school' of India studies. The work of Japanese historians who write on India is distinguished by a mastery of the language and structure of the main source material of the period under study, and by the innovative use of quantitative techniques in analysing historical data. The Association for South Asian Studies has a robust publishing record. It is into the tenth annual issue of its journal, and it also brings out an annual newsletter. The book under review is the second in a series on South Asia (the first, a collection of essays on caste in India, was published in 1997).



Noboru Karashima, editor of the volume, is the doyen of historical studies on India in Japan. In India, south India in particular, his is a well-known and admired name in historical circles, as his work and academic collaborations have substantially advanced the frontiers of knowledge on the economy and politics of medieval south India. The volume brings together a selection of nine studies by Japanese historians on kingship in the ideology and practice of the medieval period. Three of these articles look at the theory of kingship in literary sources, while the others are studies of the actual forms that kingship took in different regions of India, the evolution of these forms, and the historical purposes they served.

The question of kingship, linked as it is to the important issue of state formation and forms of state control, has generated much debate in historical and anthropological studies in India. The variety and complexity in the forms of early and medieval kingship across the country (between the 'great' traditions of monarchy and statecraft, and the 'little' traditions that proliferated outside them) is evident from the variation and unevenness of source material. Karashima, in his introduction to the volume, notes the tendency in this large and growing body of research towards the "blurring or losing of the historical perspective... with changes in the meaning and function of kingship being ignored." He evaluates the contributions in the volume in the light of standard approaches to the concept and function of kingship in academic research, as for example, 'secular' vs 'religious' and 'political' vs 'ritual'. But these issues can be concretised only by actually looking at the historical data to see how kingship of its agencies permeated local communities. Most of the essays in the volume do not offer theoretical postulations that are not drawn from a meticulously marshalled source base.

THE first article by Genichi Yamazaki is a comparison of the theory of kingship as presented in three major literary sources of ancient India, on the one hand, and how it found practical expression as revealed in four major inscriptions of around the same period. The literary sources are the Dharmasastras (c. 200 B.C. and A.D. 200) reflecting orthodox Brahmanism; the Buddhist literature written by heterodox thinkers between c.500-100 B.C.; and the *Arthasastra*, a book on

political science believed to have been written around the third century B.C. The theories on kingship postulated in these works are compared to kingship as described in the Edicts of Asoka (third centry B.C.), the Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela (second to first century B.C.), the Junagadh Rock inscription of Rudradaman (second century A.D.), and the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (fourth century A.D.). Yamazaki lists 18 attributes of kingship in the three literary sources – 12 of which they share, and six on which there is a divergence of views. If the orthodox and heterodox schools hold two extreme positions of the scale, the four actual systems of kingship as described in the inscriptions are strung on the scale between these extreme positions. Purely on the basis of the features of kingship that the inscriptions share with the literary sources, what emerges from the study is the shift along the scale from heterodox to orthodox forms of kingship between the age of the Mauryas and the age of the Guptas.

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Takanobu Takahashi and Hiroshi Yamashita look at the images of kingship in the *Tirukkural*, the didactic Tamil classic of the fifth century, and in two major Sangam works of around the same period, namely the *Tirumurugatrupadai* and *Paripadal*. Takahashi looks at why the *Tirukkural* is not as aggressively prescriptive as say, the *Arthasastra*, in its treatment of the duties and rights of the king, and why it only offers rather vague and often naive generalisations on kingship. Yamashita evaluates the view held in Tamil literary studies that the Hindu concepts of god in Tamil India owe a great deal to indigenous notions on the warrior-like and superhuman king. According to this theory, the ancient Tamil king was a warrior *par excellence* and the gods of the period were consequently invested with similar virtues. Yamashita's own reading of the texts does not support this view. Both he and Takahashi urge a re-examination of the Sangam works.

Complementing these contributions is an excellent study by Yasushi Ogura about temple architecture being the mirror of changing forms of kingship during the Chola period. If royal involvement in temple building was a way of expressing and consolidating ideological and political legitimacy by the Chola kings, then these forms changed through the 400 years of the Chola period. Looking at conventions of temple building over this period, at royal involvement in construction, and at changing forms of iconographic representation, Ogura concludes that the Chola pattern of seeking legitimacy "... developed from a simple and more heroic form in the early period to a more sophisticated Sanskritised form in the later period, while in the middle transitional period, both forms were mixed together."

Karashima's contribution to this volume is a study of the Vijaynagar nayakas, a stratum of intermediaries between the ruler and the local communities, who were conferred military titles and held superior rights in the land. Compiling the lists of nayakas appearing in Vijaynagar inscriptions in the districts of Chinglepet, North Arcot, South Arcot, Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur, he has looked at nayaka rule in relation to their control over land and taxation systems, and the nature of their subordination to the Vijaynagar kings. Karashima's conclusions strengthen the idea of a hierarchical and inclusive power structure that extended from the king at the apex to the local communities at the base, an understanding that contrasts with that held by another distinguished historian of south India, Burton Stein.

Nobuhiro Ota's survey of two clans of the Beda Nayakas in Karnataka is an interesting study of the historical narratives of two families. He looks at how the clans secure a desired self-image through the use of idioms and legends, in order to establish themselves within the larger caste/clan on the one hand, and within the military/political structure of the nayaka system on the other.

Studies on the practice of kingship and society in early medieval Rajasthan by Masahiko Mita, in 18th century Khurda (Orissa) by Akio Tanabe; and in 17th to 19th century Deccan by Hiroyuki Kotani complete the volume.

It must be said that the high academic standard of the contributions is unfortunately not matched by the quality of editing. Editing errors are aplenty and do detract from an otherwise absorbing read. ■

■ BOOKS

SUSAN RAM

by J.M. Coetzee; Secker & Warburg, 1999; pages 220, £14.99, special Indian price Rs.590.50.

IT is, perhaps, coincidental that the final Booker Prize of our century should go to a South African writer. But as you read *Disgrace*, J.M.Coetzee's eighth novel and his second to win the prestigious literary award, you become aware of a certain bleak appropriateness. It is not so much that South Africa, with its rare physical beauty, mineral bounty and human diversity, is poised to enter the new millennium weighed down by its grim, oppressive past. In political terms, there has been, if not a revolution, then a partial overturning of the old order. Apartheid, the dominant reality of South Africa's twentieth century, has been dismantled. The formal structures of a modern democracy have been put in place. Innovative efforts have been made, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to come to terms with the past. But all this seems overwhelmed by a continuing sense of tragedy. As the stories come out of South Africa – stories of unemployment at epidemic levels, rising crime, lives blighted by Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), defeated expectations – the realisation grows that the process of reckoning has only just begun.

Coetzee's new novel is essentially an engagement with the anguish and the mayhem that stalk contemporary South Africa. But where another writer might have been tempted to assay the grand scale, mounting a broad sweep through a society in crisis and producing a blockbuster, Coetzee adheres to a modest canvas. Herein lies his effectiveness. Through his small, spare story, with its unheroic central character and its encounter with violence that, by prevailing South African standards, can be deemed a brush, he unlocks a stash of themes and issues.

With a rape at the centre of the narrative, there is an exploration of the act of rape along its personal, political and other dimensions. Growing old, understood not simply as a process of physical diminution and decay but as a loss of identity and being, is a running theme. There is attention to language, especially relevant in a culture of man most of them traditionally l

A comprehension of life

tempt by white South Africa, and to the ssociated challenge of communication in new times. Above all, Coetzee engages with difficult areas of human experience: confession of wrongdoing, atonement, forgiveness, the path back from purgatory to something like a state of grace.

COETZEE, a professor of literature at the University of Cape Town, draws the central figure of his novel from the academic world of the southern Cape. David Lurie, a white South African of English descent, is a university teacher for whom the certainties of life – a cloistered existence among the Romantic poets, a succession of women won over by his wit and boyish good looks – are in visible retreat. Leisurely literary pursuits stand uprooted in the new South Africa; David now teaches courses in communications skills, in the company of colleagues who are similar relics of the past, 'clerks in a post-religious age'. More damaging still to his sense of being is the awareness that his attractiveness to women is dwindling. As a womaniser once confident that 'if he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look', he experiences growing old (he is now 52) as losing 'the backbone of his life'.



Through his small, spare story, with its unheroic central character and its encounter with violence... Coetzee unlocks a stash of themes and issues.

David's response is a classic instance of mid-life male recklessness: he seduces one of his students. The one-sided affair quickly sours, exposure follows, and he finds himself before a university enquiry facing charges of sexual harassment. In the new South Africa, sensitivity to such issues is part of a larger human rights agenda, but David, locked in the past and incapable of frank self-exploration, reacts with disdain: while ready to plead guilty as charged, he will not issue the public statement of confession and remorse ('abasement' is how he sees it) that will save his job. Banished from the university, he now steps out into realities – geographic, social, racial, political – for which nothing in his years of sheltered, privileged self-preoccupation has prepared him.

With two broken marriages behind him, David has no partner to help him through the crisis. He therefore turns to his daughter Lucy, a woman in her mid-twenties who owns a homestead in the eastern Cape. This is several removes from the rural idyll of the Romantic poets, a dusty, incomplete Eden hobbled by 'poor soil, poor land... good only for goats'. But it is a sanctuary of sorts, a place where David might come to terms with his new situation, soothed by unhurried routines and his daughter's calm engagement with existence.

But in a society as ravaged and scarred as contemporary South Africa, sanctuary can only be fragile and temporary. The homestead becomes the target of a vicious assault in which Lucy is raped and David is bludgeoned, locked in a lavatory and set alight in a manner designed to taunt rather than kill or maim. His impotence as a father and protective male is underlined by this humiliation; the womaniser with the rarefied poetic interests must now confront his daughter's incomprehensible reaction to events: Lucy will not press charges of rape, will not even give voice to the fact of her violation.

Initially the reader shares the father's incredulity. But as the dialogue between father and daughter unfolds between confrontations and silences, Lucy's perspective reveals its inner logic. As a young white liberal who has made a conscious choice to stay on in South Africa, abjuring the easier option of moving to Europe to live with her Dutch mother, Lucy knows that there are implications, costs, sacrifices. Were she to pursue her rapists, who are black, she would set in motion all the old mechanisms of the past, unleash ancient prejudices, reopen wounds in the early, tentative stages of healing, set back the whole attempt of a society to knit itself together. Her contribution now, 'in this place, at this time', lies in stretching herself across the past like a protective wall or dam. The rape she will diminish in her mind to 'debt collection', a 'purely private matter' between herself and her attackers. And she will stay on in her farm, not in a spirit of bravado or confrontation but as an expression of something more elemental: that, somehow, this is what is needed, this might possibly endure.

Such a course does not easily commend itself to David, for whom the whole notion of sacrifice is suspect. But the rape, and his daughter's reaction to it, prove unstoppably destabilising, forcing him to re-examine his life, his priorities, his sense of himself, his view of what the future holds. The results fall far short of a tidy resolution. Indeed, if Coetzee has a message to convey, it is about the incompleteness of life, its inherent messiness, the necessity of making do. At the end of the novel David has achieved at least this understanding.

This is a big novel, presented tautly and with understatement in a little over 200 pages. It is not without unevenness: like his protagonist, Coetzee is more at ease in the world of libraries and lecture theatres than in the rural Cape, and the opening section of the novel charting David's fall from grace is particularly persuasive. Not every strand introduced into the story works, however. A recurring motif is the unrealised music in David's head, and his attempt, through an episode in Byron's life, to give voice to it. There are interesting possibilities in the clash between inner music and external mundanity, between past poetic yearnings and the challenge of the present, but Coetzee perhaps leaves himself too little space in which to explore them convincingly. But such caveats in no way detract from Coetzee's achievement. *Disgrace* is an outstanding work of fiction, opening windows not only on a distant land but on painful, problematic areas of human experience that all of us find easy to pass by. ■

Brain drain vs brain gain

C.T. KURIEN

The Migration of Knowledge Workers: Second-Generation Effects of India's Brain Drain by Binod Khadria; Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999; pages 240, Rs.350.

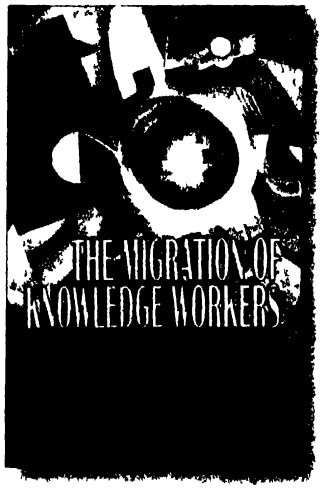
THE movement of professionally trained people – knowledge workers as they have come to be known – from one country to another is not a new phenomenon. During the colonial period the flow was primarily from the metropolis to the colonies. In the new international order that has been emerging since the end of the Second World War – when many colonies became independent but described as "developing countries" – there has been a reversal of the flow. Now, knowledge workers migrate from the developing countries to the developed ones, from the poor countries to the rich ones, to be more honest. It is this flow that has widely come to be known as "brain drain".

The phenomenon is now quite familiar, but a few statistics may still be useful. A 1994 study estimated that out of the annual output of highly qualified young men and women in India, 7.3 per cent in engineering, 2.8 per cent in medicine and 2.1 per cent in the natural sciences move to other countries in search of better earnings and conditions of work than would be available in India. Another study found that roughly one-fourth of the B.Tech graduates who pass out of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are moving out of the country. It is well known too that in the area of computer science, those leaving the country as a proportion of those trained is even higher.

With globalisation, and the relatively freer mobility that is now becoming possible to highly skilled persons in practically all walks of life, brain drain could become even more pronounced. There is a natural explanation for this. Governments of developing countries attach a great deal of importance to higher education, especially in the sciences and in technology. Developed countries find in such trained people a ready-made recruitment pool. The poor spend on training, the rich make use of that training – at relatively low cost!

That is the "first generation" aspect of brain drain. But is it possible to visualise a "second generation" effect of this phenomenon? Can the emigrants participate in certain selected but specific nation-building activities as opposed to the general stereotypes, asks the author. Isn't it possible that in this age of globalisation there may be a significant return flow of resources that can replace and replenish what is being drained away? These are the questions that the author of the book sets out to explore. In short, can brain drain in the newly emerging global situation become "brain gain"? Is this already beginning to happen?

For his enquiry the author has chosen the brain movement between India and the United States. While the U.S. may be correctly described as a land where the vast majority of the population consists of immigrants and their descendants, free immigration was for long restricted to those from Europe. Even as late as the middle of the present century there were severe restrictions on immigration from Asia. Similarly, Indians traditionally emigrated to the United Kingdom and Canada (among the Western countries). Only in the early 1970s did the number of persons emigrating to the U.S. begin to exceed the total of those going to the U.K. and Canada. However, by the early 1990s, the number of people migrating to the U.S. from India was almost twice as many as those going to the other two countries. Today, the Indian community in the U.S. (migrants plus Indians born in that country) forms a noticeable proportion of the Asian population there. What is more important is that among the immigrant communities, Indians constitute a much higher proportion of the labour force (that is, those employed and those actively looking for employment). The data given in the book on this aspect is rather dated, but still important. According to the 1980 U.S. Census figures, 75 per cent of Indian immigrants aged 16 and over were in the labour force – 95 per cent of them were employed, while 5 per cent were looking for jobs. This figure was significantly higher than that for all immigrants (56 per cent in the labour force) and noticeably higher than the figure for total U.S. population (62 per cent in the labour force). More striking perhaps was the fact that in 1983, the share of professionally and technically qualified immigrants constituted 50 per cent of the total Indian immigrants, placing Indian knowledge workers at the top of the list of those from all Asian countries, including Japan. Average earnings of Indians are also considerably higher than those of other Asian immigrant communities. One of the major weaknesses of the book is that while it is full of facts and figures, information on some of these significant aspects is very dated.



Knowledge workers migrate from the developing countries to the developed ones, from the poor countries to the rich ones. This flow has widely come to be known as "brain drain".

In terms of the questions that the author had set out to explore, the three final chapters of the book are the most important. The first of these, Chapter 5, contains a well-documented and revealing account of the benefits that India may have accrued by way of remittances from Indian communities in different parts of the world, technology transfers and services rendered directly by expatriate Indians. Remittances have been quite significant, especially in relation to the balance of payments problem. But

the final verdict the author arrives at are: (1) "...in terms of return of money... to India, globalisation of the Indian knowledge workers has not been quite gainful to the country" (p.150) when remittances are considered as returns on capital invested for training; (2) "...the payments made by developing countries to developed countries on technology account would be in the vicinity of U.S. $10 billion per annum, cancelling at one stroke a major part of the total aid flow from the latter to the former" (p.156); and (3) "...gains realised from the geo-economic presence of Indian knowledge workers in the U.S. neither necessarily nor sufficiently support the proposition of a successful globalisation of India's human capital through emigration of Indian professional and qualified manpower, whether to the U.S. or to any other developed country" (p.162).

So much for the first generation aspects of brain drain. Evidence points to the fact that it is still a drain. What about the second generation possibility? The last two chapters deal with this question. Chapter 6 reports on interviews the author conducted with a few returnees in India, some non-resident Indians in the U.S., and a few select experts and academicians in both the countries. The exploration was aimed at studying whether Indian knowledge workers outside the country can help India, specifically in the areas of education and health care. There are, of course, examples, some of which qualify as "shining examples". Indian scholars who settled abroad have come back, often during their sabbaticals, to teach in India or to interact with researchers here. Doctors too have made their services available to their parent country. More important, institutions have been founded and continue to be supported by Indians living abroad, including some of the prestigious hospitals in the country. In all, the author sees evidence of "some silver streaks ... even if no proper silver lining" (p.164). But, there are severe constraints. For one, only well-established senior professionals who have spent some 15 years in the countries to which they migrated can afford to turn to social service. More important, globalisation severely discounts social service, and puts a high premium on value for money. Born optimists may find signs of some hope somewhere in situations like this. But realistically speaking, the possibility of the "brain drain" turning into "brain gain" for countries such as India is a matter for the future – a very distant future, indeed. ■

■ BOOKS

An exceptional career in politics

ROBERT DALLEK

Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography by Adam Clymer; William Morrow & Co; pages 692, $27.50.

IN 1968, after Robert Kennedy's assassination had deprived the nation of his likely election to the presidency, Democratic Party leaders urged his 36-year-old brother, Senator Ted Kennedy, to run in his place. They assured him that the nomination was his for the asking. Kennedy refused: "How could I conscientiously combat allegations by Nixon...that I was too young, that I had no record in public life strong enough to recommend me for the high office of President, that perhaps I was trying to trade on my brothers' names." Kennedy's self-denying response in 1968, among many considerations in deciding not to run, stand in stark contrast to current assumptions about running for President. A want of political experience as an officeholder, elected or appointed, is no deterrent to becoming a candidate. Celebrity is an acceptable credential for a White House bid.

As Adam Clymer, Washington correspondent for *The New York Times*, demonstrates in this first-rate biography, Kennedy has consistently put public ideals above personal ambition during his 37 years as a U.S. senator. Clymer's book is not a hagiography; Kennedy's personal flaws are on full display. But unlike so many other recent political biographies, Clymer's volume focuses not on sex or scandal but on politics.

Americans interested in substantive public questions have been rewarded with a biography that reconstructs Kennedy's role in the many major domestic and foreign policy issues that have been central to his political career. This is not to imply that we are in the presence of some dry political chronicle devoid of the personal tragedies that have punctuated Ted Kennedy's life. The suffering he endured through the murders of his brothers and the illness of a son who lost a leg to cancer are sensitively covered. The author also deals forthrightly with the senator's failed marriage and the Chappaquiddick scandal.

What sets Clymer's discussion of the personal apart from recent biographical exposes is the link he makes between the private and the public. Some biographers of John F. Kennedy, for example, have explained their emphasis on his womanising by asserting that it jeopardised his presidency; his impeachment was only a newspaper story away, they argue. But as Clymer convincingly demonstrates, journalists in the 1960s published little or nothing about politicians' sex lives. When Senator Kennedy became drunk on a plane ride home from Alaska, the reporters with him did not publish stories about it.

Clymer says that he believes that Chappaquiddick – with the death of Mary Jo Kopechne on Martha's Vineyard in 1969 in a car accident caused by Senator Kennedy's carelessness – changed the way in which journalists write about politicians' private lives. The accident raised questions about the senator's character and put him under a journalistic spotlight. Whether it was only or even principally Chappaquiddick that altered journalistic standards is debatable. But Chappaquiddick was of crucial importance in Ted Kennedy's political career. It was a decisive element in the defeat of his presidential ambitions in 1979-80. Consequently it receives Clymer's close scrutiny, not for the sake of salacious details that might titillate readers but rather because it was of such importance in Senator Kennedy's public life and the life of the nation. Clymer argues that despite never gaining the presidency, Senator Kennedy has been a major political force as an heir to the idealism John and Robert called forth and as the unflinching leader of New Deal liberalism. He writes that Senator Kennedy "deserves recognition not just as the leading senator of his time, but as one of the greats in its history".

Clymer's book is also a fine counter to the cynicism and indifference that have recently reduced voter participation in elections and discouraged too many of the country's best and brightest from taking up the challenge of a political life. ■

New York Times Service

Indefensible arms

Excerpts from the South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament *by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, Oxford University Press, Rs.595.*

NUCLEAR weapons are quite unlike any other armaments. Their uniqueness lies in their truly awesome power of destruction on a scale unimaginable until rather recently in human history. Nuclear weapons alone have the potential to cause *total destruction*, exterminate humanity, destroy all life on earth. No other class of armaments can possibly cause that kind of havoc through an unstoppable chain of destructive events – including the release of vast amounts of energy through heat blasts, X-rays, and a range of radioactive poisons, some of which will remain lethal for millions of years. There is not, and cannot be, any defence against nuclear weapons, whether military, civilian, or medical. The totality of destruction wreaked by, and the unending lethality of, nuclear weapons gives them a singularly horrible quality, which is incomparable with any other instrument of war. They are unique even within the category of 'weapons of mass destruction'.

Ten years after the Cold War ended, the world still has enough firepower in its 30,000-plus nuclear weapons arsenal to cause a million Hiroshimas; indeed, wipe out the human race altogether. At least half of these weapons are in a state of alert or are deployed so as to be ready to be launched in a matter of minutes or hours. It is this sheer awesomeness, this vast, virtually infinite, limitless, destructive power of nuclear weapons that has radically altered the condition of human existence, indeed its very possibility, as never before.

At no time in the past has the world experienced such an obsession with a particular type of weaponry, nor has another class of armaments so fundamentally transformed, distorted, and in other ways affected, the way millions of human beings look at security and defence, experience mortal fear and vulnerability, or feel anxiety and uncertainty of the most profound kind. Nuclear weapons have the potential to terminate human culture, end history, murder the human imagination as we know it. Nuclearism is based upon a series of illusions. One illusion holds that security can be derived from insecurity, itself rooted in the capacity of adversaries to inflict limitless violence upon each other. Another is that responsible leadership structures exist at the military and political level which can prudently and effectively 'manage' nuclear weapons, and that the citizen can be reliably protected against the enemy's nuclear weapons. One of the greater illusions is that nuclear deterrence can, and will always, work dependably, enhancing mutual confidence and security.

Just and unjust wars

The acute problem posed by nuclear weapons is this: are they legitimate weapons of war? And are they compatible with the notion of just wars? This notion has two components going back to St. Augustine and the ethics of the use of violence: *jus ad bellum* (justice through war, or the justness of war itself) and *jus in bello* (justice in war, or in the conduct of war). For our purposes, it should be evident that the second is more important than the first. The first aspect is relatively simple to deal with only because nuclear weapons are quintessentially offensive weapons calculated to wreak devastation on an indiscriminate scale. They can have no function in a war waged in self-defence, or to vacate an aggression.

The use of nuclear weapons is simply inconceivable in, say, a war of national liberation, or one waged to defend values of decency, or of democracy and worthy political systems or cultures. Wars are just only insofar as they are waged in self-defence or in pursuit of causes that are noble, and oppose injustice and tyranny. Wars involve the deliberate use of lethal violence, which can be justified only because we recognise '*two* orders of fact, each of them compelling, each of them terrible'.

Wars are indeed 'destructive to the peace of the world' but they may nevertheless be necessary and just under certain circumstances. John Locke argued by analogy against the categorical pacifist view: 'They may as well say, upon the same ground, that honest men may not oppose robbers or pirates, because this may occasion disorder or bloodshed... If any mischief come in such cases, it is not to be charged upon him who defends his own right'.

It is virtually impossible to countenance the possibility that a nuclear war could meet any elementary criterion underlying the notion of *jus ad bellum*. How can epochal, apocalyptic forms of mass destruction and insensate violence possibly promote a cause that is noble? The nature of any struggle against tyranny and injustice, however grave, is undermined by the greater tyranny of nuclear destruction. Indeed, even the creation of the wherewithal to wage nuclear war, a gigantic military apparatus ready and willing, and in a state of alert, to wreak devastation upon the earth, itself involves disregard for values such as sobriety, caution, democracy, and transparency, and an obsession with paranoid and jingoistic notions of national security.

At best, a rather wishful case could be made out in favour of the *threat* of use of nuclear weapons: the idea that through active preparation and readiness to use such weapons, one might be effectively and reliably able to deter an adversary from using his own nuclear armaments or other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). This, however, really pertains to the issue of nuclear deterrence, its morality and its strategic value, not to the morality of the actual use of such weapons. Nuclear deterrence is discussed separately below.

There are several criteria of *jus in bello*, which have evolved over the past centuries through debates on ethics. Some of these have been incorporated into jurisprudence and bodies of international law and international humanitarian law. War and methods of warfare cannot be divorced from rational strategic considerations. The use of force must be *proportionate* to the threat that it is meant to contain. Excessive force or violence is not permissible. Non-combatants must not be targeted. The use of cruel or inhuman methods with pitiless disregard for basic human values is forbidden. For instance, you cannot mass-poison civilians or starve prisoners of war. Prisoners of war have rights, just as combatants, even guerillas,

have rights. Wars must be fought well and scrupulously. Certain methods of warfare are totally prohibited no matter how admirable and desirable the end they might achieve. There are rules about hostages and blockades, and about reprisals and retribution.

Indiscriminate destruction

Nuclear weapons fail each of these criteria. They kill massively, indiscriminately, without distinguishing between combatant soldiers and non-combatant civilians. Indeed, they are quintessentially indiscriminate and acquire their particularly horrifying character precisely because they kill massively and indiscriminately... If the world could outlaw chemical and biological weapons, and even agree to an anti-personnel landmines ban, then surely the case for eliminating nuclear weapons – which are incalculably more destructive and more indiscriminate in the damage they cause – is even stronger.

The case extends even to nuclear deterrence, the doctrine that holds that an adversary can and should be effectively deterred from attack by virtue of being threatened with the infliction of 'unacceptable' damage. Nuclear deterrence not only legitimises horror weapons but entails a willingness to use them, whether in anticipation, to pre-empt an enemy attack, or in retaliation or reprisal. Without such willingness, indeed a firm commitment, to use them, deterrence loses its sting, becomes meaningless. Every established nuclear weapons power has well-formulated, elaborate plans to *use* nuclear weapons. Whatever the difference in the details of their strategic doctrines – whether they profess a policy of No First Use, and of No Use against a non-nuclear adversary, or are wedded to 'extended deterrence' and pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons even against non-nuclear states – each of the P-5 has well-developed plans for the *actual* use of such weapons. These go well beyond mere *intentions*, themselves highly objectionable. They involve *actual* preparations, the creation of extremely expensive command, control, communications, and intelligence infrastructures (which in the U.S. alone have cost over $4,000 billion), and *credible* war-fighting schemes to which nuclear weapons are central.

The Gandhi-Nehru legacy and its degradation

Ever since Mahatma Gandhi declared that nuclear weapons 'represent the most sinful and diabolical use of science', India's leaders have forcefully characterised (until recently, that is) nuclear deterrence as an 'abhorrent' and 'morally repugnant' doctrine. Indeed, India's classical position, officially stated by its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, insisted that not only the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, but even their manufacture and possession, be 'declared a crime against humanity'. India's diplomats, spokespersons and Ministers until 1998 energetically argued that nuclear deterrence is simply impermissible and morally unacceptable...

Thus, it was not an aberration that India in 1995 pleaded before the World Court that nuclear weapons are illegal and incompatible with international law and international humanitarian law, and advanced an elaborate set of arguments for outlawing their use, threat of use, manufacture or possession. The written statement of the Government of India before the International Court of Justice contends, on the basis of Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter, that 'any use of nuclear weapons as a measure of use of force to promote national policy objectives would be unlawful' and the 'use of nuclear weapons in any armed conflicts as a first attack would be unlawful under international law'. Further, it argued that the use of nuclear weapons 'by way of reprisal or retaliation would violate the principle of proportionality and humanitarian law'; therefore, the 'prohibition of the use of a nuclear weapon in an armed conflict is an absolute one, compliance with which is not dependent on corresponding compliance by others'; it is a 'requisite in all circumstances'.

The Indian official statement reads:

This brings us to the question as to the legality of the use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict on the ground that it is open as a measure of last resort under limited conditions as a matter of military necessity. A basic principle of the law of armed conflict and particularly the international humanitarian law, which is contained in Article 22 of the Hague Convention IV (1907), states that 'the right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited'.

Therefore,

the use of nuclear weapons in response to attack by a conventional weapon would patently violate the principle of proportionality, but also a nuclear response to nuclear attack, would violate the principle of discrimination, humanity, environmental security and probably the principle of neutrality as such an attack would not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, causing civilian casualties, ravaging the natural environment and contaminating the territory of neighbouring and distant neutral countries. Nuclear deterrence had been considered to be abhorrent to human sentiment since it implies that a state if required to defend its own existence will act with pitiless disregard for the consequences to its own and adversary's people

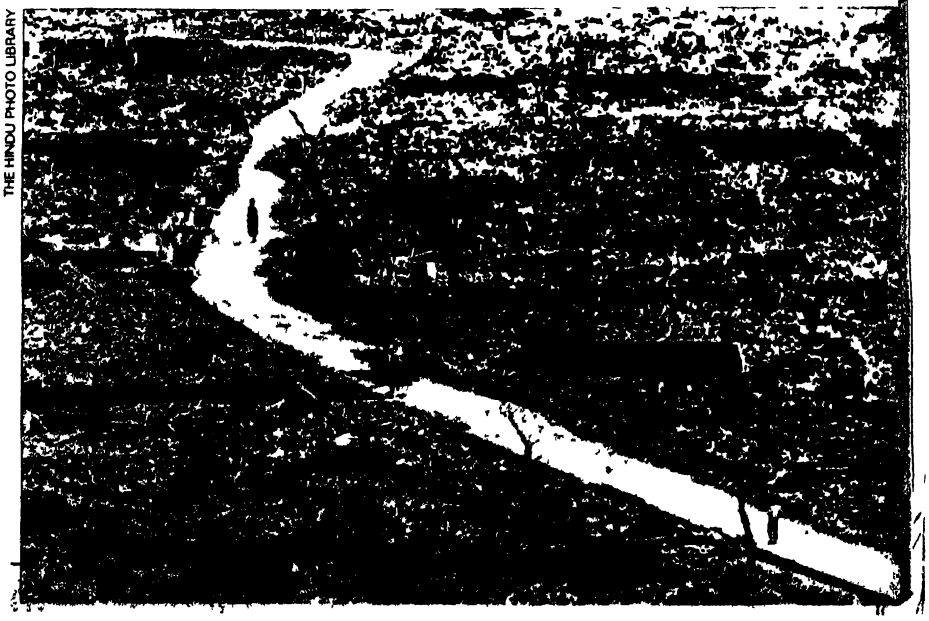
This was not all. India also pleaded:

Since the production and manufacture of nuclear weapons can only be with the objective of their use, it must follow that if the use of such weapons itself is illegal under international law, then their production and manufacture cannot under any circumstances be considered as permitted.

Thus, the statement concluded:

In view of the above, it is submitted that the

August 6, 1945: A residential area in Hiroshima. Nuclear weapons "acquire their particularly horrifying character precisely because they kill massively and indiscriminately".



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threat or use of nuclear weapon in any circumstances, whether as a means or method of warfare or otherwise, is illegal or unlawful under international law

Similarly, it was the long-standing doctrinal continuity in India's radical and categorical rejection of nuclear weapons that led Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar to state at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in March 1996:

> India's objectives are different We do not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security, and we have followed a conscious decision in this regard We are also convinced that the existence of nuclear weapons diminishes international security. We therefore, seek their complete elimination. These are fundamental precepts that have been an integral basis of India's foreign and national security policy. It shall, therefore, remain our endeavour in the coming months to try to ensure that the disarmament agenda is not lost in a purely non-proliferation agenda.

New Delhi's embrace of this 'abhorrent' doctrine barely two years later, without as much as a figleaf of an attempt at a rational explanation of a change of stance, signifies not so much a change in ground realities or the regional situation, as the moral debasement of the Indian elite and a coarsening of the quality of public discourse in the country. The degeneration of the Indian elite is a long drawn out process, but it has become particularly stark and obvious over the past two decades. It is itself related to the evolution of domestic politics since the early 1980s: a combination of an ascendant Hindu communal ideology, growing alienation of the elite from the people, its militaristic obsession with India becoming a great power, and the spread of profoundly cynical political ideas.

A distinctive moral insensitivity

Perhaps the single most disturbing fact that emerged after the Indian tests (followed by the tests in Pakistan) was the moral insensitivity of India's policymakers in regard to nuclearism. In no country that had previously gone nuclear was the crossing of the threshold made into such an issue of national pride. The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is to this day supported by a majority of U.S. citizens. This is shameful, but the Bombs were viewed with a sense of relief, not pride. They were widely (though incorrectly) seen as helping to bring the Second World War to a rapid end. The Russian and Chinese tests were seen internally as necessary responses to the US and there was, of course, the officially organised drumming up of 'patriotic sentiment' typical of the authoritarian undemocratic regimes that existed at the time the first Bombs were developed and exploded in the two countries. In Britain, the public response was far more muted. Indeed, of all the NWSs, in Britain there emerged in the 1950s a major anti-nuclear mass movement and sentiment. In France, a significant 'patriotic' sentiment did emerge around nuclear weapons, but there was no euphoria.

In none of the first five NWSs was there anything to parallel or approximate the kind of nationalist euphoria and near-hysterical response that was characteristic of significant sections of upper-caste, upper-class Indian urbanites. The kind of celebratory scenes that were portrayed in the international media gave a misleading impression about the size and depth of popular support to the Indian tests. However, although small, the celebrations were real and disturbing in themselves. If similar behaviour was to be found in Pakistan after their government tested, this is more easily explicable as resulting from the popular belief that Pakistan could now match India. It is the insecurity, immaturity and moral insensitivity of the pro-nuclear Indian elite that is most striking. No one in Pakistan talked of building a mosque in commemoration of the 'grand act', but Hindu nationalist organisations like the VHP declared their determination to build just such a temple to worship Shakti, the goddess of power, in commemoration of the Pokhran-II blasts!

At one level, it is not difficult to understand (without ever condoning) this new elite sense of pride. After all, what else has the Indian elite helped accomplish over the last 20 years that could be a source of national pride? Poverty, illiteracy, institutionalised injustices of all kinds continue to haunt Indian society. To take pride in the possession of what even Indian hawks once used to admit was a 'necessary evil' testified to the existence of a profound moral sclerosis. However necessary one might consider an evil, the fact that it is an evil should preclude celebration or pride at its arrival. But it did not. Equally disturbing was the fact that not a single strategic expert, politician, or media-person among all those who supported the tests criticised the praise (official and non-official) that was showered upon Indian science and scientists following the tests. This was truly extraordinary.

Not one prominent supporter of the Bomb found the intelligence or integrity to say what could easily have been said: That even as he or she supported the tests and India's newly declared status as a nuclear weapons power, he or she lamented the fact that Indian science had to be *misused* and that the skills of 'our wonderful pool of scientists' had to be *abused* to produce these evil weapons (when we would have preferred to use their skills for so much more worthwhile ends) because India felt compelled for security reasons to follow the path of other NWSs which had similarly abused science and the skills of their own scientific community. To have said as much, even while supporting Indian nuclearisation, would have at least shown a recognition of the proper relationship between science and ethics. That no prominent pro-Bomb person stated this obvious truth was a striking testimony to the collective absence of a reasonable level of moral sobriety, balance and sensitivity.

Influential sections of the Indian and Pakistani media selectively played up the 'popularity' of the Bomb. Based on no more than a few casual phone calls, one of them reported that 91 per cent of Indians support India's nuclear weapons. The DAE and DRDO scientists and engineers responsible for Pokhran-II were instantly turned into heroes and glamour figures. The circumstance that they disguised their identities, misled their families on their whereabouts, and wore military fatigues, was celebrated as a great achievement. Awards and prizes were showered upon them even as they openly advocated the creation of a 'military-industrial complex' and 'defence-based development.'

Opposing nuclear weapons is not merely a personal matter. There are certain universal evils that must be recognised as such. They debase all of humanity: those that seek to benefit from them as well as those who are their purported or actual victims. Such is the case with evils like apartheid, colonialism, and nuclearism, all of which involve insensate violence. They are often justified in the name of 'national security', 'the national interest', 'national greatness', etc. We cannot create a sustainable and durable nuclear-free world unless we value our common humanity and sustain a shared anger for such universal evils as nuclearism. It is only on the basis of this shared but controlled anger and passion whose wellsprings are our individual moral capacities that we can hope to build a wider consciousness across national boundaries. That alone can help bring about the goal of complete and global nuclear disarmament. ■

A numbers game

The campaign by the Sangh Parivar that there has been a disproportionately high growth in the Christian population in India relies on skilful and selective suppression of facts.

V SRIDHAR

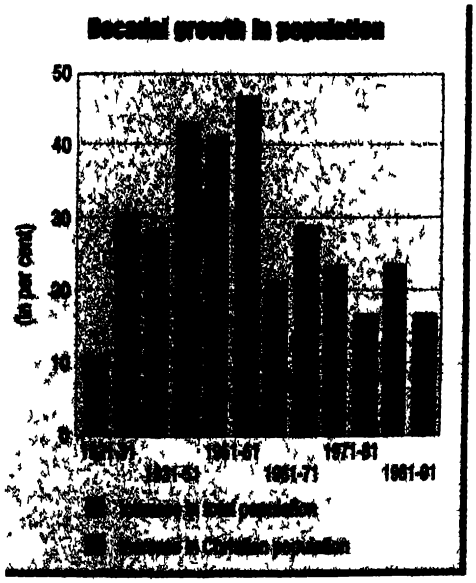
THE repeated articulation by sections of the intelligentsia of mendacious theories floated by Sangh Parivar elements goes some way towards investing these with an aura of legitimacy The canards the Sangh Parivar spread about Muslims in India since the 1980s (*Frontline*, October 25, 1991) gained currency because its propositions were repeated even by informed sections of society This strategy is now being employed against Christians in India While attacks against Christians have gone on across the country, the Sangh Parivar has managed to focus on the evil designs' of Christian missionaries indulging in mass conversions' This shrill campaign, which grew ever louder on the eve of Pope John Paul II s visit, has however been picked up by others

On the day the Pope arrived in India several newspapers published (as an advertisement) an open letter to him addressed by several prominent personalities Among those who appended their signatures to the letter, under the banner of the Citizens Committee of Dharma Raksha Sammelan in Chennai, were the ophthalmologist Dr S S Badrinath, dancers Sonal Mansingh and Padma Subramaniam and several writers and film personalities

They alleged that evangelisation was but a "less dignified cousin" of 'conversion" and that "the Christian missionary activity in our nation is tearing apart families and communities in every strata of our society" They said that "religious conversion, which seems to be synonymous with papal work, is violence pure and simple." They blamed the "intolerance of missionaries" for the "clashes" that occurred regularly since the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 1998 "We Indians are deeply hurt by the spurt in the aggressive campaigning of the Church to convert the people of India by all available means," they claimed.

On the eve of the Pope's visit, *Organiser* the mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), published several articles attacking the Christian community in India The Pope was obviously the main target, but there were also articles which used official and other statistics to back claims of a massive increase in the Christian population in India An article titled "Christian population Misleading figures,' by Rajendra Kumar Chaddha in the October 31 issue, used statistics" to drive home the point that the Christian population is increasing at an alarming rate

The author provides a list of districts in India where the Christian population has grown by more than 100 per cent between the 1981 and 1991 Censuses However, an analysis of the Census data reveals that the *Organiser* has abused the statistics in several cases, suppressed relevant facts in some others, and used bogus figures in still others For instance, *Organiser* claims that the Christian population as a percentage of the total population increased from 2 53 per cent in 1981 to 2 61 per cent in 1991, however, Census data show that the percentage declined from 2 45 per cent to 2 32 per cent during this period The ratio of Christians in the population increased by a little over half a percentage point between 1921 and 1991, indicating that conversions are an insignificant factor in the long term demographic transition of Christians in India (see Table 1)



The list of districts in which the RSS claims that the Christian population increased sharply between 1981 and 1991 is interesting (see Table 2) The article provides just the percentage of increase of the Christian population It ignores any mention of ratios of Christians in the total population, details which will indicate whether their weightage in the population is increasing What is striking is the small numbers of Christians in many of the districts listed in the *Organiser* article For instance, in Guna district in Madhya Pradesh, the number of Christians increased from 258 to 642 over a 10-year period ending in 1991 Although this is an increase of nearly 150 per cent, the fact remains that the Christian population in Guna accounted for 0 05 per cent of the total population in 1991, up from 0 03 per cent in 1981 Obvious factors such as migration into the district over a 10-year period have not been taken into account by the author, who seems determined to attribute the increase entirely to conversions

In three cases of the districts examined – Udaipur and Sirohi in Rajasthan, and Periyar (now Erode) in Tamil Nadu – *Organiser*'s figures are false For instance, *Organiser* claims that the Christian population increased by 928 per cent between 1981 and 1991 in Erode district, the fact is that the Christian population here increased by only 2 28 per cent during this period In fact, in 1991 Christians accounted for 1 86 per cent of the population of 2 32 million, having declined from 2 02 per cent in 1981

In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, *Organiser* again makes a skilful suppression of facts about percentages and ratios. Its claim that the Christian population in Arunachal Pradesh grew by

226 per cent between 1981 and 1991 is true; however, it fails to mention that the Christian population as a percentage of the total population increased from about 4 per cent in 1981 to about 10 per cent in 1991. The Census figures show that the population of the States in the north-eastern region increased at a rate far above the national average. For instance, while the population of India increased by about 24 per cent, the population of Arunachal Pradesh increased by 37 per cent between 1981 and 1991. This was probably because of the porous nature of the border in these States and also because of large-scale migration within the region. Interestingly, while *Organiser* mentions the districts where the Christian population grew more rapidly than the Hindu population between 1981 and 1991, it fails to mention two other districts in the State – Upper Subansiri and Lohit – where the Hindu population grew much faster than the Christian population (see Table 3).

Population by religion in India
(percentage of total population)

Census Year	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	RSS claims on Christian Population
1921	84.40	9 57	1.79	1 47
1931	84.34	9.86	2 11	1 77
1951	86 89	9.09	2.35	2 35
1961	83.51	10.70	2.44	2 44
1971	83 00	10.84	2.59	2 60
1981	83 09	10.86	2 45	2 53
1991	82.41	11.67	2.32	2 61

Source (i)Census of India 1991 Tables on Religion
(ii)RSS claims from Organiser October 31 1999

Note Between 1981 and 1991 the Christian population increased by 16 89 per cent, the population of Hindus increased by 23 79 per cent and the Muslim population increased by 32 76 per cent

An interesting aspect of the data for the northeastern States is that there was a sharp decline in the number of people who told the enumerators that they were from "other religions and persuasions". This category would include those who maintain their tribal identity, worshipping local deities, and whose beliefs and practices would be far-removed from mainstream Hindu practices and rituals. In Arunachal Pradesh this category accounted for more than 50 per cent of the population in 1981; in 1991, people with "other religions and persuasions" accounted for only 36 per cent. While the Hindu population increased sharply in some districts, the Christian population increased in some others. This trend in the decline of the percentage of people with such beliefs is in line with the historical tendency of mainstream religions to make inroads into such communities.

Historian Sumit Sarkar points out that "Sanskritisation" or "cultural integration" of marginal groups and tribals were often termed "*shuddhi*", "reclamation" or "*paravartan*" (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's preferred term for getting these groups back into Hindu society) and is not substantially different from the term "conversion" (Sumit Sarkar, *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 26, 1999). Sumit Sarkar also elaborates on the point made by Richard Eaton in his study of the rise of Islam in Bengal "that in large parts of the subcontinent, certainly in medieval times and to a considerable extent even today, the great religious traditions have been expanding at the cost, not so much of each other as in relation to a multitude of local cults or practices." He emphasises the point that the potential for conflict in premodern times was far less because of the slow nature of the process. Moreover, the process in those times was not based on conversion of individuals but of whole groups, families, clans or local communities. This, he notes, reduced the scope for conflict. Such an explanation also contradicts the right-wing claims that the state, whether during Mughal rule or during British rule, played the major role as a facilitator in the spread of Islam or Christianity.

Data available from the National Family Health Survey conducted in 1992-93 reveal some patterns across the various religious communities. For instance, the rate of illiteracy was about

Growth of Christian population in some districts in India: RSS claims vs facts

District/State	RSS claim on the increase in percentage of Christians in total population	Number of Christians		Christians as percentage of total population		Increase in percentage of Christian population	Total population *(in millions)*	
		1981	1991	1981	1991	1981 – 1991	1981	1991
Guna (M.P.)	148 84	258	642	0.03	0.05	148.84	1 000	1 310
Bhind (M.P.)	182 45	57	161	0 01	0.01	182.46	1.219	0 970
Sidhi (M.P.)	134.30	615	1441	0.06	0.11	134.31	0 990	1.373
Jhabua (M.P.)	-	10788	14974	1.36	1.32	38.80	0.795	1.130
Surat (Gujarat)	120.36	14425	31787	0 58	0.94	120.36	2.493	3.398
Dangs (Gujarat)	416.77	1514	7824	1.33	5.43	416.78	0.114	0.144
Udaipur (Rajasthan)	79.73	2974	4732	0.13	0.16	59.11	2 356	2.889
Sirohi (Rajasthan)	286.60	759	985	0 14	0.15	29.78	0 542	0.654
Erode (Periyar), (Tamil Nadu)	928.90	41845	43053	2.02	1.86	2.28	2 068	2.320

Source (i)RSS figures from Organiser October 31 1999
(ii)Official figures from the Census of India 1991 Religion Table c-9 part IV B (II) for various States

Population of religious groups in Arunachal Pradesh

State/District	Percentage of Christians in population		Percentage of Hindus in population		Percentage of Muslims in population		Percentage of those following 'Other religions and persuasions'		Total population *(in thousands)*		Percentage increase
	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981-91
Arunachal Pradesh	4.32	10.29	50.34	57.67	0.80	1.36	51.80	36.22	631.94	864.56	36.80
[illegible]er Subansiri	7.10	21.89	21.56	28.61	1.18	2.20	62.66	44.04	112.65	158.09	40.34
[illegible]r Subansiri*	1.38	1.95	7.14	14.49	0.22	0.71	86.20	80.83	36.41	66.08	81.49
[illegible]	3.44	18.09	97.36	78.68			59.19	69.19	69.44	90.87	30.84
[illegible]	4.25	4.78	57.69	78.21			38.06	1.79	69.50	100.21	97.29

[illegible]e: Census of India 1991, Series 3, Arunachal Pradesh
*[illegible]: *Figures for these districts are not mentioned in the Organiser, October 31, 1999*



ANU PUSHKARNA

At the papal Mass in New Delhi on November 7. Census data indicate that conversions are an insignificant factor in the demographic transition of Christians in India.

33 per cent among Christians, compared to 64 per cent among Hindus. Nearly 8 per cent of the Christian population had studied above the high school level, compared to 3.4 per cent among Hindus. The empowering aspect of the figures is brought out by these figures: nearly half the Christian women surveyed knew the legal minimum age for marriage, compared to 32.5 per cent among Hindu women.

The results of the survey show that the Christian population in India also has better access to health care. Neonatal mortality among Hindus was estimated at 55 per thousand live births, compared to 32.6 per thousand live births among Christians. Post-neonatal mortality rates were estimated at 35.4 per thousand live births for Hindus, compared to 17.3 per thousand for Christians, while the infant mortality rate for Hindus was 90.4 per thousand live births compared to 49.9 per thousand live births among Christians. The child mortality rate was estimated at 19.4 per thousand live births among Christians while for Hindus it was 36.9 per thousand live births. More than 60 per cent of those surveyed among Christians reported that they received antenatal care from a doctor, compared to only 38.6 per cent among Hindus. A comparison of the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the measure of the average number of children delivered by a woman during her reproductive life, among Hindus and Christians also indicates a gap among the two communities. While the TFR for the Christian population was 2.87 in 1992-93, it was 3.3 for Hindus. The obvious conclusion is that the Christian population had better access to medical facilities compared to the rest of the population. Obviously, the death rate among Christians was far lower than in the rest of the population – 8.2 per cent, compared to 12.9 per cent among Hindus (figures for 1984).

The rate of growth of the Christian population in India was high between 1921 and 1971; in fact, between 1921 and 1971, the rate of growth of the Christian population was consistently higher than that of the total population, although the gap narrowed in successive rounds of the Census. However, since 1981, this trend has been reversed. While the population of India increased by almost 24 per cent between 1981 and 1991, the Christian population grew by 17 per cent.

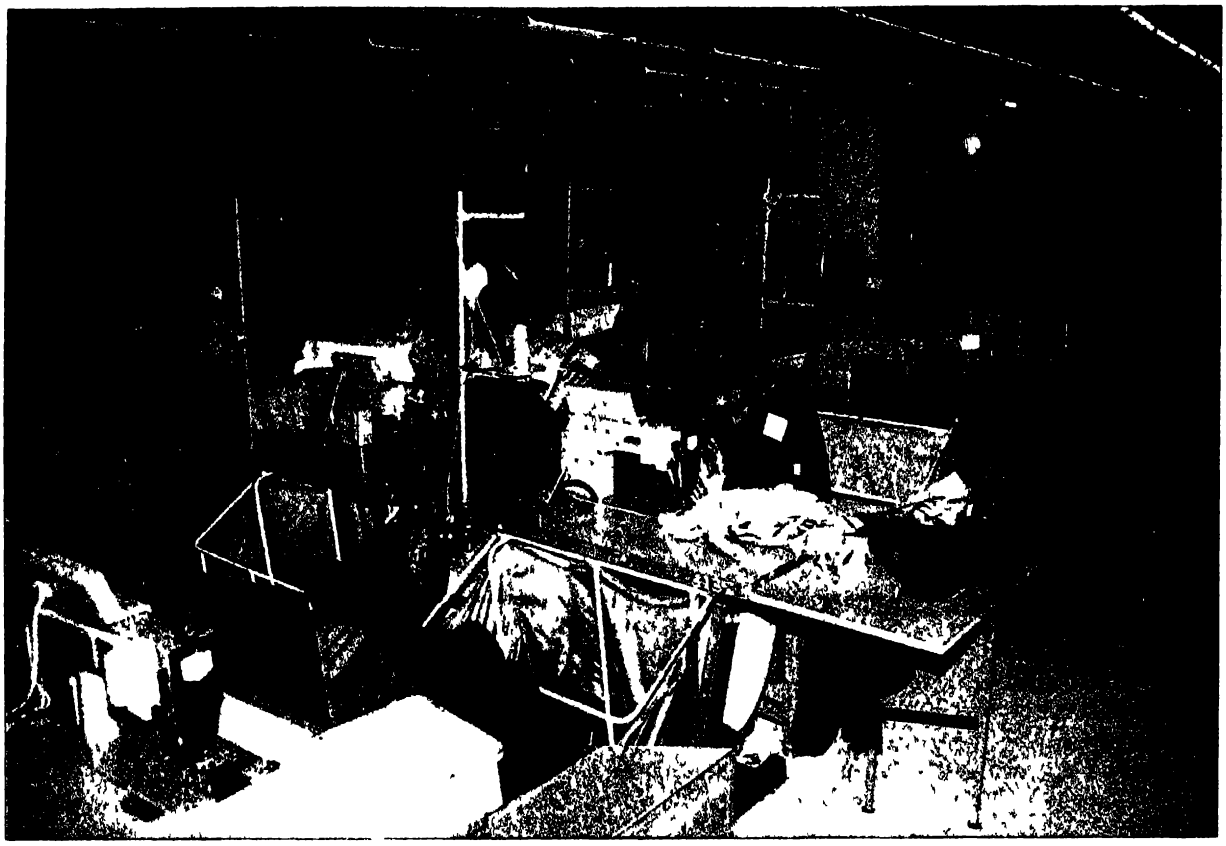
It is clear that the Christian population in India is well on its way towards a demographic transition. Principles of demography show that the first impact of development is on the death rate, reducing it by the delivery of modern medicine to combat the basic diseases. However, the birth rate takes longer to slow down because it is in part a function of literacy, particularly among women, and other long-term factors. It is quite plausible that the natural rate of growth of the Christian population up to 1971 was higher because of the sharper decline in the death rate among Christians when compared to the rest of the population. However, since then, exposure to literacy and other factors, particularly among women, appear to have set the birth rate on a declining trend. This would have caused the natural rate of growth of the Christian population to slow down. The unwinding of this process means that the natural rate of growth of the Christian population is likely to slow down even more in relation to the rest of the population.

What this means in terms of the logic of the Sangh Parivar is that if the Christian population has to catch up, it has to rely increasingly on conversions. The fact that the proportion of Christians in the population has increased by just half a percentage point in the last 70 years shows the absurdity of such fears. The Christian population accounts for only 2.5 per cent of the total population almost 2000 years after the religion reached India.

It is obvious that much of the advancement in the living conditions of the Christian population has been because of missionary activity – not confined to conversion in the narrow sense, but also in reaching literacy, health care and other basic empowering resources to the poor. That the state has failed to reach these basic fruits of development to large sections of the people is the obvious corollary. ■

Global double standards

While non-competitive and decaying industries in Western countries cry for universal labour standard, more buoyant Western industries looking for new areas of operation seek the dilution of labour laws.



K PICHUMANI

The criticism of rich countries for their attempt to impose "labour standard" on poor countries does not take away from the fact that the working conditions of Indian workers are sometimes appalling.

BIPLAB DASGUPTA

THE first official Commission, established in 1895, to inquire into the conditions of workers in the Indian jute industry, was inspired by the industry's global rivals, the jute textile industry of Britain, located in Dundee, Scotland.[1] The management of both was in the hands of the British, more specifically Scottish, but the managements were sworn enemies. The Indian industry was seen by its Scottish rivals as an intruder in a field that they looked upon as their exclusive preserve. The interest they took in the labour conditions in the Indian jute industry was prompted less by their concern for the low wages and poor working conditions of the Indian proletariat than by the fear that the Dundee industry would be swamped by products from this cheap source and its survival would be threatened.

THE issue of "labour standard", which the rich countries are pushing for acceptance at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial conference in Seattle, to begin on November 30, is prompted by the same capitalist desire to keep away competition from cheap sources. The rich countries are proposing a set of global rules that would standardise labour market behaviour and establish some parity in terms of the wages paid and the conditions under which they operate. The argument in support of such standardisation is that low wages are conferring on the poor countries a differential advantage in global trade and that such differential is unfair and is threatening many industries of the rich countries.

Such a partisan view ignores what is obvious. The wage level of a country cannot be independent of the overall state of its economy and its per capita gross national product (GNP). There can be no mechanical parity of wages between, say, Japan and India when the former's per capita income is one hundred times more than India's. To demand that the wages paid in India should be made com-

1. Daniel Houston Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India*, Frank Cass & Co, London, 1966 (first edition 1934), p. 421.

parable with those paid in rich countries would amount to driving Indian exports out of the world market.

It can also be argued that poor countries like India, having little capital, technology and management resources, enjoy an advantage over the rich countries only in terms of the prevailing low wages. To force them to adopt Western wage levels would ruin their industries and take away whatever little chance they still have in making some of their products competitive in the world market. It might also be asked why the rich countries should grudge this very small advantage the poor countries have over them when they dominate world trade comprehensively and ruthlessly. The share of poor countries in global trade is pitifully small and is getting ever smaller. The terms of trade are consistently against poor countries as they keep on producing and exporting more to earn less. Activities that are ancillary to trade, such as shipping and insurance, are under the near-absolute control of the rich countries, while multinational companies (MNCs) decide, in the case of most poor countries, what to produce and what to sell.

The criticism of rich countries for their attempt to impose "labour standard" on poor countries does not take away the fact that the conditions in which Indian workers work are appalling. Many of the issues the Dundee competitors raised in the 1890s regarding conditions of work in the Indian jute industry were undeniable, nor was there anything wrong in the support, monetary and otherwise, their trade unions gave to their Indian counterparts. The management has always been reluctant to share the profit with those who toil on the floor, while the unpardonable crime of employment of child labour continues. But the analysis above serves the purpose of providing a global perspective. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) rightly takes the view that the provision of social insurance and social protection are basic human rights.[2]

THE controversy over labour standards is yet another manifestation of two current global tendencies, both emanating from the rich countries and harmful to the interests of the poor countries. The first is the tendency to universalise and standardise everything in terms of a set of global rules that are framed mainly by the rich countries with the interests of their own MNCs in focus. Whether it is patents, investment, competition policy, labour or the environment, an obsessive and vulgar desire to bind the world with a uniform set of rules is evident. Such an attempt at standardisation ignores the wide divergence that exists between countries in terms of the level of development, resource endowment, human resource, historical background, and what not. Such standardisation is also opposed to the spirit of the 1993 Convention on Biodiversity, which followed the Rio Earth Summit and emphasised on diversity (and not conformity) as something essential for the sustenance of life on this planet.

TOWARDS SEATTLE

The second tendency is to subordinate the United Nations and its affiliated bodies to agencies promoted by Group of Seven (G-7) countries and the powerful global trinity of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WTO, organisations which are effectively owned/controlled by the former and which share a market-oriented economic philosophy. The WTO now deals with matters such as investment, patents, agriculture, the environment and labour, which should have been left to specialised U.N. institutions that were created in response to specific needs – for instance, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the ILO. Almost all these U.N.-affiliated organisations had for a long time opposed the various aspects of globalisation sponsored by the trinity, though, over the past few years, with intense pressure from G-7 countries, almost all of them have been brought in line with the economic philosophy of the trinity. While, in the original format of 1944, the World Bank and the IMF were supposed to report their activities to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), this was never done. The agenda of various U.N. bodies has been hijacked by the institutions patronised by G-7 countries, so much so that today people hardly know of the ECOSOC, but, whether they love it or hate it, the trinity influences their lives. The G-7's preference for the trinity over the United Nations and their active financial and political patronage of the former in comparison with the latter is understandable because by their voting power and otherwise they control the trinity more easily.[3]

THE trinity's concern for free trade and global mobility of capital, inputs and products does not mean support for a free flow of labour power across national frontiers. If anything, over the past three decades, immigration laws in the rich countries have become more rigid and their implementation more severe against labour exports from poor countries. Unlike capital and products that are supposed to move from anywhere to anywhere in response to demand, movement of people from labour-surplus areas to labour-deficit ones is actively discouraged. Obviously, what is desirable in terms of the philosophy of free trade in the case of capital, one major factor of production, does not apply to labour, another and no less important a factor. To complete the argument one should add that land, the third major factor of production, is incapable of moving across frontiers.

If capital is to be given "national treatment" and freed from discrimination in favour of local enterprises under TRIMs (Trade-Related aspects of Investment Measures), why should labour, irrespective of its source, not enjoy a similar "national treatment" and protection from discrimination? The argument that unrestricted flow of labour would adversely affect the local population and their culture in rich countries is analogous to the "local content requirement" argument that was used by many countries, including India and East Asian countries, during the pre-1991 period (it is banned by the WTO now) against foreign capital, asking the foreign investor to give priority to local manpower and materials. It cannot be that "local content requirement" is bad for capital and good for labour, while "national treatment" is good for capital but bad for labour. Obviously, the global trinity's love for free trade is confined to the factor the rich

2. Roger Plant, *Labour Standards & Structural Adjustment*, ILO, Geneva, 1994, p.57.
3. Biplab Dasgupta, *Structural Adjustment, Global Trade and the New Political Economy of Development*, Sage (Delhi) and Zed Books (London), 1998, Chapter IV on Structural Adjustment.

countries have in plenty, that is, capital, and does not extend to labour, which the poor countries have in plenty.

THERE is, however, a serious conflict between two types of views on labour use, which are yet to be reconciled – again both emanating from the rich countries. For the purpose of this article, they can be described as "protectionist" and "liberal" views. While "labour standard" is essentially a protectionist argument to ensure the survival of many of the inefficient and non-viable industries in rich countries, particularly leather and textile industries, there are other western industries that are stronger and are keen to enter the markets of poor countries. The latter, in fact, argue for a completely different set of labour policies in the poor countries, that is, for the dilution of existing labour laws that protect the interests of workers, for instance, laws on minimum wages, job security against lay-offs and closures, the right for better working conditions, compensation in case of injuries, provident funds, and trade union rights. The objective here is to ensure that MNC investments are not hindered by restrictive labour laws. This is more in line with the orthodox view on liberalisation, which is by its very nature anti-trade union. These industries argue that the existing labour laws do not allow flexibility in the operation of an enterprise, that is, they do not allow wages to fall or the workers to be sacked, as and when needed, in order to balance demand with supply.

How to resolve this contradiction, between those who favour a universal labour standard that can be brought about by elaborate labour legislation, and those who seek as much dilution of labour laws as possible, and between the non-competitive, non-viable, decaying Western industries gasping for breath and the more buoyant Western ones searching for new markets, is a matter to be pondered over by the G-7 countries. However, it is in the interest of the poor countries to point out this contradiction.

To demand that the wages paid in India should be made comparable with those paid in rich countries would amount to driving Indian exports out of the world market.

Some of those who take this second, liberal view and seek the dilution of labour laws even prescribe a complete overhauling of the labour market, with "labour power" rather than the "labourer" as the focus. They argue for the replacement of regular labourers who work for a scheduled number of hours in a day and for a scheduled number of days in a week by "flexi-time workers", whose contribution would be measured by "hours" and who would not be required to stick to a given time format. This, they claim, would improve efficiency as it would no longer be necessary for an enterprise to carry permanent workers on the pay roll even when the demand for its product declines.[4] Those who advocate a competitive labour market, with completely flexible movement of wages, both upward and downward, in response to demand, mainly seek the right to hire and fire and to close down non-viable units.[5]

Those who are opposed to such radical change in the pattern of labour use point to the Japanese example, where a person is recruited for life, and seniority, rather than merit, determines the grant of promotion. The Japanese model, based on a stable and regular workforce, has cemented the bond between the worker and the management, while no such loyalty is expected from flexi-time workers, they argue.[6] It is also established that governments, which are otherwise keen to carry out labour market reform in line with the "structural adjustment" package of the Bretton Woods twins often find it politically risky to implement a radical change.[7]

ONE major impact of globalisation on labour use and the labour market that has serious implications for a country like India is rarely, if ever, discussed. This relates to the distorting impact of MNC salaries on the wage structure for the country as a whole. With the entry of the multinationals, the pay structure for the higher levels of management has been catapulted to a very high level. Although not on a par with salaries for the same jobs in the rich countries, these are now high enough to make the ablest of the skilled workforce to gravitate towards them in the poor countries. This is forcing non-MNC companies, in their turn, to raise the salaries of their own management staff to MNC levels, realising that not to do so in this age of globalisation would mean losing them to MNCs.

Two major consequences follow from these. First, the economy is divided clearly into those enterprises which can offer MNC-level salaries to their professionals and managers and those who cannot. Secondly, the disparity between the highest paid and the lowest paid within the same enterprise is widening alarmingly. The company's balance sheet, while capable of offering astronomical salaries to a few, would not allow similar increases in the salaries and wages of other employees. While the ratio between the highest paid and the lowest paid is around 30:1 in the rich countries and 10:1 in East Asia, it is around 100:1 in many Indian enterprises. Such gross inequality is not sustainable and is bound to lead to widespread industrial unrest. The Indian companies are thus facing a serious dilemma as it is not easy to reduce this disparity – either by raising the wages of the lower order, given their vast number, or by restraining wage increases at higher level, in view of the global competition. ■

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4. Development Committee, Development Committee, 47th meeting, September 1993, World Bank, Washington DC, 1993.
5. Mancur Olson, 1982, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation and Social Rigidities*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1982.
6. Vittorio Corbo and Stanley Fischer, "Adjustment Programmes and Bank Support – Rationale and Main Results", in Vittorio Corbo, Stanley Fischer & Steven B Webb (eds.), *Adjustment Lending Revisited – policies to restore growth*, A World Bank Symposium, World Bank, 1992, pp. 7-20, p.20.
7. Corbo and Fischer, op.cit. p. 11; Steven B. Webb & Karim Shariff, "Designing and Implementing Adjustment Programs", in Corbo et al (eds.), pp. 69-98, p.78.

China into the WTO

A Sino-U.S. agreement clears the way for China to be admitted into the World Trade Organisation, but it is hard to believe that China would go the whole hog in the matter.

C.P.CHANDRASEKHAR

WHAT seemed inevitable for almost two decades, finally seems imminent. The mid-November Sino-U.S. agreement over the terms on which the U.S. would support China's entry into the 135-member World Trade Organisation (WTO), paves the way for the quick accession of that country into the world trading arrangement. The Chinese Government would of course have to win the support of many other members as well. Under the rules governing the WTO, where voting rights are distributed on the one-nation, one-vote principle and which follows the convention of taking decisions by consensus, the general council or a ministerial conference has to approve a membership treaty drafted after agreement with all members on the terms of accession. This requires, in principle, bilateral deals with all member-countries. While quite a few countries had virtually unconditionally backed China's request for membership, 12 formal bilateral deals have been inked so far and negotiations are open with another 28 countries and groups, including the European Union. However, for political reasons, agreement with the U.S. was considered a major stumbling block. With that block having been cleared, full agreement is widely expected to follow soon, even if not in time for the Seattle ministerial meet starting on November 30.

To most China-watchers, this outcome had seemed inevitable once it was clear that the Chinese economic reform which began in 1978 would remain in place. This view was buttressed by the fact that, despite China's exclusion from the formal world trading arrangement during the 1980s and 1990s, exports constituted a major plank of its growth strategy under reform. The share of merchandise trade in China's aggregate product rose from 9.2 per cent in 1978 to 16.8 per cent in 1984 and more than 20 per cent in the mid-1990s.

This dependence on trade implied a growing engagement of world markets. China's share of world merchandise exports, which stood at between 0.7 and 0.8 per cent during the 1970s, rose to 1.4 per cent in 1983 and stood at 2.9 per cent in 1996. In that year, China's share was higher than that of other leading developing country exporters such as South Korea (2.5 per cent), Singapore (2.4 per cent), Taiwan (2.2 per cent) and Mexico (1.8 per cent). With exports constituting the goal of an important segment of domestic economic activity and China's presence in the international markets increasing, it no more appeared sensible for China to remain vulnerable to unilateral trade policy responses and tenuous bilateral arrangements. The dangers were epitomised by the debates which surrounded the annual exercise since 1974 in which the U.S. Congress had to ratify continuing a normal trading relationship with China.

Not surprisingly, China declared in 1986 that it would like to be part of the multilateral framework governing world trade. The fact that China's accession is finally in sight only 13 years later is not primarily due to its own recalcitrance. There have been occasions when China has on many trade-related issues been willing to go further in the direction of liberalisation than developing countries participating in the multilateral trading arrangement. In fact, in the dispute over patent regimes during the later stages of the negotiations that led up to the Uruguay Round agreement, China's willingness to compromise at a bilateral level was quoted to smother developing-country opposition and buttress developed-country positions. What held back the final agreement were complex political and economic compulsions in the developed countries, especially in the U.S.

That such compulsions played a role is clear from the fact that as recently as April, President Clinton turned down terms offered by China in return for U.S. support for its entry, which were no different from those underlying the latest agreement. Those terms were by no means limited.

To start with, it involves a substantial degree of liberalisation of trade. China's average import tariffs are to be reduced by almost 5 percentage points, from 22.1 per cent to 17 per cent. Tariffs on some farm products exported by the U.S. are to be reduced sharply to 15 per cent. And tariffs on automobiles, currently ranging up to 100 per cent, are to be subject to a "front-loaded" reduction to 25 per cent over a six-year period.

Secondly, the package offers a number of concessions for foreign firms and investors. For example, international automobile manufacturers and banks would be allowed to offer consumer loans for car purchases, which is a crucial concession given the high price of automobiles in China relative to incomes. Foreign manufacturers will also be allowed to distribute their own products imported from abroad and not be forced to rely on domestic distributors. Above all, foreign firms are to be provided an important role in the emerging and rapidly growing telecommunications sector (including the Internet). The agreement provides for foreign firms to hold 49 per cent of the equity in local ventures for a period of two years and 50 per cent subsequently.

The third area in which major concessions have been offered is the financial sector. Thus far, foreign banks were allowed to offer their services to foreign companies operating in China. But under the terms of the agreement they would be allowed to offer their services to Chinese firms two years after their entry, providing loans, undertaking currency transactions and servicing their other banking requirements. Limits on the insurance business undertaken by foreign insurance companies are also to be gradually dismantled and they are to be allowed to increase the number and expand the size of their branches as well as enter new areas such as property. Market access is to be eased and enlarged for foreign legal and accounting firms. Finally, foreign brokerage houses and mutual funds are to be allowed to form joint ventures with Chinese companies, holding 33 per cent equity initially and a possible 49 per cent subsequently.

In return for these substantial concessions, the U.S. has agreed to support

China's claim to WTO membership. But it has not offered very much else. In the contentious area of textiles, which is a major item in the Chinese export basket, quotas are to be phased out only by 2005. The U.S. has also reserved for itself the right to respond in protectionist fashion to what it sees as import surges in the U.S. market, for a period of ten years, and to respond similarly to "dumping" for a period of 15 years. The experience under the Uruguay Round so far points to the ease with which such clauses can be converted into protectionist devices by developed countries.

THE willingness of China, an important developing country exporter which has been struggling to join the formal multilateral trade framework, to make these compromises is to an extent understandable. What is less clear is why the U.S. which for political reasons was earlier unwilling to accept even these terms, has suddenly come round to accepting an agreement which according to some reports is not as good as the terms which were on offer and were rejected in April. Moreover, given the impending presidential elections and the strong opposition among the trade unions to Chinese entry, the timing of the agreement is indeed surprising. AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations, has vowed to fight the deal, because it threatens American jobs and goes against America's "democratic principles and most cherished values".

And some local business interests, including the textile lobby, have sharply attacked the agreement.

If yet the Clinton administration has chosen to go through with it, it is possibly because of a strategic concern. It is indeed pointless not integrating an emerging economic power like China into current and future negotiations on the world trading system. But, more important, the willingness of China to make crucial concessions in areas like foreign investment and the financial sector could be an important source of pressure on recalcitrant developing countries unwilling to agree to start negotiations on investment and services, as part of a new round. That could possibly explain the willingness to conclude an agreement on terms rejected only recently, in time for the ministerial meet in Seattle. As in the case of patents at the time of the Uruguay Round, China is implicitly being held up as a model of a developing country with a reasonable negotiating position.

MATTERS, of course are far more complex. Given the political and legal structure in China, and autonomy of local governments especially after the reform, accepting an agreement is a far cry from implementing its provisions. Despite China's acceptance of strong patent rights regulations earlier than many developing countries, not only is reverse engineering the rule among Chinese firms, but international firms detecting patent or copyright violations are rarely in a position to challenge them and get the Chinese government to initiate action.

In fact, this time around, the consequences of implementing the provisions of the agreement relating to trade liberalisation can be extremely damaging, especially for the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) primarily created during the pre-reform years. There were 118,000 such firms in China in 1998. Although their contribution to China's industrial output had fallen from over 75 per cent in 1978 (when economic reform process began) to less than 35 per cent in 1995, this was not so much owing to the shrinkage of this sector as to the expansion in the rest of the industrial sector consisting of collective enterprises, individually owned enterprises, wholly foreign owned firms, and foreign joint ventures.

What is significant is that even now the SOEs dominate or even monopolise their chosen areas of operation, which are the capital-intensive, heavy and basic goods industries characterised by lumpy investments and long gestation lags.

The significance of the SOEs comes through in other ways as well. For example, they still constitute the principal source of employment in urban China. In 1995, seven out of ten urban workers were employed in state firms. Such employment does not ensure just a wage, but a range of welfare benefits such as housing, medical care and retirement benefits. Further, SOEs constitute the primary source of tax revenue for government. In 1995, SOEs produced only 35 per cent of China's industrial output but contributed 71 per cent of government revenues. Thus, it is not only directly that the SOEs contribute to the government's governance and welfare responsibilities, but indirectly, by providing the latter with the wherewithal to finance its own expenditures.

Trade liberalisation, which would subject these units to competition, and financial sector reform, which would make it extremely difficult for them to access the credit so crucial to their survival, mainly threatens these firms. Thus, the terms of WTO entry, if implemented, could spell unemployment and erode standards of living. According to China's official Xinhua News Agency, China's Labour Minister Zhang Zuoji stated in a report to the financial and economic committee of the National People's Congress earlier this year that more than three million workers in the SOEs are expected to lose their jobs this year. They would join the six to seven million people who, having been retrenched from state firms, are yet to find new jobs. Zhang noted that while China would need 24.5 billion yuan ($2.95 billion) this year to provide basic living expenses to laid-off workers, the amount currently available was only 19.5 billion yuan. This problem of inadequate support is bound to intensify if China resorts to massive trade and financial sector liberalisation involving partial retrenchment or closure of public sector units, since there were an estimated 113 million urban workers employed by state-owned firms in 1995.

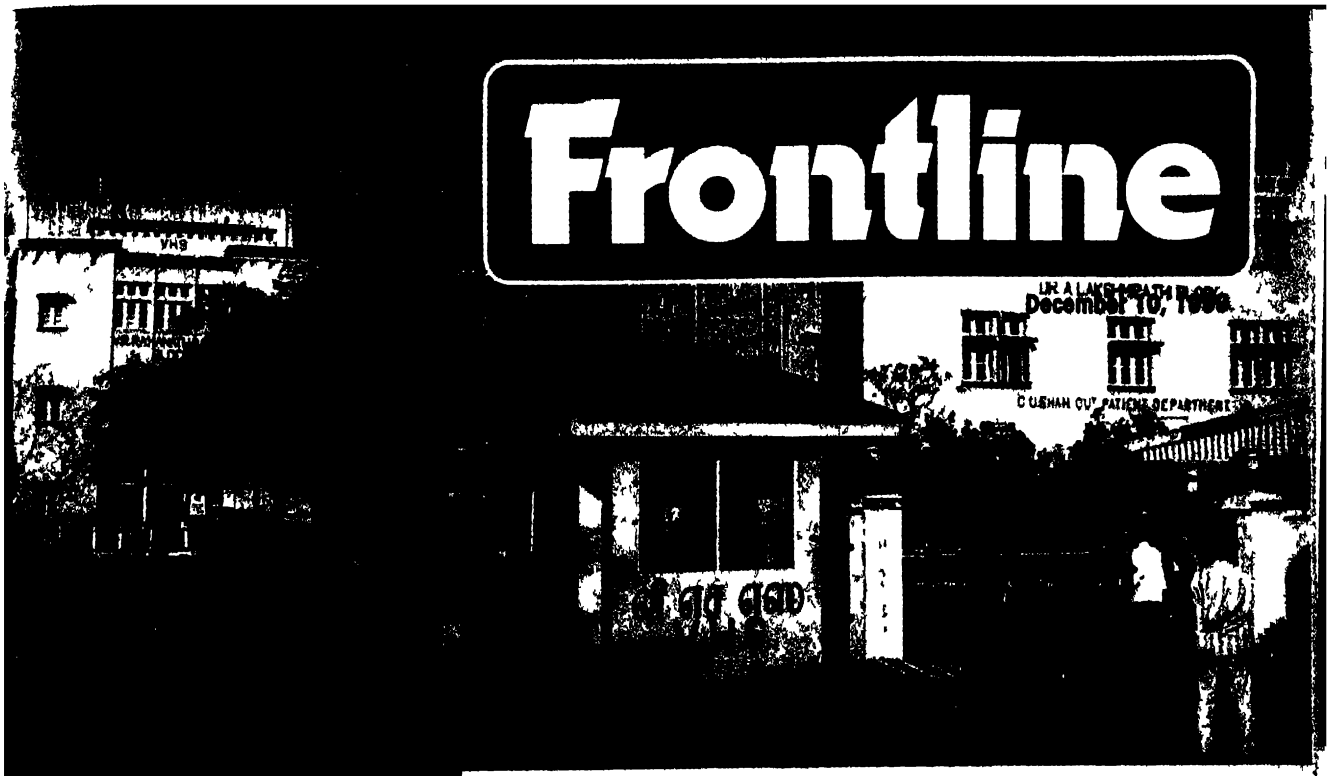
It is for this reason that it is hard to believe that China would go ahead with the kind of liberalisation it has promised on a range of fronts. In fact, there are many China watchers who are sceptical. For example, the *Financial Times* quoted Gordon Chang, a lawyer in a Beijing firm, as saying: "If it (China) really follows through on the agreement, the changes are going to be little short of revolutionary. This leads me to believe that the agreement is not going to be implemented as announced."

In the circumstances, the view that all developing countries should give in to a more liberal (though unequal) global order just as China has done may be misplaced. China's giving in may be more rhetorical than real. And the competitive threat to developing countries from China, which has been intense in the past, is unlikely to increase after China's entry into the WTO.

Unfortunately, misplaced views about the implications of China's entry are being aired in India as well, in defence of the position that India should 'learn from China' and not insist on a review of the Uruguay Round and raise too many objections to a Millennium Round with a far-reaching agenda. But as in the case of developed-country spokespersons, this is just one more ruse to push through their own agenda. ■

Frontline

December 10, 1994



AIDS Prevention & Control in Tamil Nadu





What makes a love story ?

Passion. Peace of Mind. And Protection.

True love can be expressed in many forms. And using a condom is one of the best ways to show you love and you care

Condoms are your best protection against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS And this security can certainly add to the pleasure of making love

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So the next time you think of making love do it safely Just pick up some condoms You ll see how it makes your love story complete

USAID

AIDS Prevention And Control Project,
Voluntary Health Services
Adyar, Chennai 600 113 Phone 2352065, 2355048 Fax 91-44-2355018

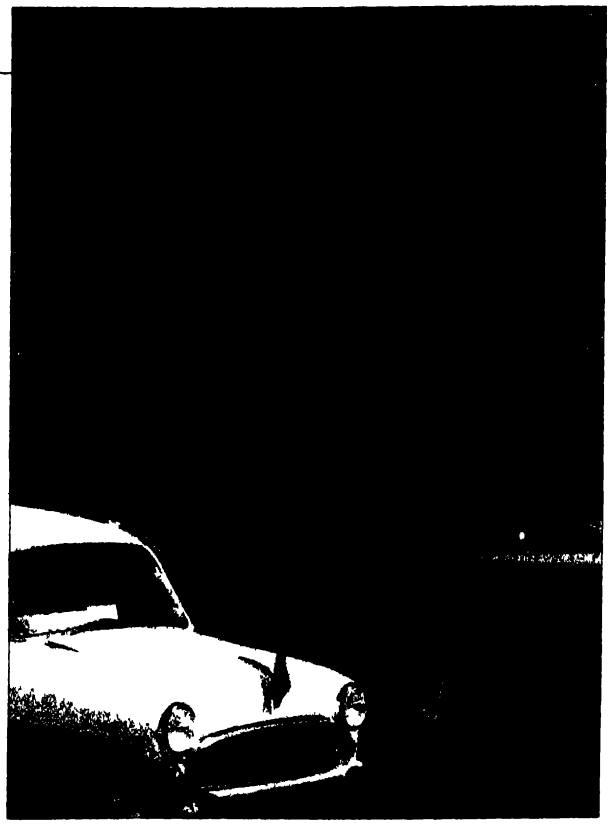
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Focus on AIDS prevention

The success of the AIDS awareness and prevention programme in Tamil Nadu, spearheaded by the AIDS Prevention and Control Project at the Voluntary Health Services and the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society, owes much to a multi-sectoral approach, involving the government, the private sector, non-governmental organisations, professionals and the public.

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR
in Chennai

THE human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and which still eludes a cure, claims 2.5 million lives and infects six million persons worldwide every year. Shattering lives, tearing apart families and decimating entire communities, the AIDS pandemic has killed 14 million people since it was first detected in 1984. The virus has infected 33.4 million people all over the world, but largely in the developing countries, which, unlike developed countries, can hardly bear the burden of the disease. Over 95 per cent of the HIV-infected people live in developing countries, which account for less than 10 per cent of the global gross national product. The rate of HIV propagation in these countries is also very high.



M. MOORTHY

On an arterial road in Chennai, a billboard with an AIDS awareness message.

AIDS was classified as a disease in 1981 and HIV identified as its cause in 1984. HIV attacks and destroys certain white blood cells, the T4 lymphocytes, that are crucial to the body's immune system. The virus is transmitted primarily through unprotected sexual activity; contaminated blood and blood products, tissues and organs; and contaminated needles, syringes and other piercing instruments; and from mother to child.

The primary mode of transmission, however, varies from one country to another, and even within a country. In Tamil Nadu, which is one of the three epicentres' of AIDS and HIV infection in India, 74 per cent of HIV infections are caused by heterosexual sex, 7 per cent occur through blood products, 8 per cent owing to drug abuse and the rest through other modes such as transfer from mother to child.

According to current knowledge, HIV does not survive outside the human body, and so the virus is not transmitted by merely hugging or shaking hands, by sharing utensils, or in other everyday circumstances. HIV is not known to be transmitted through mosquito or insect bites.

There are two types of HIV – HIV-1 and HIV-2. Both reproduce using the genetic materials of the cells they invade and gradually disable the body's immune system. Both mutate and appear to have different subtypes, each with significant variations; this makes it virtually impossible to develop a universal drug or a vaccine.

INDIA has the largest number of HIV-infected persons among the countries of the world – about four million. AIDS was first reported in India in 1986, in Chennai and in Vellore. Maharashtra, Manipur and Tamil Nadu have emerged as epicentres of HIV infection in the country, together accounting for three-fourths of the AIDS cases and two-thirds of the HIV infections. Maharashtra accounts for half the HIV cases. While the infection cuts across age and sex divisions, it occurs most frequently in the 15-45 age group (90 per cent) and among men (79 per cent).

Although national-level surveillance data on the disease are patchy, recent surveys in some pockets are revealing. For instance, the infection rate among pregnant women in Pondicherry has increased from insignificant levels in 1992 to 4 per cent in 1999. Among truck drivers in Chennai, the incidence of HIV infection quadrupled from 1.5 per cent in 1995 to 6.2 per cent in 1996. In Manipur, some drug-detoxification clinics reported that 70 per cent of their patients were HIV-positive.

According to the 1998 national sentinel surveys conducted by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), the epidemic has spread all over the country, from the urban to the rural areas, and from the high-risk groups (truck drivers, commercial sex workers, intravenous drug users, homosexuals and persons with promiscuous sexual

THERE IS LIFE AFTER HIV

It is true that if you catch it, there is no return ticket. But, once infected, a person may live with the virus for another 10 to 15 years. When they are down with opportunistic infections, they have to resort to a hospital. Often despised by the society, they live with the stigma, although they might have got it by blood transfusions or from a wayward husband. Children are born with HIV, contracted from an infected mother. Many lives are ruined for no fault of theirs



At Meenakshi Mission Hospital and Research Centre, Madurai, we take care of all the HIV/AIDS patients, whatever be the way of transmission. Ours is the first and the only private hospital in Southern Tamil Nadu that cared to admit AIDS patients for continuum care. This ward is named after Mother Teresa and is run with the assistance of Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society.

MMHRC is committed to the cause of AIDS. In 1996, we started training health care providers in counselling patients with sexually transmitted diseases. This year, we have initiated the Regional STD / HIV / AIDS Infotech Centre Both these programmes are sponsored by the AIDS Prevention and Control (APAC) Project of Voluntary Health Services, Chennai funded by USAID.

There are more than 5 lakh HIV carriers in Tamil Nadu They are going to live for the next 10 to 15 years

Think about it.

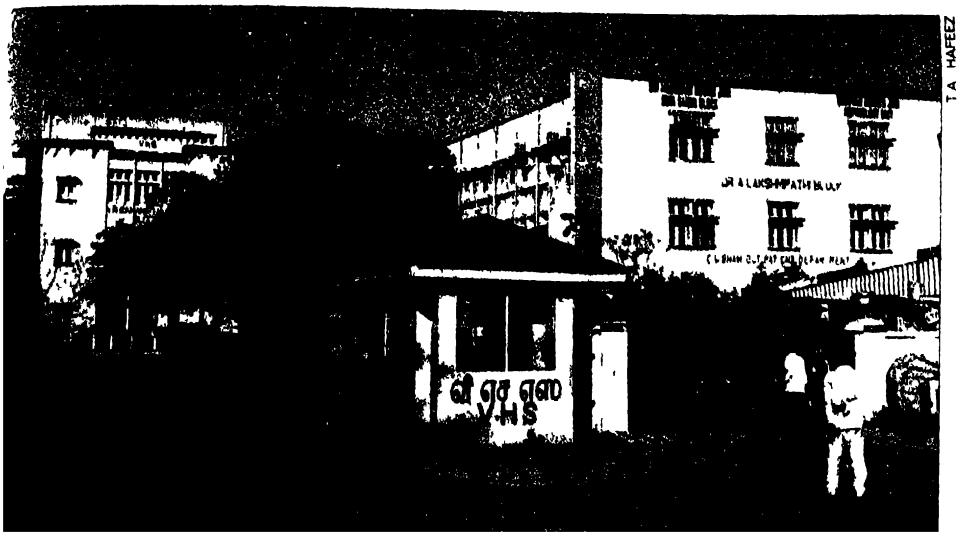
Who will provide them costly medicines to control infections? Neglected and helpless, they are not even permitted entry in many hospitals in our country.

Can YOU help?

Decide today to become a friend of those living with HIV.
Become a Member of our RED RIBBON CLUB
to fight against the spread of AIDS *(No membership fee)*

Drop in a letter immediately to:
STD/HIV/AIDS INFOTECH CENTRE
Meenakshi Mission Hospital & Research Centre
(Run by S.R.Trust*)
Lake Area, Melur Road, Madurai, Tamil Nadu 625 107
Tel: 0452-58 8741 (Extn. 3242) Fax:0452-58 6353
Email:aidsinfo@vsnl.com
Please visit our website at www.meenakshimission.org/aidsinfo

**S R Trust is a non-profit public charitable trust. Contribution towards this is tax deductible under Section 80G of the IT Act and drafts and cheques should be made in favour of S.R.Trust, Madurai.*

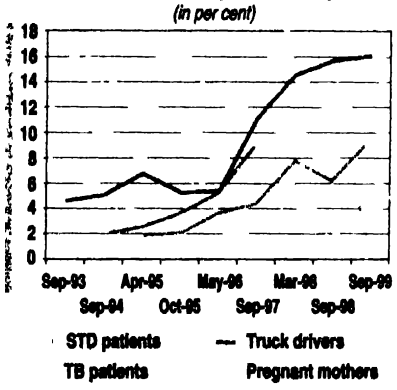


T.A. HAFEEZ

he Voluntary Health Services Hospital in Chennai, which is the base for the AIDS Prevention nd Control Society (APAC).

HIV prevalence trends in Tamil Nadu (1993-1999)

(in per cent)



Source APAC-VHS

behaviour) to the general population. There has been a rise in perinatal transmission of the virus, alongside an increase in HIV incidence among women who come to antenatal clinics. According to the survey, one in every four HIV cases reported involves a woman.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), over half of all newly infected adults globally are women. The number of infected women is expected to increase from six million now to 13 million by 2000. Women are particularly vulnerable to the disease because of their vulnerability and subordination in sexual, economic and social terms.

Over 90 per cent of the under-15 HIV-infected trace the cause of infection to infected mothers. According to the United Nations AIDS Programme (UNAIDS), since the early 1980s three million under-15 children have tested HIV-positive globally. In 1996, it was estimated that 1,000 children died of AIDS every day the world over. At the end of 1997, there were over one million HIV-infected children, 90 per cent of them in the developing countries.

LETHAL as it is, HIV has a dangerous tendency to coalesce with tuberculosis(TB)-causing bacilli and co-infect individuals. The WHO estimates that at least 4.5 million people (98 per cent of whom are in the developing countries) are infected with both HIV and TB. According to the WHO, the TB bacterium can activate HIV from a latent state in infected cells. TB chemoprophylaxis, a regimen of administering anti-TB drugs to HIV-positive people to prevent the onset of active TB, can save tens of thousands of lives and simultaneously help curb the spread of the HIV epidemic.

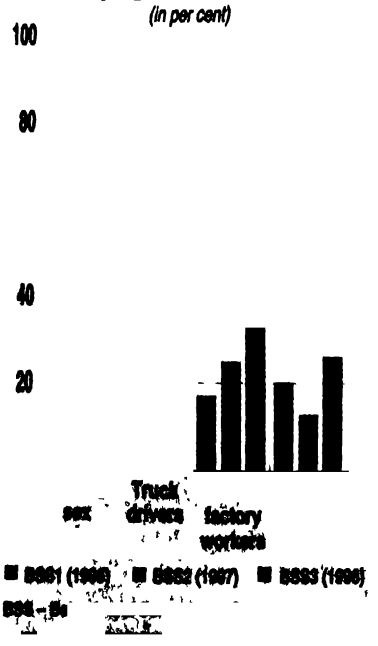
In the absence of a cure, the only way to check the spread of AIDS is to take preventive steps to check the spread of HIV. Actively involved in this effort are various international organisations, such as the World Bank, the WHO, UNAIDS, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Ford Foundation, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD), the Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the European Commission (E.C.), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). USAID has been the global leader in finding ways to slow the spread of the AIDS pandemic over the last decade. It works in partnership with other international agencies, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In India, a national AIDS control committee was set up in 1991 under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The first phase of the National AIDS Control Programme was launched in September 1992 in order to evolve a comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy for the management of the pandemic. It was implemented by the NACO and the AIDS cells in 32 States and Union Territories. The programme focussed on generating public awareness, conducting research and surveillance, supporting NGOs in reaching out to the target groups, promoting the use of condoms and ensuring blood safety.

Between 1992 and 1998, the Union Government and international donor agencies allocated a total of Rs.397 crores for AIDS awareness and prevention programmes in India. For the next five years,

Effect of AIDS awareness campaign on condom use

(in per cent)



Source APAC-VHS

Strategies for prevention

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

IN the absence of a cure or a vaccine for HIV/AIDS, the best strategy to deal with the scourge is prevention. The four major components involved in this approach are:

Generating awareness: There is a wide gap between disease awareness, knowledge and actual practice, largely because AIDS is an "invisible" disease, unlike malaria and tuberculosis, and because awareness campaigns have hitherto focussed largely on the importance of "condom use" and of being "faithful". Campaigns do not induce behavioural changes if the people do not understand the mode of spread of an infection or a disease, understand that a behavioural change will benefit them and are provided the support needed to make behavioural changes.

In Tamil Nadu, the awareness campaign targets the high-risk groups as well as the general population and uses a multimedia approach: television, radio, print, hoardings, advertisements, documentaries and folk songs, dance and theatre.

Promoting condom use: According to P. Arvind Kumar, a condom promotion specialist with APAC-VHS, in India HIV is transmitted predominantly through heterosexual activity, and promoting the use of quality condoms will control the spread of the pandemic. India is one of the largest manufacturers of condoms, but over 50 per cent of the condoms produced in India are exported to over 150 countries; per capita condom use in India is one of the lowest in the world. Arvind Kumar attributes this to the poor availability of condoms at retail shops, buyer inhibition and unfamiliarity with usage procedures. To make good-quality condoms easily accessible, APAC-VHS provides technical assistance to condom manufacturers to meet international quality standards, helps create awareness about condom use and markets condoms at subsidised rates.

To ensure better acceptance of condoms, APAC-VHS holds training programmes for retailers in collaboration with the National Institute of Sales, and for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and health workers in collaboration with the Madurai-based Centre for Entrepreneur Development. Consequently, the number of condom outlets increased by 50 per cent in the last few years: there are now over 3,000 retail outlets in Tamil Nadu. Also, condoms are available at non-traditional outlets such as department stores, groceries and *pan* shops. The number of people using condoms has also increased dramatically over the last few years.

STD care: Studies by APAC-VHS show that people with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are 10 times more susceptible to HIV than others. Less than 10 per cent of STD patients get treated in government hospitals. Most STD patients ignore the problem or opt for self-medication owing to poor awareness or the lack of adequate women doctors. According to APAC Assistant Director Dr. N.Zafarullah, 15.8 per cent of the general population has one or other STD; 1.8 per cent of that number is HIV-infected. Treating STDs early is a sure way of reducing the number of HIV infections. To increase awareness of STDs and the treatment for them, APAC-VHS has trained over 4,000 health-care providers in Tamil Nadu in the last few years. APAC-VHS is also involved in setting up STD clinics in corporate and private hospitals.

Ensuring blood safety: As part of the measures adopted in Tamil Nadu to ensure blood safety, 815 blood banks have been modernised, and 40 blood-component-separation units set up; tests for HIV, hepatitis-B, syphilis and malaria have been made mandatory during blood donations; professional blood donations are being phased out and voluntary donations promoted; blood transfusion councils have been set up; and doctors and laboratory technicians have been trained.

BEHAVIOURAL SURVEILLANCE SURVEYS (BSS), which systematically monitor risk behaviour among people in the high-risk categories that spread the epidemic, have emerged as a critical component of the integrated surveillance package.

Changing risk behaviour through interventional strategies remains a key method to check the spread of HIV. Behavioural Surveillance Surveys provide the tool to monitor the success of these strategies.

Where the prevalence of HIV is still low, such surveys help identify the population groups that are most vulnerable to HIV infection and the sections that may be susceptible in future if preventive interventions are not initiated. This early warning may be important for Asian countries where HIV infection rates are low.

Behavioural Surveillance Surveys are generally repeated in the same cross-section of sub-population groups in relatively large geographical areas, and their data are meant to encapsulate broad-based behavioural trends.

In Tamil Nadu, where HIV infection rates are among the highest in the country, a BSS project by APAC-VHS has been monitoring behavioural trends since 1996 in several urban areas. Other findings of the survey include two important trends: reduction in the number of non-regular sex partners and increase in condom use among non-regular sex partners. ■



K. PICHUMANI

Condoms on sale at a general store.

Only you can prevent an STD patient from becoming an AIDS patient.



As a responsible member of the Medical Profession, caring for your patients is the most important thing in the world And you want nothing more than to see them completely cured And perhaps no other set of patients are as vulnerable as patients with a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) That is why it is important that you give them all the attention you can and the best advice possible Namely

- To make sure that they undergo complete treatment for the STD so that it is fully cured And warn them that repeated exposure of an STD condition (ulcers in the genitals) to high risk behaviour can make way for contracting AIDS
- To make sure that you include Partner Notification as part of your clinical advice and ensure that the patient brings his/her sexual partner for treatment
- So that the vicious cycle of the cured partner contracting the STD from his/her untreated partner is prevented
- Explain to them the differences between symptomatic and asymptomatic STD and explain all STD symptoms
- And advise them that a condom is the only protection against any STD including AIDS

AIDS Prevention And Control Project
Voluntary Health Services
Adyar, Chennai 600 113.
Phone: 2352965, 2355048. Fax: 91-44-2355018.

Always use a condom

A message on the highway

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

CONSIDERING the vulnerability of the lonely long-distanace truck driver to dangerous temptations along the road, AIDS-control strategies now routinely focus on getting the message of safety across to them. This involves setting up shop along busy highways, often at points where drivers stop for food at wayside eateries. One such centre is located at Sandhavelur, near Sunkuvarchatram, 65 km from Chennai, where literature on AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and condoms are handed out to members of the target population.

This evening, Madhes, 33, a truck driver, and Settu, 23, a cleaner, are being told in simple Tamil what AIDS is, what causes it, how it spreads and what are the ways to prevent contracting it. V. Kalidas, a field officer in the Indian Institute of Community Health, a non-governmental organisation that runs a project called Trucker-Highway Community Health Project (THCHP), tells them that people who have multiple sex partners, homosexuals, or people who use infected syringes are at high risk of contracting the virus that causes AIDS; the virus can also be passed through transfusion of contaminated blood. He uses flip charts and flash cards with pictures to educate them on HIV and STDs, and dispels myths. He then demonstrates the proper method of using a condom. Madhes and Settu's questions are answered, and after about 20 minutes, the two truckers hit the road again.

Under the THCHP, which is funded by International Family Health, London, counsellers advise truck drivers and cleaners, and commercial sex workers on the preventive steps that can avert STDs and AIDS. There are eight counselling centres under the THCHP: at Chembarampakkam and Sandhavelur on National Highway 4; Mamandur and Ulundurpet on NH 45; Perunthurai and Kaniyur, and Koratti (in Kerala) on NH 47; and Andalur Gate near Rasipuram on NH 7. The project at Sandhavelur was started three years back.

According to Kalidas, he and assistant field officer V. Karuppusamy educate about 35 truckers a day (from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.) on sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Karuppusamy said the truckers' response was good. Kalidas added, "In particular, drivers and cleaners who are about to get married come to us for counselling."

Right opposite the THCHP counselling centre, next to another dhaba, is another AIDS Counselling Centre, run by Alternative for Indian Development, an NGO, and funded under the AIDS Prevention and Control Project (APAC) of the Voluntary Health Services (VHS). The centre was started two years back. Seated in a small room, surrounded by posters that list the symptoms of AIDS (rapid weight loss, dysentery, fever cough, itching and so on), field officers G. Venkatesan and R. Vasu said that their campaign to counsel truckers had had mixed reactions. "Some of them ignore us. Others get angry and ask us why we focus only on truck drivers and why there are such centres only on the highways," Venkatesan said. AIDS Counselling Centre has a strategy in place to spread awareness among drivers and cleaners: it has trained employees at petrol stations, dhabas, *pan* shops and vulcanising shops to spread AIDS awareness. These employees are called "peer educators".

Under the THCHP, condoms were sold at subsidised rates in petty shops along the highways. Truckers were also given a key-chain with a secret compartment in which to store the condom.

Dr. B. Arulmurugan, who is attached to the THCHP at Sandhavelur, said he treated about three to five men with STDs each day. If HIV infection is suspected, he refers patients to the Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute in Porur, near Chennai, or to Dr. Sunithi Solomon, YRG CARE (Centre for AIDS Research and Education), in Chennai, for treatment.

Kalidas and Karuppusamy said that drivers who were being treated for STD often did not get continuous treatment if they were put on a different route.

The Indian Institute of Community Health operated a mobile clinic in villages around Erode to provide medical treatment for commercial sex workers.

beginning 1999, Rs.1,155 crores has been allotted.

Tamil Nadu's AIDS awareness and prevention programme has been cited as a model by the NACO. The State's success can be traced to its multi-sectoral approach: the government, the private sector, NGOs, professionals and the general public work in collaboration to combat the problem. The nodal agencies for the AIDS prevention campaign in the State are the Voluntary Health Services Hospital, Chennai, which is the base for the USAID-funded AIDS Prevention and Control (APAC) Project, and the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TNSACS).

The TNSACS programme is an experimental model for the NACO; it is the first project under the national programme which was started in 1994. The TNSACS, chaired by the State Health Secretary, works closely with the government.

The Voluntary Health Services Hospital, a non-profit institution started in 1963 with the objective of preventing and curing serious illnesses, is one of the few hospitals in Tamil Nadu that treat people infected with HIV or AIDS. It gets technical help for its AIDS treatment programme from the Chennai-based YRG CARE (Centre for AIDS Research and Education). Of its 400 beds, VHS has devoted 20 for HIV/AIDS patients.

THE mass media may help raise awareness about HIV and AIDS, but only inter-personal and interactive communication can induce behavioural changes that will check the spread of the disease. In this context the role of NGOs is crucial.

In Tamil Nadu, APAC-VHS provides financial and technical support to over 40 NGOs for targeted interventions among high-risk groups such as commercial sex workers, truck drivers and tourists. The NGOs educate the target population on the causes and effects of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and the advantages and the method of condom use; they also train health care providers in identifying the symptoms of STDs and treating the diseases.

The behavioural surveillance surveys (BSS) undertaken by APAC-VHS at regular intervals show that the multi-sectoral and multi-media targeted approach has led to increased awareness and adoption

▶ 114

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Training Programme on SOCIAL MARKETING OF CONDOMS

(An NGO Capacity Building Programme sponsored by USAID & VHS-APAC)

The Programme

The Programme is jointly designed by Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad, Centre for Entrepreneur Development (Tamilnadu) and AIDS Prevention and Control Project (APAC),Chennai,with the support of USAID.

The objective is to train the NGOs engaged in health oriented projects to get an indepth orientation on Social Marketing Concept.An indepth analysis of issues related to HIV/ AIDS and effective use of condoms in the control of HIV / AIDS will make the participants confident of approaching the issue.

Eligibility

Senior staff of NGOs, Academicians and Consultants engaged in Social Marketing Sponsored by NGOs, Service Clubs like Rotary,Lions,Social Reformers and other Public Persons engaged in Health Related Issues.

[redacted]

This is a four day residential programme conducted at CED Training Campus,Madurai and CED plans to train 200 persons (in 20 member batches) through 10 Programmes in a span of two years. The next Programme is expected to be conducted by early December 1999.

[redacted]

The total cost of the Programme works out to Rs 3,000/- per participant. However, Fellowship is available from USAID & VHS-APAC, to the extent of Rs. 2,000/- per participant. Therefore, NGO participants need to pay only Rs.1,000/- per participant.This fee covers local conveyance, accomodation, course material, certification, boarding, lodging etc.

For further details:

Mr. S.Gnana Haran
Course Director

Mr.C.Rajayokkiam / Ms.N.Girija
Project Co-ordinators

Working on a model programme

Interview with Dr. P. Krishnamurthy, APAC Project Director.

"AIDS is the fastest spreading pandemic in medical history and requires urgent action," says **Dr. P. Krishnamurthy**, Project Director of the AIDS Prevention and Control Project (APAC) based at the Voluntary Health Services Hospital in Chennai. APAC and the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TNSACS) are the nodal agencies for the AIDS awareness and prevention programme in Tamil Nadu, which has been recognised as a model programme by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO).

Dr. Krishnamurthy, who has a background in public health, has been involved for a decade in AIDS control work undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Government and has been with APAC since its inception in September 1995. He was trained at the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Calcutta. He has presented several technical papers at international AIDS conferences. As part of his research work, he conducted a study of the behavioural pattern of the high-risk population and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in Tamil Nadu. Dr. Krishnamurthy is a member of Monitoring the AIDS Pandemic, an international core group of 100 experts from 40 countries.

Dr. Krishnamurthy spoke to **Asha Krishnakumar** on the reasons for the spread of the AIDS pandemic, the ongoing research and other issues related to the problem. Excerpts from the interview:

▶ *When did the problem of AIDS surface and how did the disease spread?*

The problem of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, has been around for over two decades. In India, it was first detected in September 1986 in Chennai by Dr. Suniti Solomon (then Professor of Microbiology at the Madras Medical College), and around the same time by Dr. Jacob T. John at the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, Tamil Nadu. These two cases were detected when the doctors tested the blood of a few commercial sex workers. The first case of AIDS was identified around the same time in Mumbai. However, people refused to believe that the disease, which at that time was associated largely with promiscuity, could be prevalent in India: this denial arose largely from a moralistic point of view.

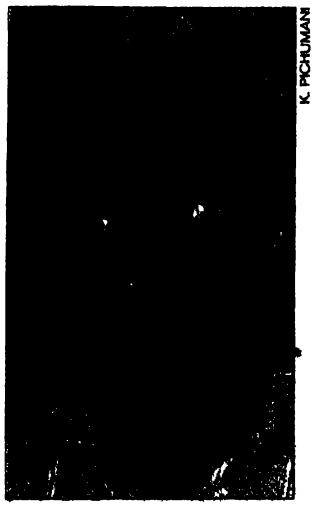
As health is a State subject, it was important that the State governments woke up and accepted the prevalence of the scourge. For many years, however, most States refused even to acknowledge its presence. This first stage of denial is part of the AIDS epidemiology globally. It is only now, after the scourge has spread across the country and among all groups of people, that State governments have accepted the presence of the problem.

In India, there are an estimated 30-40 lakh people with HIV. Of these, an estimated 4.5 lakh are in Tamil Nadu. Thus, a big chunk of the problem is in Tamil Nadu. The figures are increasing rapidly.

▶ *How has Tamil Nadu managed the problem?*

Tamil Nadu's AIDS prevention programme is recognised as the model by the National AIDS Control Organisation, the nodal agency for AIDS prevention and control in India, and by international agencies. Tamil Nadu government officials who are involved with the AIDS prevention programme now plan strategies for control programmes in other States.

Tamil Nadu is considered a model largely because of the efforts of some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have spearheaded the fight against AIDS. Initially, they worked on their own; later they tried to mobilise government support. In 1992, the Tamil Nadu government launched a massive drive against the scourge, with funds from the World Health Organisation (WHO).


K. PICHUMANI

The programme in Tamil Nadu owes its success to five factors: the strong NGO movement, the government's commitment, the support provided by religious organisations, the unstinted support given by professional institutions such as the Indian Medical Association and by paramedical and nurses associations, and media support.

Tamil Nadu acknowledged the presence of the problem fairly early and forged a collaboration of various groups. This heightened awareness among the high-risk groups and the general public. Over 90 per cent of the population in Tamil Nadu seems to be aware of the problem.

There was, however, a gap between awareness and behavioural change. It was only in 1996, following consistent efforts by the government and the NGOs, that awareness translated into behavioural changes such as adoption of safety measures.

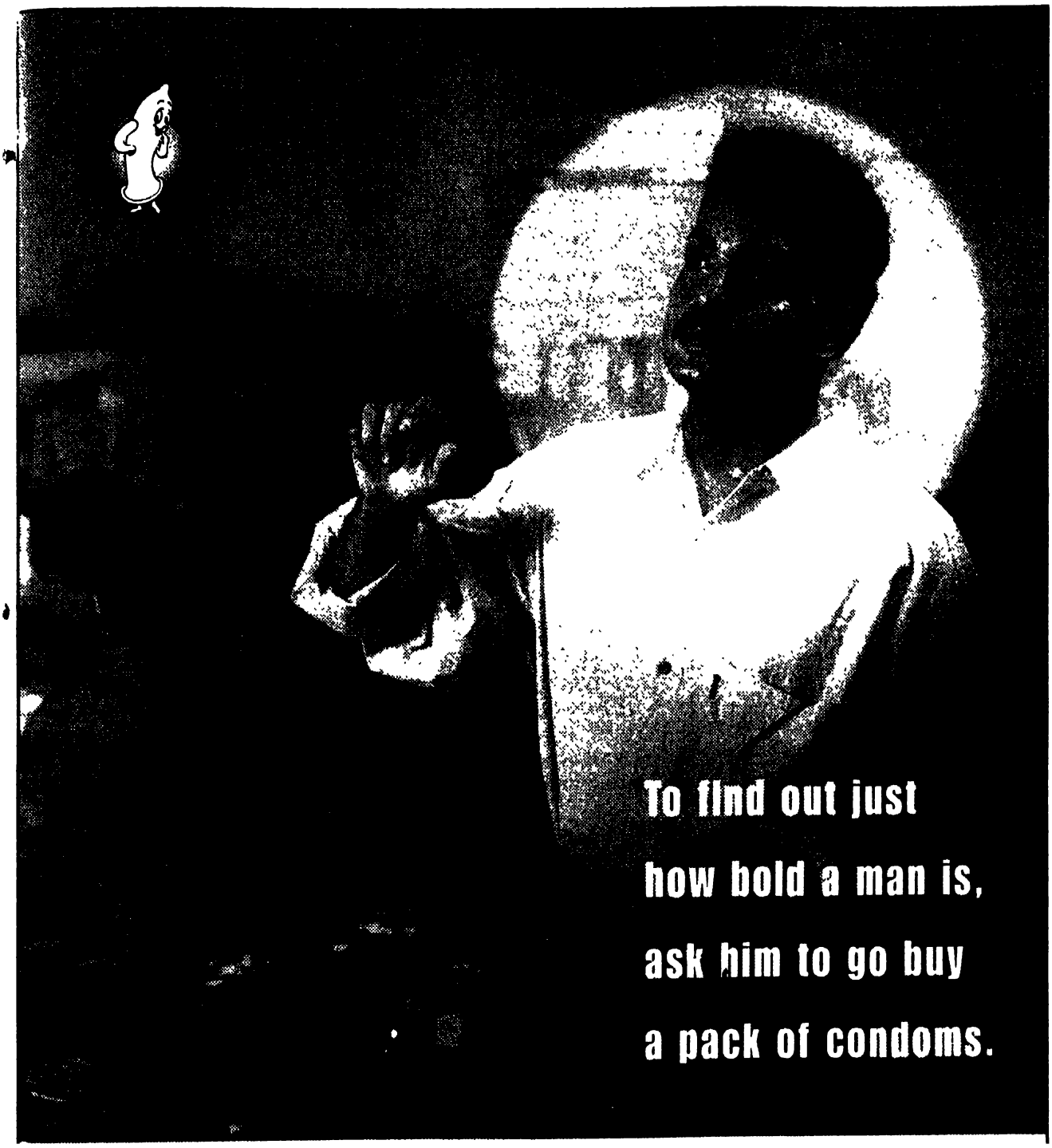
▶ *How do you assess behavioural change?*

Through Behavioural Surveillance Surveys (BSS) conducted by APAC. Such surveys study the people's behaviour in terms of their non-regular sexual relationships and safety measures such as condom use during such non-regular sexual practices. APAC has conducted such surveys continuously on the same set of people since 1996.

▶ *What behavioural changes have been noticed?*

For example, one of the target groups in this project is long-distance truck drivers. Eleven NGOs are working on a project called "Prevention along the Highway". Between 1996 and 1998, non-regular sexual behaviour, that is, incidence of sexual relationships with persons other than their spouses, reduced from 48 per cent to 32 per cent and condom use among the 32 per cent of the truck drivers increased from 47 per cent to 66 per cent.

Surveys among commercial sex workers show that they have started buying condoms in shops, in addition to what is distributed: this indicates their acceptance of safety measures. The number of sex workers who buy condoms has gone up from 9 per cent in 1996 to 16.5 per cent in 1998. Similarly, sales of commercially market-



There are still a few men who find it challenging to go out and buy a condom.

Why should you be embarrassed about buying or using a condom? Today millions of men have understood the protective value of the condom and ask for it as freely as they would for shampoo or a soap.

A condom is the best protection you and your partner have against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS. Today a condom is also a terrific accessory for lovemaking. And it is the best way to show your partner that you really love and care.

Be a socially responsible citizen. The next time you need a condom, ask for it. Without embarrassment. Always use a condom.

AIDS Prevention And Control Project,
Voluntary Health Services
Adyar, Chennai 600 113. Phone: 2352985, 2355048. Fax: 91-44-2355018.

ed condoms, as opposed to subsidised condoms and those that are given away for free, increased from nine million pieces in 1994 to 29 million in 1998. These figures are higher than in any other State. People are now aware and are motivated to use condoms.

It took seven years for such a rate of behavioural change to occur in Uganda and five years in Thailand.

Psycho-social support to HIV-positive people is important. Usually, from the detection of HIV infection to its becoming a full-blown AIDS case, it takes three to 10 years.

▶ *What are the programmes in Tamil Nadu and which agencies are involved?*

In Tamil Nadu, the two major partners are the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TNSACS), with K. Allaudin as its Director, and APAC, based at the Voluntary Health Services Hospital. The State Health Secretary provides support to both agencies. Both complement each other's work and avoid duplication.

APAC-VHS' role is confined largely to the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS through the sexual mode. It concentrates on prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), promotion of condom use; HIV/AIDS-related research activities, and educational programmes to stimulate behavioural change in the community. It does this with the help of 46 NGOs in the State and provides them technical guidance and financial support.

The TNSACS concentrates on blood safety in government and private sector blood banks; it supports government medical institutions in STD care and supports and cares for persons who test HIV-positive. It also conducts educational programmes.

▶. *What is the nature of APAC-VHS' collaboration with NGOs?*

APAC-VHS supports NGOs and the private sector. Its approach is thematic: it encourages NGOs to work with the target or high-risk groups such as the people in the urban backward area settlements (slums), highway truck drivers, commercial sex workers, and people in pilgrim and tourist towns. Since February 1995, APAC-VHS has given 46 grants to NGOs in Tamil Nadu.

▶ *How does APAC-VHS monitor the work of the NGOs?*

Its monitoring system is acknowledged as one of the best by NACO and the TNSACS, which now follow some of APAC-VHS' innovative approaches.

In addition to providing funds to NGOs, APAC-VHS offers technical support. It trains coordinators, counsellors and social and health workers to counsel patients; markets condoms socially, that is, sells them at subsidised rates; desensitises the NGOs' staff in dealing with sexuality issues; provides support to render services to target communities; and helps develop field workers' communication skills.

The goal of the USAID project, which ends in January 2002, is to sustain the work by developing about 100 NGOs as model groups that can continue the work until the scourge is controlled.

▶ *How does APAC-VHS collaborate with the private sector?*

In many ways. For instance, we have collaborated with JK Ansel Ltd (manufacturers of condoms) to market their product aggressively. We carry on advertisement campaigns to help condom buyers overcome their inhibitions about buying the product; make condoms available in non-traditional outlets such as grocery shops; tie up with the National Institute of Sales to train retailers to promote condom sales, as a social responsibility; and tie up with the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development to train NGOs in condom marketing. All these activities have increased condom use in Tamil Nadu among the high-risk groups and the general public.

▶ *What major research activities have been undertaken in Tamil Nadu?*

APAC-VHS has undertaken pioneering research work on the prevalence of STD in the 15-45 age group. Incidence of STDs in Tamil Nadu is high: 9.8 per cent of the adult population has at least one disease. If HIV and hepatitis-B are also included, the percentage is 15.8. In terms of absolute numbers, 3.9 million people suffer from at least one STD: this is a large number by any account.

The Behavioural Surveillance Surveys constitute the first such effort in India. Behavioural changes are the first observable parameters in targeted interventions. Such surveys, which provides valuable data on the changing behaviour of people, are conducted every year for the target groups by APAC.

The TNSACS has undertaken a Sero-Sentinel Surveillance as part of NACO's national agenda. The data collected from this survey are used only for research purposes: the identity of those surveyed is not made public. This research has been done continuously from 1993 in Tamil Nadu, the only State to have completed several rounds. This survey shows that the percentage of HIV-positive people among STD patients increased from 4.2 in 1993 to 16.27 in 1999; it now appears to be plateauing, which is a good sign.

But the positivity of HIV among pregnant women is likely to increase. While this figure was insignificant in 1994, it was 0.69 per cent in 1997 and is 1.67 per cent now. This is expected to increase for another two or three years. Generally, there will first be a plateauing in the high-risk group and then among the general population.

▶ *Why is the study of STD incidence important in dealing with HIV/AIDS?*

Because STD is a co-factor for HIV. People with STDs are 10 times more vulnerable to HIV than others. The second physiological reason is that people who suffer from STDs have ulcers in, or discharges from, the genitalia, through which the virus can get transmitted. Also, if a person has an ulcer or a sore in the genitalia owing to STD, that will be the entry point for HIV. Therefore, STD prevention is crucial to controlling HIV.

▶ *What is the latest in the treatment of HIV/AIDS?*

The treatment of HIV-positive pregnant women. Vertical transmission from the mother to the child is normally 30 per cent. With AZT (Zindovidin), the probability of transmission is reduced substantially; with treatment the child can be infection-free. The cost is also not very high.

▶ *How does providing psycho-social support to HIV-positive patients help?*

Psycho-social support to HIV-positive people is important. Usually, from the detection of HIV infection to its becoming a full-blown AIDS case, it takes three to 10 years. In India, the joint family system is a great help in providing care for such patients.

▶. *Is there no known cure for HIV?*

None till date. There are a lot of claims by Siddha and Ayurveda practitioners, but scientific proof is needed. In many cases, quacks exploit the emotional distress of HIV-positive patients and their families. Scientific research should be allowed to find out if a cure is available in the alternative systems of medicine. If such claims are proved scientifically, India would be in the forefront of HIV cure. ■



India's most sensational SEX accessory is a new condom

Dotted for extra pleasure

Normal condom



The lack of texture on the condom makes its usage purely functional.

New Moods Supreme



These dots bulge on the condom to excite the sensitive zones, and make the act of love even more passionate.



DOTTED CONDOMS

of safe sex practices. For instance, 95 per cent of the target population is aware of the two most common modes of transmission of STDs and HIV; among the target group, there has been a drop in the incidence of sex with non-regular sex partners; condom sales have risen from 17 million to 32 million pieces in the last three years, and the number of condom outlets has increased from 24,000 to 36,000 in the last two years.

ONE of the challenges that India faces is the care of the large number of HIV-infected persons. The lack of clinical, psycho-social and family-based support results in emotional distress and an increase in "opportunistic infections". According to APAC Project Director Dr. P. Krishnamurthy, home care is the best way to deal with HIV-infected persons as it not only helps them emotionally and physically but also reduces the public health care burden.

In fact, the Fifth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAA), which concluded in Kuala Lumpur recently, stressed the importance of psycho-social support for the HIV/AIDS-affected and their families. According to Dr. Gordon Alexander, Senior Country Programme Advisor, UNAIDS, the epidemic has been getting out of control in Asian countries but the political response has been patchy. The conference also emphasised the need to see the HIV/AIDS problem beyond a narrow health perspective.

Dr. Suniti Solomon, director of YRG CARE, agrees. "Confining the scourge to the tertiary sector is not enough. There is a need to channel efforts to improve the quality of life for the HIV/AIDS-infected. This calls for a holistic approach without concentrating on just the clinical aspects." Such an approach should address other factors, such as the social stigma attached to HIV and AIDs and the fact that the legal provisions in respect of the fundamental rights of HIV-infected persons are somewhat nebulous.

The experience of public health professionals the world over demonstrates that coercive strategies, such as mandatory testing, breach of confidentiality and discrimination against the HIV/AIDS-affected, only serve to drive the epidemic underground and thereby increase the risk of new infections. There is, thus, a need for an open debate with a strong political response to combat the deadly scourge. ■

A pioneering service

The Community Health Education Society in Chennai offers medical help for HIV-positive children, reaches out to the community to identify and treat others who are affected, and works to create awareness about the disease.

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

LIFE dealt a cruel double-blow to Meghala, 11, and Manoj, 9, within a few years of their birth. They were orphaned seven years ago; a little over a year later the two, who were admitted to the Institute of Child Health (ICH), Chennai, with severe diarrhoea, were found to be HIV-positive. Even as their condition deteriorated, Meghala and Manoj were turned out of the ICH for fear that the infection would spread to others. The orphanage they had been staying refused to take them back.

At that point, Dr. P. Manorama, a paediatric gastroenterologist at the ICH, treated and nursed them and adopted them. The orphans found a home and a caring mother. As news of Manorama's gesture spread, a number of HIV-positive patients, who had been refused medical aid elsewhere, came to her; many more were referred to her. To take care of the increasing number of HIV/AIDS-affected patients, Manorama founded the Community Health Education Society (CHES).



Dr. P. Manorama, founder of the Community Health Education Society in Chennai.

There are a number of organisations that work with HIV-positive persons in Tamil Nadu, but the CHES is one of the few that do pioneering work not only in taking care of HIV-positive children but in reaching out to identify and treat the affected. It also helps create awareness about the disease.

Set up with 11 volunteers, the CHES now has over 200 volunteers, 34 full-time members on its staff and 30 peer educators (who track and identify HIV-positive persons). In the last five years, it treated 330 HIV-positive adults and 60 AIDS patients. There have been referrals from all over the State and from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and even from Mumbai and Calcutta. Until now, the CHES has treated 96 children (of whom 12 died). It also runs an ashram, a home for HIV-positive children who have been abandoned by HIV-positive parents or commercial sex workers; where possible, children are sent back to their families after counselling. There are 20 children at the ashram; there is also a school for HIV-positive children who have been denied admission in regular schools.

The CHES' annual budget of Rs.30 lakhs is met by contributions from the Tamil Nadu Government, the United States Agency for International Development (through the AIDS Prevention and Control Project at the Voluntary Health Services Hospital), some private institutions and others.

The CHES runs several projects:

Home care for HIV-positive persons: This is a pioneering project in which trained field workers, who are in many



A few minutes of pleasure without protection and you could become the target of STD.

Here are a few symptoms that you might notice in your genital area if you are affected by STD.

- Genital ulcers or sores
- Urethral discharge
- Profuse vaginal discharge
- Burning sensation while urinating.

If you experience any of these or if you've had unprotected sex visit your doctor immediately. Take your sexual partner along with you too. Early treatment can easily and completely cure STD. Failure to take treatment could result in abortions, still births, sterility, continuous pain in the lower abdomen, in women. Besides it also increases your chance of being affected by AIDS.

Remember:

- Immediate treatment can cure you of STD.
- Never have unprotected sex. For safe sex always use a condom.

AIDS Prevention And Control Project
Voluntary Health Services
Adyar, Chennai 600 113,
Phone: 2352965, 2355048. Fax: 91-44-2355018.

Good health needs good genital hygiene

cases themselves HIV-positive people, visit affected people's homes, offer preliminary medical care and provide physical and psycho-social support to the family. This project is supported by the Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TNSACS) Over 250 people have been treated under this project since it was started in 1997 According to Dr. Manorama, the field staff are taken seriously because most of them are HIV-positive women, and this has contributed to the success of the project.



S. THANTHONI

At the CHES-run school for HIV-positive children, some of whom had been denied admission in regular schools.

Counselling at the Government Hospital of Thoracic Medicine (TB sanatorium): Tuberculosis is a co-factor of AIDS, and patients at the TB sanatorium at Tambaram, on the outskirts of Chennai, which has treated over 500 HIV-positive patients, need counselling. In the past 10 months, four CHES counsellors working at the sanatorium have counselled about 2,500 patients. This project too is supported by the TNSACS.

Working with commercial sex workers: This project, with support from the TNSACS, educates women involved in the sex trade in Chennai about the disease and its consequences.

Rehabilitating commercial sex workers: Under this project, which is funded by USAID through APAC-VHS and is run in 10 areas in Tamil Nadu, field workers educate commercial sex workers about AIDS, promote the use of condoms, and teach them "negotiating skills" to persuade clients to use condoms. Through this project, the CHES reaches out to over 1,000 women in brothels identified by "peer educators" who are pimps and/or HIV-positive persons. In the past one year, the CHES distributed over three lakh condoms, raising the percentage of condom users in these brothels from seven to 63. The CHES also rehabilitates sex workers by finding them alternative employment and taking care of them in the interim period. It also counsels and provides STD referrals to sex workers.

Intervention project for "the third gender" (or *hijdas* or eunuchs): The CHES took up this project on its own without funding, realising the need to work with the so-called "third gender", who are another high-risk group. Under this project, the CHES organises a programme to spread awareness about AIDS, at Koovakam (near Villupuram in South Arcot district), where eunuchs congregate annually for two days, first to take their customary marriage vows to their deity, Avaran, and later to go through the rites of widowhood.

Apart from these projects, the CHES has an institutional care facility and a free hospital for terminally ill HIV-positive people. The CHES has also set up a referral centre for sexually transmitted diseases that go in tandem with HIV/AIDS. Eight out-reach workers refer STD patients to the hospital and undertake social marketing of condoms.

The CHES also helps spread awareness about AIDS by conducting cultural programmes for target groups in slums, prisoners in jails, and visitors to tourist and pilgrim towns.

The CHES' programmes are periodically reviewed and modified. Administrative officer P. Muthupandian says: "Sexual contact is perhaps the main cause of the spread of the disease. Men get HIV usually from sex workers, and women from their husbands." Meenakshi, 37, Sudha, 32, and Valli, 31, and a dozen other CHES field workers were infected by their husbands. Valli was married only 15 days, after which she was forced out of the house; but by then she had already been infected. Sukanya, 34, who is terminally ill at the CHES hospital, was infected by her husband who died of AIDS three years ago.

Awareness about the disease is still poor, even among medical professionals. According to Muthupandian, Kumar, 28, was found to be HIV-positive in a Chennai hospital four months ago. Thereupon doctors and nurses allegedly refused to treat him; he was locked in a room for four days and then sent away.

According to Dr. Manorama, misconceptions about AIDS give rise to a lot of practical problems. For instance, the CHES is unable to rent a place to house the children since many people fear that the disease spreads through casual physical contact.

Dr. Manorama says that the spread of the disease can be curbed to a large extent if sex workers used condoms. Reema, 24, an ashram inmate who was rescued from a Mumbai brothel, has a harrowing tale to narrate. Sold many times over after her marriage in Hyderabad, Reema landed up in a Mumbai brothel where she was administered intravenous drugs twice a day in order to be able to entertain six or seven clients each day. Rescued last year by the former Assistant Commissioner of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, G.R. Khairnar, she was sent to the CHES. Her experience has left her psychologically traumatised: she now suffers from a fear psychosis and is mostly in an agitated state.

Vishwa, 31, now a field worker with the CHES, was involved in the trafficking of women until 1996 when he became a peer educator and helped identify brothels. He had initiated a number of girls into commercial sex: he then decided to work for their rehabilitation and joined the CHES for a compensation of Rs.1,500 a month; in his earlier profession he used to make as much money each day. He also married a former sex worker.

Not all children born of an infected mother become HIV-positive. For instance, Rama, 35, who contracted the infection from her truck-driver husband (who is now terminally ill at the CHES hospital), has two daughters, only one of whom is infected. Says Dr. Manorama: "The real problem now is the care of children who are HIV-negative. What will they do after their family members die? They will have to live with the stigma."

In its mission to provide medical assistance to those who have been denied it and to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, the CHES networks with organisations working in the same sphere, including the YRG Care Centre for AIDS Research and Education, the TTK De-addiction Centre, APAC-VHS and the TNSACS. ■

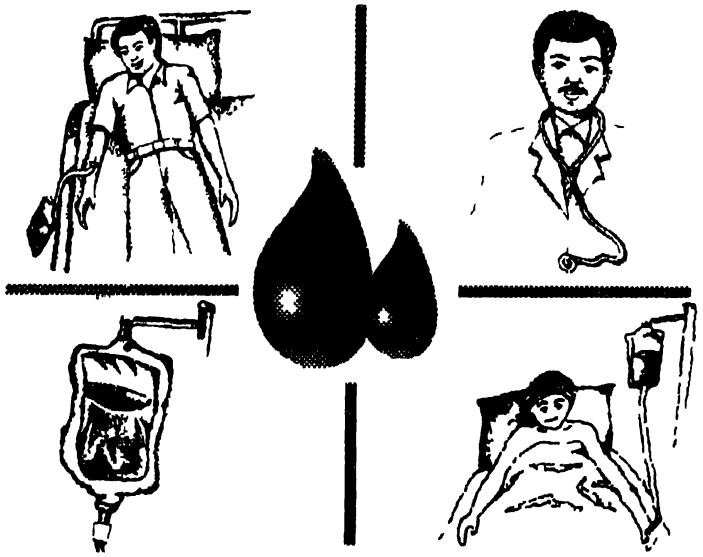
(Names of some persons have been changed to protect their identity.)

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MYTHS & TRUTHS ABOUT BLOOD DONATION

MYTHS ABOUT BLOOD DONATION

- Donating blood is dangerous, health will be affected **(Wrong)**
- HIV/AIDS spreads by blood donation. **(Wrong)**
- Blood donation will have side effects **(Wrong)**
- Blood donation will weaken the body and body weight will come down **(Wrong)**
- Day to day routine work cannot be done after donating blood **(Wrong)**



TRUTHS ABOUT BLOOD DONATION

- Health will not be affected by donating blood **(Right)**
- Donated blood will be regenerated in the body within 21 days **(Right)**
- Healthy men/women who are above 45 kgs in weight and above 18 years of age can donate blood. **(Right)**
- Blood donation does not transmit HIV/AIDS to the donor **(Right)**
- Men can donate blood once in three months and women can donate blood once in four months **(Right)**

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A child survival tool

The BCG vaccine is still efficacious in protecting children against some serious forms of tuberculosis, though it affords no such protection to adults.

R. RAMACHANDRAN
in New Delhi

A CONTROVERSY over the use of the BCG (bacillus calmette-guerin) vaccine in the prevention and control of tuberculosis (TB) was recently set off by a newspaper report that questioned the usefulness of the entire BCG immunisation programme for children and called it "the Great BCG Hoax". Since the administration of the vaccine forms part of the expanded programme of immunisation (EPI) of children in the country, such a controversy could harm the programme by creating doubts in the minds of parents about the efficacy of BCG vaccination.

The news item was based on a report of the 15-year follow-up trials conducted by the Tuberculosis Research Centre (TRC), an institution in Chennai under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu, not far from Chennai. The trials were conducted in order to evaluate the efficacy of the BCG vaccine as a public health measure in preventing pulmonary TB. The TRC study, a well-managed large-scale, double-blind randomised trial, concluded that the vaccine provided no protection at all in adults but a low level of overall protection in children against pulmonary TB.

The results were published in the August 1999 issue of the *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, an ICMR journal. The findings confirmed the results at the end of the first phase of the trials in 1979 (it lasted seven and a half years), which had been published in the same journal in July 1980, as well as the results of other studies. The Chingleput trials were designed to study the vaccine's efficacy against only the pulmonary form of TB.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the tubercle bacillus, belongs to the family of organisms called mycobacteria and is the deadliest pathogen in the group afflicting humans. In recent times, it has had a resurgence in association with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The similar *M. leprae* causes leprosy. TB in humans occurs in different forms and can affect almost every system. The most common form is pulmonary TB. Extrapulmonary forms such as meningitis and skeletal, abdominal or genital TB are relatively uncommon. When TB occurs in more than one system simultaneously, it is termed disseminated TB, and miliary TB is the most extreme such form. (When it was discovered, the X-ray image of the lungs of the affected persons showed millet shaped shadows; hence the name.) In children, however, these forms are more common, and some of them, like tuberculous meningitis and miliary TB, show high mortality rates.

There is only one vaccine against all mycobacterial diseases – the BCG. It is a derived from the attenuated bovine tubercle bacillus called *M. bovis*. The vaccine was first used against human tuberculosis in 1921. The protective effect of the BCG vaccine against TB has been well demonstrated in animal systems, but a number of controlled trials conducted since the 1930s have produced conflicting results with regard to its protective efficacy against TB in humans (see Figure, which includes results of Phase I of the Chingleput trials). Its efficacy (against pulmonary TB) has been found to vary from zero to 80 per cent! (In Brazilian trials on TB meningitis, the efficacy is nearly 90 per cent.) From a medical point of view this is baffling, and in the face of the divergent results, it has not been possible to quantify, or even identify, the factors that govern the level of protection needed.

The variation has been debated over the last four decades, but there is as yet no consensus on the possible causes. One explanation attributes it to differences among the various strains. Another explanation is that the differences reflect the prevalence of infections with "environmental" mycobacteria. Numerous species of mycobacteria are found in water and soil, for example, and many human populations are sensitised to these. This is particularly true of India. Animal-based studies have shown that infections with some of these species can confer a certain degree of protection against TB, as can BCG. Therefore, in populations where there is natural infection with "environmental" and "atypical" mycobacteria (such as *M. avium*), or natural immunity derived from exposure load to *M. tuberculosis* itself, it can mask the effect of BCG.

Another view is that different immunological mechanisms act against different stages of mycobacterial infection and disease, and that BCG is more effective in stopping bacterial dissemination in blood, than in containing the growth in specific parts of the body. This view seems consistent with the finding that BCG generally provides a high level of protection against tuberculous meningitis even in trials in which the vaccine offered little protection against other forms of TB. Yet another explanation for BCG's inconsistent behaviour is geographic variations in the TB bacilli. In the context of the Chingleput trials, it has been pointed out that the common South Indian strain of *M. tuberculosis* is less virulent than other strains. Perhaps several factors, biological and environmental, have conspired to varying levels in the contexts of different trials, resulting in the wide variations noted.

EVEN though the use of the BCG vaccine as a public health measure in checking the pulmonary form of TB has thus been controversial for long, there is conclusive evidence from studies around the world, including India, that it is very effective in preventing childhood forms of TB. It is for this reason that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended its continued use in immunisation programmes in TB-endemic areas. And it is for the same reason that, based on the recommendations of the ICMR, the vaccine has been retained in the EPI to immunise children under one year of age in India where TB remains widely endemic and a major cause of death.

The strategy of routine childhood vaccination has been adopted in most other nations (with the notable exceptions of the Netherlands and the United States). In fact, it is the world's most extensively used vaccine. Because of the controversy over its efficacy, it also has been the most studied one. The news report in question reflected an improper understanding of the TRC trials and their outcome. It missed the fact that there are other severe forms of TB that affect children, against which the BCG vaccine

is been demonstrated to be effective. The RC study was not designed to evaluate the ficacy of the vaccine against these extra-ulmonary forms of TB, however.

The Chingleput trials were started in y 1968 and the vaccine/placebo intake ase was completed in March 1971. The 5-year follow-up of the effect of the vac-ine on the study population was com-leted in 1987. (It is, however, not clear why it took 12 years for the results to be published.) A study conducted during 1950-55 on the rural population of Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh had shown that BCG could only protect to the level of 31 per cent. In 1963, the Government of India felt that a reliable estimate of the efficacy of BCG as a pub-ic health measure should be obtained. This was the rationale for the Chingleput rials. The study was expected to provide a conclusive answer with regard to the pro-ective efficacy of BCG, especially in the ight of the Madanapalle findings and the onflicting results of earlier trials.

SINCE their isolation between 1908 and 1918 at the Pasteur Institute in rance, BCG organisms have been main-ained in several laboratories around the vorld. It has never been cloned but sever-l strains of BCG are used in the manu-acture of the vaccine, the most potent nes being the Paris and the Copenhagen strains. The vaccine is cheap and stable and comes in the form of freeze-dried powder which is reconstituted in injectible liquid form before use. The vaccine used in the Indian EPI is based on the Copenhagen strain. The Chingleput trials, however, used both the strains among the study population so that any intrinsic strain-dependent disparity in the protective efficacy of the vaccine does not affect the results. The strains were evaluated against placebo control, and within each strain two doses (high and low) were used.

The study population included a largely rural community with some semi-urban people as well. The trial area covered 209 panchayats and nine town blocks. The entire resident population 3,66,625 (except children under one month of age) was included. Of this, 281,161 persons were vaccinated with BCG or placebo by random allocation in such a manner that the two strains were administered to one-third of the population each and the placebo to the remaining one-third. The study area is characterised by high infection rates in children and high disease rates among the middle aged and the old. The trial was organised by the ICMR, in cooperation with the WHO and the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), U.S., during the first phase and subsequently by the ICMR by itself.

At the end of seven and a half years, the preliminary results showed that BCG did not protect against pulmonary TB. When the results of Phase I were published, several reasons, including possible methodological flaws, were postulated for the lack of protection. The follow-up period was extended to 15 years chiefly in order to test these hypotheses and settle the issue. Among the 109,873 persons classified as "uninfected" at intake phase, 560 TB cases had arisen over the 15-year period. The number of cases from the high-dose, low-dose and placebo groups were 189, 191 and 180 respectively. The similar rates in the three groups indicate lack of efficacy, confirming the results at the end of seven and a half years. The study has also ruled out the various other hypothesised reasons for the null result.

The design of the trials was to "test the efficacy of BCG as a public health measure; that is, in cutting down transmission of TB". The disease is spread by prolonged contact with an infected individual through airborne droplets from sputum. Accordingly, the TB cases in the study were identified by means of the demonstration of the TB bacilli by sputum smear analysis as well as culture. This kind of bacteriology, however, does not detect all forms of TB, particularly extra-pulmonary forms or childhood forms, for persons with such forms do not excrete bacilli as those with the pulmonary form do. But from the perspective of limiting transmission, it is enough to look at forms that excrete bacilli through sputum and this is rare among children. Indeed, more than 95 per cent of the TB cases in children are usually smear negative. Thus, owing to the nature of the design of identifying TB cases, the Chingleput trials did not investigate the impact of BCG vaccination on childhood forms of TB.

However, from the limited sample of children in the trial population, the study examined the data by age group to estimate the possible protection offered by BCG against pulmonary TB in children. In children aged one month to nine years, it found a moderate protective efficacy of 27 per cent and 21 per cent with high and low doses of BCG respectively. However, the report pointed out that these levels of protection were not statistically significant. Also, even if BCG does confer protection, it is limited in time, and the vast majority of newly developed smear positive cases of pulmonary TB among the general population cannot be prevented by mass BCG vaccination, particularly in the developing countries, where a substantial number of the TB cases is caused through



N BALAJI

uberculosis patients in a government hospital in Chennai. BCG vaccination confers high level of protection against childhood forms of TB, and provides additional rotection against leprosy in endemic areas, although it is a different story when it omes to its efficacy in an adult.

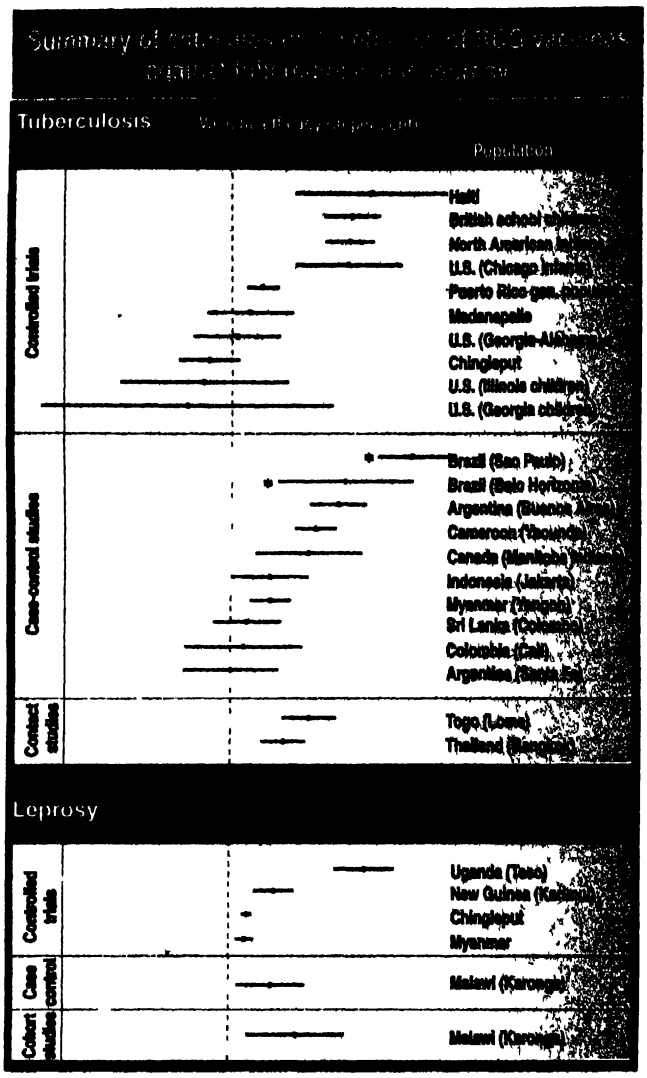
re-infection or reactivation.

Given this fact, the report makes this pertinent observation: "The public health value of BCG can only be in preventing childhood mortality caused by disease resulting from haemotogenous spread (through blood)". It has thus reiterated the WHO/ICMR rationale for recommending continued use of BCG in EPI, the objective of which is to protect children from serious forms of TB and ensure childhood survival. Indeed, based on the data of Phase I itself, the immunisation policy of the Government of India had changed. Earlier, everybody below the age of 20 years was vaccinated with BCG. After the Chingleput trials since 1979, only infants below one year of age are vaccinated under the EPI. According to the ICMR, inclusion of BCG in EPI (whose coverage today is over 90 per cent) has proved beneficial as evidenced by the low incidence of TB meningitis and miliary TB in children in recent years.

"BCG protects children against serious forms of TB. BCG does not protect adults," emphasises Dr Thomas R. Frieden of the WHO in New Delhi. He adds: "What protects adults is the stopping of TB at the source and that is done by treatment with multi-drug therapy based on the DOTS (direct observation short course) strategy of the WHO. In the case of TB, the clinical programme is a public health measure and treatment is prevention. BCG is a child survival tool whereas DOTS is a TB control tool." (In the context of HIV/AIDS, Dr. Frieden points out that children who are simply infected with HIV (to be mere carriers of infection) can be given BCG safely. However, children who have symptoms of AIDS should not be administered the vaccine because it may lead to complications.)

Since the Chingleput trials did include children, it is unclear why the efficacy of BCG against childhood forms of TB was not simultaneously investigated. Since these forms do not excrete bacilli, diagnosis is difficult. For example, TB meningitis would require extraction of spinal fluid for analysis and this procedure cannot obviously be carried out on a large scale. The incidence of these forms is low and, for a sufficient sample size, a huge population would be required to conduct randomised trials, and also the trials will be expensive, points out Dr. S. P. Tripathy, former Director-General of the ICMR, who was closely associated with the Chingleput trials. "While it may be difficult to do such a study today, nobody is prepared to take the risk. The BCG vaccine itself is inexpensive. So why drop it?" he asks.

But there are several case-control studies now available which have demonstrated that BCG confers consistently a high level of protection against childhood forms of TB. The results of the Brazilian trials on meningeal TB are a case in point. The protective efficacy found in other studies has ranged from 52 per cent to 84 per cent. The better done the study, the higher the evidence of efficacy, points out Dr. Frieden.



Note Estimates are based on data from randomised controlled trials, case-control studies, and household-contact studies Efficacy is expressed on a logarithmic scale, with bars indicating 95 per cent confidence intervals The two case-control studies in Brazil, indicated by asterisks, were on tuberculosis meningitis

A case-control study carried out at the Kalawati Saran Children Hospital, New Delhi with 37 cases and 74 controls found the efficacy of BCG in preventing TB meningitis to be 84 per cent. A similar study at the Government Medical College, Nagpur, with 92 cases and 92 controls in the 0-12 age group, found the efficacy to be 86.54 per cent. Here the efficacy was greater in the 0-6 age group than in the 7-12 age group. A study carried out at the Institute of Child Health and Hospital for Children, Chennai, during 1990-1992 found the protective efficacy of BCG against TB meningitis in children in the 0-12 age group children to be 77 per cent. A British study factored out the meningeal and miliary TB cases from the results of randomised controlled trials and case-control trials on the effectiveness of BCG against all forms of TB. It found the efficacy against meningeal/miliary forms to be 86 per cent in randomised controlled studies and 75 per cent in case-control studies.

There is also a fringe benefit from BCG vaccination which is particularly relevant in the Indian context. The Chingleput area is also endemic to leprosy. The first phase of the TRC trials also looked at the protection that the BCG vaccine conferred against leprosy and found its efficacy to be about 30 per cent. Evidence that the BCG vaccine may provide a higher level of protection against leprosy than against TB also comes from a 1979-89 study in the African country of Malawi, which found 50 per cent protection whereas there was no significant protection against pulmonary TB.

Even though the BCG vaccine is a less than ideal vaccine for the purpose because of the unpredictable nature of its protective efficacy in TB or in preventing transmission, the fact that it is very effective against childhood forms of TB in most populations and that it provides additional protection against leprosy in endemic areas makes it a useful prophylactic tool in countries where the diseases are prevalent. Above all, it is inexpensive, safe and stable. Nothing much is lost in continuing its use in EPI. So why complain?

Setback to 'social engineering'?

Vajpayee's axing of Kalyan Singh as U.P. Chief Minister has weakened the strategy of relating Hindutva to OBC politics. This could spell big trouble for the BJP.

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

IT is a truism that Kalyan Singh did not really resign as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, although as a technicality, that is correct. He was unceremoniously sacked by Atal Behari Vajpayee – more out of personal pique than on the basis of a serious political calculation regarding the BJP's future. The axing of Kalyan Singh and the weeding out of some of his supporters from key positions in U.P. mark a new phase in the evolution of the BJP, in particular of factionalism at the topmost level of the party, and its relationship with different social classes, especially the other backward classes (OBCs), that vocal group of middle castes which continues to be assertive, particularly in the Hindi belt.

It is, of course, undeniable that Kalyan Singh campaigned against some BJP candidates in the latest elections, and worked more or less openly in some cases in favour of the Samajwadi Party through leaders such as Sakshi Maharaj. But that is not why he was removed. Other senior leaders such as Kalraj Mishra or Lalji Tandon, and even U.P. party president Rajnath Singh, have committed similar acts of subversion without incurring the wrath of the party's top bosses. Nor is it possible to attribute the BJP's poor performance in the State mainly to Kalyan Singh's sabotage. The party's base in U.P. has considerably eroded, its vote share having fallen by nearly 10 per cent – thanks to processes that are largely independent of Kalyan Singh, including restlessness among the OBCs, greater self-confidence amongst Muslims and the revival of the Congress(I).

Kalyan Singh was singled out because Vajpayee has a particular aversion to him, and believes that the Chief Minister worked clandestinely for his defeat in Lucknow. Personal pique apart, Vajpayee is allergic to Kalyan Singh's aggressive OBC politics. He has long been uncomfortable with the "social engineering" approach advocated by the likes of K.N. Govindacharya, and to an extent, L.K. Advani, which tries to co-opt OBC self-assertion into the broader Hindutva framework. Vajpayee certainly disapproves of the idea of banking on Hindutva's aggressive forays into OBC identity politics as the key to the BJP's growth.

Vajpayee went out of his way to remove Kalyan Singh altogether. He replaced him with Ram Prakash Gupta, a Bania leader less known for his political accomplishments than for his longstanding RSS connections and personal loyalty to Vajpayee. The composition of Gupta's Cabinet does not do much to reverse Kalyan Singh's marginalisation, although some of his old Ministers have been accommodated in it out of fear that the former Chief Minister might get even more rebellious if they are kept out. Gupta is reportedly planning to reverse a number of decisions made and orders issued by his predecessor, including more than 60 recent appointments – the most important among them being the nomination of Kusum Rai, considered his confidante, to the State Commission for women.

NONE of this would have merited serious attention if it were a phenomenon confined to U.P. and to "normal" factionalism which has become pervasive in what was once "the party with a difference" – disciplined, united, purposive, and dead-serious. As it happens, the U.P. drama is a "side-show" or surrogate battle being played out within the BJP's national-level leadership, especially between Vajpayee and Advani. Vajpayee has been personally, directly, involved in the events in U.P. that run from candidate selection three months ago, through Kalyan Singh's dramatic departure, to the selection of portfolios in the new Cabinet. Advani, for his part, has been equally serious in promoting, shielding and defending Kalyan Singh. What is being played out in U.P. is the Vajpayee-Advani conflict, in which Murli Manohar Joshi, a side-player, has sided with Vajpayee.

Vajpayee clearly has the upper hand in this power struggle. Earlier, he succeeded in marginalising Sushma Swaraj (and her husband Swaraj Kaushal, then engaged in secret talks with Naga rebels). Similarly, it was at Vajpayee's instance that the BJP allied with the Janata Dal in Karnataka – a decision that was not discussed at the National Executive. Vajpayee has also been playing his own game in the VHP, where Ashok Singhal (who is close to Advani) is being eclipsed by Giriraj Kishore, a Vajpayee groupie, who can hardly be called "liberal" or even a soft-Hindutva advocate. Now Vajpayee has turned his attention to India's most important State where he is relentlessly promoting factional loyalists, rejecting compromises. For instance, an agreement was struck between the Vajpayee and Advani factions just before Gupta's swearing-in that two BJP upper-caste faction leaders – Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon – would be kept out of the Cabinet. As part of the deal, Advani had agreed to communicate this decision to the two leaders, and also to be present at Gupta's oath-taking. But this was cancelled just as Advani was about to board a plane for Lucknow – at the behest of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The Mishra-Tandon duo was duly sworn in.

ALL this calls for a reassessment of Vajpayee. Those who thought that he is soft, "liberal", above factionalism, or that he works by consensus, and has no raw ambitions related to crude power politics, must think again. Vajpayee's image, largely cultivated by a fawning media, is misleading. He is deeply mired in fac-

tional politics. He is as ruthless as anyone else. He deeply resents the fact that for long years he was sidelined in the party by Advani, who served two terms as president, terms which saw the party jump from two Lok Sabha seats to 89. Vajpayee is attached to the upper caste, in particular Brahmin, faction in U.P. and probably believes that the BJP's best bet lies in a Brahmin-Dalit alliance, which totally marginalises the OBCs. He is not averse to soiling his hands in venality and patronage, nor to the politics of personality cults. The PMO under him has been involved in numerous shady deals in the past 20 months.

Vajpayee apart, Kalyan Singh's removal from a pivotal position in the BJP power structure must be seen in relation to other OBC politics-related events, in particular Shankersinh Vaghela's alienation from the party in Gujarat, and Sahib Singh Verma's Jat lobby which was involved in faction-fighting in Delhi, which too led to his removal as Chief Minister. The party top brass is giving out the signal that it is not as committed as in the past to the Mandal-Kamandal alliance – despite the expansion of the OBC reservation list, in pursuit of pure expediency.

However, Vajpayee may be overplaying his hand in U.P. – just as he did in Karnataka, where allying with the utterly discredited J.H. Patel turned out to be a disaster for the BJP. This time around, the stakes are even higher. The BJP is in deep trouble in U.P., its fortress in recent years. In the latest Lok Sabha elections, of a total of 425, the party led in less than 120 Assembly segments. Its OBC base is shrinking. Kalyan Singh is a formidable opponent. He is gutsy and muscular, has political acumen, and pushes a hard line, even if that means brazenly violating the law. The Babri Masjid demolition, it bears recalling with awe and horror, could not have happened without him manipulating the government machinery to ensure the kar seva would take place on ember 6 safe from the attention of ntral forces.



SUBIR ROY

Kalyan Singh and Vinay Katiyar at the Hanuman Garhi temple in Ayodhya on November 9.

Kalyan Singh can create real trouble for the BJP, especially if Vajpayee continues to marginalise and humiliate him, and if his OBC core-supporters are kept out of access to power. This could well precipitate fresh Assembly elections, which the BJP cannot relish. The Rajya Sabha elections from U.P. too are less than four months away. The BJP needs every seat it can find to shore up its poor presence in that House. It cannot afford to have Kalyan Singh ranged against it.

YET another factor is the neighbouring State of Bihar. State party boss Sushil Modi was dead against removing Kalyan Singh because of the likely damage to the BJP in that State, where too it has to compete with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) for OBC support.

Kalyan Singh has for the moment chosen to move Rightwards by adopting a hardcore Hindutva line, as demonstrated by his visit to Ayodhya, his drumming up of the temple issue, and his statements ridiculing the Lahore summit. But he may only be reminding Vajpayee of his own importance in the Ayodhya factor and its contribution to the BJP's political advance during the period of 1986-92. At any rate, this does not mean that he will reject for all time to come the option of joining hands, openly or secretly, with non-BJP leaders and parties, including Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav (who has approached him). Kalyan Singh may well be so tempted. In U.P., an OBC alliance with substantial Muslim support, could form a formidable, potentially winning combination. Kalyan Singh's ability to mobilise peasant castes, like his own Lodh Rajputs, should not be underestimated. It is not the Mishras and the Tandons who built the BJP in U.P. They have no mass base whatsoever. It is above all the OBCs' entry into it, engineered by Kalyan Singh, that gave it ballast.

Kalyan Singh is not just another BJP politician. He is quintessentially an OBC leader. Indeed, he represents a unique confluence of two streams, Hindutva and OBC-based politics, Mandal and Kamandal. No other leader of stature has been able to embody this or co-opt OBC politics into the Hindutva framework, or half as confidently, the way Kalyan Singh has. He represents the greatest success of the "social engineering" strategy of accommodating plebeian groups into Hindutva's hegemonic project.

If Kalyan Singh is antagonised and pushed out of the BJP, that could spell a decisive setback for, if not the end of, "social engineering". Kalyan Singh is not only the BJP's ablest non-upper caste leader with a rural base, he is potentially a candidate for India's first Prime Minister shaped by OBC politics. Losing him will cost the BJP heavily in terms of its image and in terms of votes. It could well inaugurate its reduction to a largely urban, upper caste, elitist party that cannot communicate with the poor or the middle layers of society. Such a party could, of course, have a significant presence in Indian politics, but it could hardly hope to come to power on its own. Even less can it transform India radically and fundamentally the way the Hindutva project aspires to do. Without a sizable non-upper caste base, the BJP has only a dim future.

Bofors

This has reference to the Cover Story "Know your Bofors" (November 26). The ...ly legitimate concern of the Indian gov...nment in the Bofors affair could be ... whether it got the guns at the price it was ...repared to pay. What AB Bofors did with ...e millions that accrued to it through the deal with India should not have been the government's concern at all. Moreover, payment of commissions is a long-established and widely prevalent practice.

It was the parties and politicians opposed to Rajiv Gandhi who have tried to make much of his decision to go ahead with the Bofors gun deal in spite of the then Army chief's opinion that the contract should be cancelled if the company refused to furnish the names of the middlemen. The superb performance of the Bofors gun in the Kargil War proved that Rajiv Gandhi was right.

K. Kumara Sekhar
Eluru, Andhra Pradesh

Cyclone havoc

"Killer cyclone" (November 26) gave a graphic account of the tremendous loss in terms of human lives, livestock and damage to infrastructure in Orissa. It will take years and thousands of crores of rupees to bring back normalcy to the devastated areas. The nation has responded to the disaster in a half-hearted measure, though. However, the relief materials and the money should reach the affected people. Politics should be kept out when the nation faces a tragedy of such magnitude.

The Orissa Government and the Centre should think of long-term measures to cope with cyclones.

D.B.N. Murthy
Bangalore

Kannur violence

Political violence in Kannur district has a long history ("Blood and tears in Kannur", November 26). When the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) was formed in the 1950s under the leadership of P.R. Kurup, there were clashes between the workers of the PSP and the undivided Communist Party in the Panoor area of Thalassery taluk. Later, in the 1970s, the district witnessed clashes between CPI(M) and Congress workers. During the same period, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Jan Sangh achieved some presence in the area. Although these organisations are not strong numerically, their cadres, who receive physical training, are active.

All political parties have to share the blame for the recent developments. Now each party is trying to bring the villages under its control. Some attempts are made to establish peace, but these are confined to top political leaders. Unless party leaders at lower levels are involved, the situation in the district will remain the same.

P. Sreedharan
Chittariparamba, Kerala

Auschwitz and Pokhran

I was surprised to read the concluding paragraphs of the article "Auschwitz, Pokhran and beyond" (November 19). I do not think that the Nazi killing fields, the use of the atom bomb on Japan and Pokhran-II are objects of comparison. The author does mention the difference between the first two, although he proceeds to ignore the difference later.

More disturbing is his claim that the people, the Government and the nuclear establishment in India are dehumanising the decision to go nuclear and the terrible consequences of doing so. We do happen to be surrounded by countries which do not value much the freedom of the people of India. Past events have shown that we cannot rely on the United Nations or the United States to defend our borders and our values. The author quotes Gandhi: "Will it restore to him (the poorest and the most helpless person) control over his life and destiny?" I think the nuclear test will help the poorest person pursue his dreams.

Bhaskar S. Manda
Received on e-mail

Rajaji

This has reference to the article "In the cause of peace" (November 19) by C.V. Narasimhan, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. It made interesting reading, especially the reference to former Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari and his visit to the United States to meet President John F. Kennedy. Just after Rajaji met the President, reporters asked him whether the talk was fruitful. The reply was: "Well, I can't say as it is only the beginning of a long process and at the moment I can only say the talk was flowerful and it may take quite some time to bear fruit."

It would also be of interest to recall that in 1967, at the initiative of Narasimhan, the queen of Indian music, M.S. Subbulakshmi, gave a musical performance at the United Nations. She sang a beautiful and meaningful song composed by Rajaji.

R. Daniel Jayakumar
Nellikuppam, Tamil Nadu

George Fernandes

In the article "The meaning of George Fernandes" (November 5) the author seems to be too harsh on the Defence Minister. It is not unethical for anyone to harbour ambitions. Every writer or scientist wants to win the Nobel Prize, just as every politician dreams of becoming Prime Minister. By aligning his party with the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Samata Party leader served the cause of secularism. This is evident from the fact that the BJP has adopted the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) manifesto in which there is no place for issues such as the Ram temple, abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution and a common civil code. The extent of success achieved in this direction can be gauged by the fact that the Farooq Abdulla-led National Conference is now a partner in the Vajpayee Government.

George Fernandes' views on the threat from China were right but they could have been expressed in diplomatic language. George Fernandes is a great parliamentarian and an eloquent public speaker.

George Fernandes has been a doughty opponent of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's rule. He believes that dynasties and democracy do not go together. However, history will not condone George Fernandes for shifting his loyalty to Charan Singh immediately after defending Morarji Desai's government in the Lok Sabha in 1979.

Prem Behari
Lucknow

Foreign funds

I do not normally respond to Praful Bidwai's tendentious articles. However, this time I shall, for he states that the "Hindutva campaign against 'foreign' funds would have sounded a little less biased and outrageous had the BJP, its cohorts and its government had consistent standards" ("Stifling dissent and debate", November 5). Is this not true for most, if not all, of his arguments? Additionally, since Lalita Ramdas ("Letters", November 5) and others call for a public debate as to what constitutes "political" action and

what is "social" action, let us have one.

The thrust of his "vitriolic attack" on the Government action of issuing notices under a "technical provision of some enactment like the FCRA" (laws are mere technical provisions!) is that it is an assault on democracy, the freedom of speech and so on. The action of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs)/civil society organisations (CSOs) was not "political" but "social" and in consonance with the fundamental duties prescribed under Article 51 (a) of the Constitution. Is not compliance with such a "technical provision", passed under the Constitution, part of the duties of Indian citizens? The courts should have been approached had there been any discrimination in the application of the laws of the land and/or if compliance with an enactment like the FCRA was in conflict with the provisions of the Constitution.

The article says that the funds (of CSOs/NGOs) are "earmarked for specific projects" and are "not easily divertible". It also says that these organisations are accountable to the "donors". Does it then mean that the funds for sponsoring these advertisements of *Communalism Combat* had been earmarked by their (foreign) donors? If "foreign funds" have not been used in the advertisement campaigns as claimed, it can very easily be proved since everything is accounted for. Thereafter, the only fact that would remain to be examined would be whether the campaigners were motivated by partisan concerns or social concerns.

Undoubtedly, the advertisements were one-sided. If the concerns were social, the advertisements should not have stopped at just highlighting the views of the Sangh Parivar on women. It should also have informed the general public about the views of the ulema on women (as mentioned in the book *The World of Fatwas – Shariah in Action*). And please let me know whether the instances highlighted in the book are not "factual" and if any rebuttal of this book exists. If the fight was for equality and non-discrimination, why should Muslim women be discriminated against wholly and solely in obtaining maintenance under the amended Criminal Procedure Code? Subsidising pilgrims of a particular religion with public money is surely not the way to practise secularism, especially when such facilities are not granted to other religious groups – be it Hindus or Christians, Sikhs or Jews. Here is one instance where the "fundamental right" of "non-discrimination" has been violated.

The taxman, Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, was not transferred by the BJP. Neither was the BJP in power when the funds allegedly flowed into the coffers of the Sangh Parivar. Why should the present Government be faulted for the inaction of its (secularist) predecessors?

While mentioning the 16-year financial inflows from VHP- America to India, Bidwai neglects to mention how much money the Church and Church-based organisations have received from the U.S. and other countries. In addition, one is left to guess as to just how much European Union contribution of 4 per cent to Church-based groups in India amounts to. Given the widespread "fame" (dare I say it, notoriety) achieved by the Sangh Parivar, I fail to understand why it is reasonable to assume that the E.U. will contribute, in a major way, to "non-Christian, especially Hindutva oriented, organisations". What exactly is the E.U.'s benefit? Is Bidwai also equating all non-Christian CSOs/NGOs with Hindutva-oriented organisations?

Outlook (February 22, 1999) published a list of top 25 recipients of foreign funds for the year 1996-97. Ten Christian organisations included in that list received as much as Rs.209 crores, if not more, in a single year. Assuming that the inflows to these 10 organisations have remained constant, they would have received at least Rs.3,344 crores in 16 years. Compare this figure with the figure quoted for the VHP (Rs.5,300 crores). The number of Christian organisations is many, many times more than just ten. An estimate puts the inflow of funds for the Church and Church-based organisations at Rs.2,000 crores annually. The point I wish to highlight is the quantum of inflow of funds and the power it generates (regardless of its use or abuse).

It will be appropriate to apply the same standards used against Hindutva to the deeds (and misdeeds) of certain non-Sangh Parivar groups which also arrogate to themselves the right to proscribe and prescribe as to what is permissible and impermissible under the aegis of secularism and democracy. It is also not amiss to oppose, with the same strength of heart and mind, non-Hindutva organisations that publish abusive, offensive and insulting tracts. This is important if one wishes to remain credible as well as impartial.

K.M. Vasudevan

Delhi

M.S. Swaminathan

I thank you for publishing an Update on the world-famous scientist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan's achievements and contribution to Indian agriculture ("Honour f M.S. Swaminathan", September 10). Y could have added that he merits the Nob Prize (for Peace) for his achievement a dedication to the agricultural revolutio

N. Sivasankaran

Nilakkottai, Tamil Nadu

Nobel Prize

In my article on Robert Mundel ("Between Monetarism an Keynesianism", November 26), the fol lowing sentence appears: "Marcu Fleming is on the staff of th International Monetary Fund." This sen tence was not in my original article and I protest against its addition at the editing stage, especially because Marcus Fleming died in 1976.

Prabhat Patnaik

New Delhi

The author's original reference to one of Robert Mundell's striking results also being "arrived at by J. Marcus Fleming of the IMF staff" was mistakenly and unjustifiably rewritten on the Frontline desk as stated above. The error is regretted. – Editor, Frontline.

Victory margin

The article on the election verdict in West Bengal ("Patterns and pointers" November 5) mentioned that Mamata Banerjee's victory margin of 2.14 lakh votes in South Calcutta was the highest in the State. This is wrong. Nikhilananda Sor of the CPI(M) won by a margin of over three lakh votes from the Burdwan Lok Sabha constituency. His victory margin is actually the second highest in the country, next to Sonia Gandhi's in Amethi.

Also, the Trinamul Congress has not captured Serampur as reported; it only retained the seat.

Basab Basak

Burdwan, West Bengal

Correction: In "An unfinished story" (November 26) it is mentioned that according to an estimate of the People's of India project Hindus form 76.4 per cent, Muslims 12.6 per cent, Christians 7.3 per cent, tribal religionists 8.3 per cent, Jains 2.2 per cent, Buddhists 2 per cent, Sikhs 2.8 per cent, Jews 0.2 per cent and Zoroastrians 0.19 per cent of the population. These figures, however, are percentages of the communities that the project has identified.

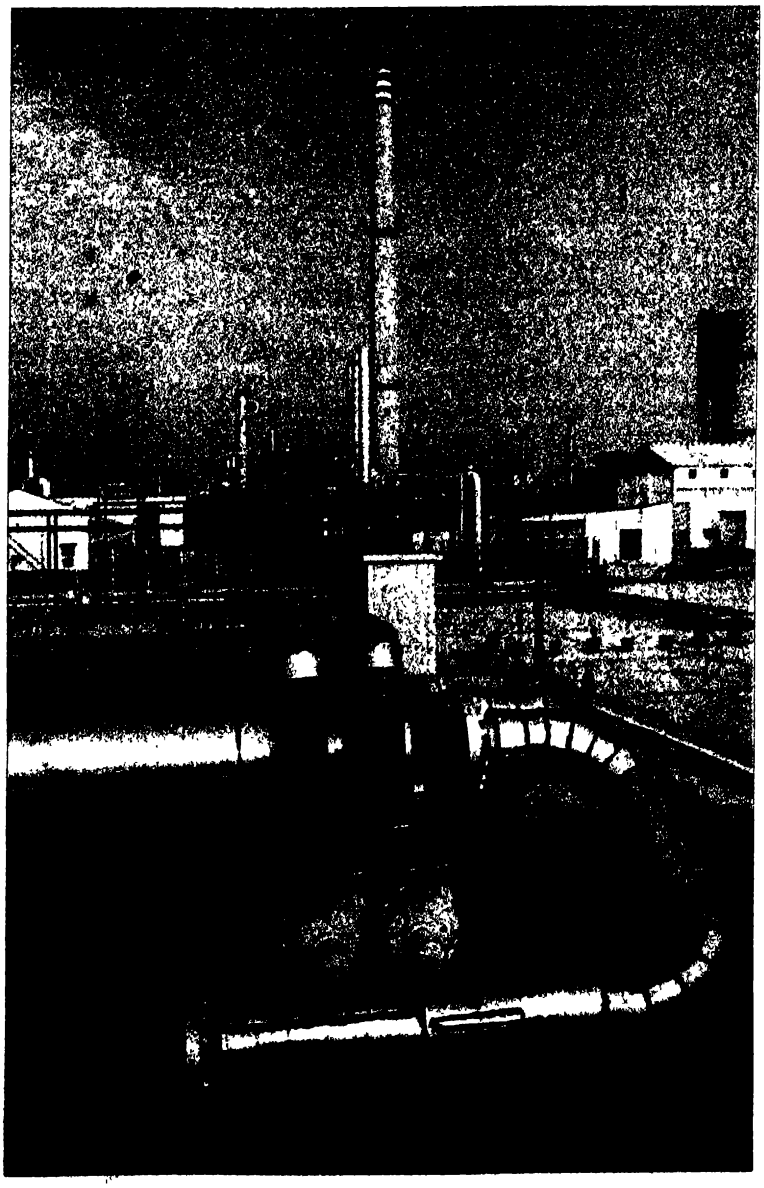
Distress disinvestment

The manner in which the Government of India has disinvested 18 per cent of its stake in Gas Authority of India Ltd has raised questions about the integrity of the disinvestment mechanism.

V SRIDHAR

SELLING the family silver is always an emotive affair. It can turn controversial if family members who have a claim to the legacy suspect distress sale. Even those who believe that disinvestment of government stake in profitable and cash-rich public sector companies is a right step have faulted the Government for the manner in which disinvestment was done in the case of Gas Authority of India Ltd(GAIL). They have alleged that the Government, in a desperate move to bridge the fiscal deficit, sold 18 per cent of its equity in GAIL at a throwaway price of Rs.70 per share. But there is a more serious allegation, that GAIL's potential competitors – Enron Corporation, whose Indian operations have been dogged by controversy since the mid-1990s, and British Gas – have bought their way into the company "for a song". While Enron has acquired 5 per cent of the company, British Gas has acquired a stake of 1.3 per cent.

On November 4, the Government issued 22.5 million global depository receipts (GDRs) of GAIL to foreign investors at a price of $ 67 (Rs.420) each. Each GDR entitled investors to six GAIL shares. This resulted in the disinvestment of 135 million shares. The Government also retained GDR subscriptions for 20 million shares. The 155 million shares disinvested by the Government constitute 18 per cent of its stake in GAIL. The pricing of the GDR at Rs.70 per share meant a discount of about 11 per cent on the closing price of the GAIL share in the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) on the day of issue. The Government raised Rs.1,085 crores through the disinvestment and the discount implied a loss of about Rs.140 crores. The disinvestment, coordinated by Morgan Stanley and Jardine Fleming, resulted in the Government holding in GAIL declining from about 83 per cent to about 65 per cent. The issue followed the book-building process, a method by which investors are allowed to bid within a price band. Market sources explain that this process is used mainly to deter speculative investors and that it is adopted in issue-pricing when it is difficult to determine the intrinsic worth of the shares being offloaded.



V V KRISHNAN

At a GAIL facility.

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram fired the first salvo on November 8 when he drew attention to the fact that the United Front Government had rejected a price of Rs.115 per share in mid-1997. He said the Government had been advised to expect a price in the region of Rs.150-170 per share. The pricing of the share at Rs.70 was "scandalous", he said and pointed out that apart from Enron and British Gas, foreign institutional investors (FII) had picked up "significant quantities of the offer". He said the Government's handling of the GAIL issue made the entire disinvestment process "open to ridicule". "Doubts will be raised about the integrity of the disinvestment mechanism," he said.

The criticism grew stronger when, a couple

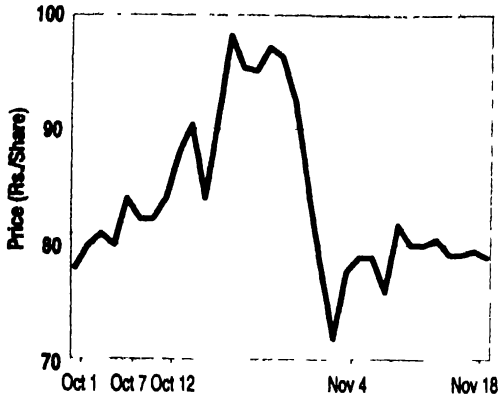
of days later, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) abandoned its GDR issue, citing the low price of acceptance in the international market (see separate story). There were questions as to why the Government could not have rejected the low offer for the GAIL share. The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) called for a "high-level probe into the scam" and asked the Government "to stop dismantling the valuable public sector assets in such a surreptitious manner for private gains." S. Dev Roye, secretary, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), told *Frontline* that the Government's action in the GAIL affair was "unpardonable".

The All India Congress(I) Committee's (AICC) economic affairs secretary, Jairam Ramesh, who was connected with the decision-making process during Chidambaram's tenure as Finance Minister, alleged that multinational companies had made a back-door entry into the Navaratna company which enjoyed a market share of 95 per cent in the natural gas business in India. He told *Frontline* that a "strategic sale to Enron would have got the Government at least three times more." He also pointed out that it was the first time corporate entities had picked up a stake in a public sector company. He observed that during the disinvestment in the Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), corporates had been kept out as a matter of principle.

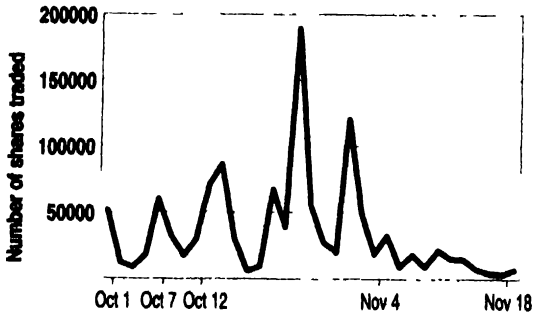
Jairam Ramesh said that British Gas acquired a stake in Gujarat Gas in 1997 from the Mafatlal group at a price of Rs.270 per share. He reasoned that if the shares of Gujarat Gas, a much smaller private sector undertaking in terms of its capacity, could get this price, the GAIL shares deserved much more. Jairam Ramesh and several other people have also pointed out that a "negotiated price", a strategic sale in other words, to those who had an interest in acquiring a stake as a long-term investment in GAIL, would have been a better option.

There are allegations that the Government has allowed Enron and British Gas, which acted as casual investors, to acquire a strategic stake in a company operating in their line of business. Both Enron and British Gas have ambitious plans for the Indian market. There are fears that their entry into GAIL will enable them to leverage their way into its projects, reducing the scope for competition. Seen from this perspective, their acquisition of a stake in GAIL makes sound business sense (see box).

GAIL: Share price movement in the BSE



Volume of trading in GAIL shares in the BSE



In defence of its action, the Government said that there was nothing in the guidelines that prevented corporates from acquiring a stake in public sector companies. Although Finance Ministry sources said that the top management of GAIL had approved the entry of entities such as Enron and British Gas into the company, a senior GAIL official told *Frontline* that the company was not involved in the decision-making process. Officially, the company has maintained that the Government as the owner of the company has the final say in matters relating to ownership.

Sources in the market say that the Government had tied its own hands by signalling to the market that it was desperate to raise revenues from the sale of its equity in public sector companies in order to reduce the fiscal deficit. The time frame for this was also limited because the Government had a target of raising Rs.10,000 crores before the end of the financial year in March 2000. In fact, in his first major interview after assuming office following the recent elections, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said that he planned "unconventional and innovative approaches" to achieve this. He also said that "a couple of big ticket items" were being considered.

Getting the price right is always difficult. This is particularly so if the market is imperfect or if it lacks depth. These conditions enable the players to manipulate markets. Some facts about the shareholding pattern in GAIL need reiteration here. Of the 17 per cent of the equity that was outside the hands of the Government before the GDR issue, about 10 per cent was with Indian Oil Corporation and the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation. These shares, recently divested by the Government through a swap, were presumably a strategic investment, not meant for trading in the stock markets. Apart from this, the Government diluted its stake in three phases – totalling a little less than 7 per cent.

The first divestment, of 3.37 per cent of the government stake, was made in 1995. In 1997 the Government issued a small number of shares to GAIL employees. Later, in early 1999, the Government released 3.62 per cent of its stake in the company. Thus, only a small proportion of the 7 per cent of GAIL's shares were in active circulation in the Indian bourses. More importantly, this low volume of floating stock in the market determined the price of the November 4 issue amounting to 18 per cent of the equity of the company. In other words, in market parlance, there was little room for a sound price formation for the share in the market.

There are allegations that the Government has allowed Enron and British Gas, which acted as casual investors, to acquire a strategic stake in a company operating in their line of business.

It is common knowledge in the bourses that FIIs have a motive

Behind the growing interest

V. SRIDHAR

FORMED in 1984, Gas Authority of India Ltd. (GAIL) is a young company, and its assets are new. Its 4,300-kilometre-long cross-country pipeline network includes the 2,300-km-long Hazira-Bijaipur-Jagdishpur (HBJ) pipeline, which has recently been upgraded at a cost of Rs.2,000 crores.

Although the pipelines have been the primary assets of the company, GAIL has developed other linkages also in the last few years. One of the biggest producers of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), the company owns five LPG processing plants with a total annual capacity of 750,000 tonnes. Two more LPG and propane plants, which will almost double the total capacity, are being established. GAIL is also constructing a 1,264-km-long LPG pipeline from Jamnagar in western India to Delhi to distribute LPG to companies that market it.

In March 1999, GAIL commissioned its first petrochemical plant in Uttar Pradesh. Built at a cost of Rs.2,500 crores, the plant is the first petrochemical complex outside western India. GAIL has also bid for a power project near Delhi in association with BSES, the private power utility. It plans to bid independently for medium and large gas-based power projects in the future.

The demand for natural gas is projected to increase sharply in the next decade. According to a British Gas projection, the demand in India will increase from 65 million metric standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) to 300 mmscmd in the next 10 years. A large part of this is likely to be imported. In order to take advantage of this situation, GAIL has joined as a partner in Petronet LNG, which will establish liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals for the import of gas. The Indian oil majors also have a stake in the joint venture.

With these arrangements in place, GAIL has a strong capability to expand as a major player in the gas retailing business. It has bid for gas fields so that it can extend its reach and ensure its own sources of supply. GAIL's earnings were nearly Rs.7,000 crores in 1998-99, and it made a net profit of Rs.1,060 crores.

Since the liberalisation process started in 1991, Enron and British Gas have been active in the Indian market. The two companies' operations in India are part of a process of consolidation by which the global energy conglomerates are vertically integrating their operations.

Although Enron in India is better known for its 2,450 mega watt power project at Dabhol, it is also active in the oil and gas sectors. It has 20-year contracts with two West Asian oil companies for the supply of 2.1 million tonnes of LNG, and the supplies will start by the end of 2001. Enron's LNG terminal at Dabhol is an important part of its Indian operations in the import and supply of gas to industrial and commercial users. The downward linkages for these plans are being provided by the oil and gas fields in the Mukta-Panna and Tapti oilfields, which are owned by the wholly owned exploration and production company, Enron Oil and Gas (EOG). The reserves from these fields are estimated to be over one trillion cubic feet of oil equivalent.

British Gas has a controlling stake in Gujarat Gas Company, the biggest private gas distribution company in India. It has a joint venture with GAIL, Mahanagar Gas Ltd., which is constructing a gas distribution system in Mumbai for commercial, industrial and domestic users. It is also developing a project for the import and regasification of LNG at Pipavav in Gujarat. It is also likely to supply gas to the power projects of the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) at Kawas and Gandhar.

Both British Gas and Enron have extensive plans for gas exploration, imports and processing in India. However, they do not have a distribution network. A pipeline network, like the one that GAIL has, would be difficult and expensive to replicate. Extension of these pipelines to meet additional demand would be a low-cost affair for GAIL; in comparison, fresh investments by new players would be an expensive proposition.

Moreover, with its assets being new, GAIL offers tremendous advantages because maintenance costs are low. Being a new company the technology used by GAIL is also of recent vintage; for instance, its IT strengths are reputed to be of a very high quality. Moreover, its manpower productivity is also reckoned to be very good; GAIL's rapid expansion, for instance, has endowed it with quality project management capabilities in-house. The recent acquisition of interests in GAIL by British Gas and Enron thus makes very good business sense. That the price was low was an additional bonus for the two energy giants. ■

driving down the domestic price of a share on the eve of a GDR issue. A Mumbai-based merchant banker told *Frontline* that FIIs sold in the domestic market, retaining their option to buy in the overseas market because they knew that the price of the GDR issue was related to the price in the domestic market. In fact, soon after the first trends in the election results came in on October 7, the volume of trading in GAIL shares in the BSE increased sharply (see chart). Between October 7 and November 3, on an average 50,000 shares were traded each day. After the GDR issue — up to November 18 – the average daily volume of trading fell to one-fourth this level. During the phase of intense trading in the GAIL scrip, the price reached as high as Rs. 98 per share, on October 20. That the price was hammered down before the GDR issue is thus a strong possibility. If an investor sold 100 shares on October 20 at Rs.98 per share and subsequently bought the same number of shares via the GDR issue at Rs.70 per share, he would have made a net profit of Rs.2,800 out of the transactions.

Although Chidambaram and others have suggested that domestic investors deserved a chance to acquire the GAIL shares at a cheaper rate, there are others who see little merit in this argument. Selling government equity at a cheap price is indefensible under any condition, even if the buyers are Indian entities. In fact, merchant banking sources said that the Government's decision to disinvest 3.62 per cent of its stake in early 1999 was just as bad as its recent GDR issue.

In early June 1997, the GAIL scrip was

quoted at Rs.183 but a year later, in June 1998, it dropped below Rs.100. The price dropped below Rs.60 around the time the Government decided to make a domestic offer, in February 1999. It is significant that Finance Ministry sources have now justified the recent GDR issue by pointing out that this has been at a higher price than the sale in February 1999. Two things are missed in this explanation. First, the fact that the market, when it has tasted blood at a lower price, is likely to hammer the price again to a level close to that. Second, and more important, this is especially so if the market knows that the Government is desperate to push ahead with the issue regardless of the price.

An analyst in a reputed consultancy told *Frontline* that based on key parameters such as the book value of the GAIL share, the cash flow position of the company and the price-earnings ratio, which were important factors in the valuation of a company's worth, the GAIL share should have been sold for "several times" the Rs.70 that the Government earned per share. A merchant banker told *Frontline* that the recent issue price was likely to provide a benchmark for subsequent divestments in the company. He said that Enron was likely to play the "waiting game because it knows that one day or the other, there will be further divestment". In fact, Enron, by virtue of its 5 per cent stake in the company, is among the biggest non-Government shareholders in the company. Informed sources say that it can have a "nuisance value" in the company if and when it manages to get a nominee on the board because of its new-found status in the company. However, Yashwant Sinha has clarified that Enron will not be allowed to be on the board.

Although the option of a strategic sale has been recommended by some critics of the GAIL disinvestment, sources in the market say that this method of disinvestment can pose other problems. In a strategic sale the Government has the option of offering a stake to companies which may wish to take a controlling stake in the company. But the range of choices may be narrow in that case. Moreover, the bidders may form cartels to gain entry into the company at a low cost. While it may be true that in an underdeveloped market a strategic sale may be a better option in terms of price realisation, other adverse effects such as the formation of private monopolies may follow. ■

■ PSUs

Issues on hold

MTNL defers its GDR issue and its domestic public offer owing to adverse market conditions. What are the factors at play?

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

THE Government was all set go ahead with the global depository receipts (GDR) issue of Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) in early November, the depressed market conditions notwithstanding. However, on November 10, hours before the roadshow was to begin, it was decided to put off the offer of 19 million GDRs. Surprisingly, the advice to do this came not from within the Government, which should have been watchful of the market sentiment while selling the family silver, but from the merchant bankers Goldman Sachs, HSBC Investment Banking and Merrill Lynch, the global coordinators to the issue.

MTNL promptly set up a task force comprising its functional directors and representatives of the Department of Telecommunications, the Ministry of Finance and the Bureau of Public Enterprises to evaluate the advice. The conclusion was that it would be prudent to defer the issue and this was communicated to the core group of senior Secretaries. The issue has been put off until the market picks up; that is, possibly until the end of the current fiscal year.

S. Sundaresan, MTNL's Director of Finance, told *Frontline* that even the domestic issue, which was to have offered around 2.25 per cent of the paid-up capital as employee stock option (ESOP), had been deferred. The company's proposal to offer a maximum of 200 shares to each employee in the C and D categories who had opted for permanent absorption, had been approved by the Union Cabinet and an offer price of Rs.146 had been fixed. Even the public offering of about 1 per cent of the paid-up capital, which was also to be at a slight discount on the market price, had also been deferred, he said. The GDR, the ESOP and the public offer would have brought down government stake in MTNL to 51 per cent: currently, it is around 56.25 per cent. During the past six months MTNL shares had hit a high of Rs.230 and a low of Rs.154. The company's previous GDR issue, of 199[illegible] is quoted at a discount.

WHAT are the reasons for the luke warm investor interest in the scrip? S. Rajagopalan, MTNL's Chairman and Managing Director, told *Frontline* that the company's troubles with the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had an impact on its rating in the international investor community (*Frontline*, November 5, 1999). "They don't go into the nitty gritty of whose case is right. As far as investors are concerned, MTNL was not able to deliver on its promises. The last time we accessed the global market we had promised that we would have our GSM (groupe speciale mobile) service operational by now. We have not kept that promise. Now, whether it is because of laxity on our part or because of obstacles placed by the policy/regulatory regimes is something that the investor is not interested in. It has impacted on our credibility. Similarly, the revenues in the last quarter dipped by 13 per cent. We can explain that it is because of the new tariffs recommended by the regulator, but international investors do not accept such explanations," Rajagopalan said.

According to Sundaresan, tariff rebalancing has cost MTNL Rs.100 crores. A part of this, however, could be recouped when the company claimed a tax holiday with retrospective effect from 1997-98, he said.

The Government has approved a proposal to amend MTNL's articles of association. An extraordinary general body meeting of the company held on November 19 approved a proposal to delegate the following powers to the board, which is now broadbased, with the induction of three persons from outside as directors: 1. To incur capital expenditure on the purchase of new items or for replacement without any monetary ceiling; 2. To enter into technological joint ventures or strategic alliances; 3. To effect organisational restructuring, including the establishment of profit centres, the opening of offices in India and abroad, the creation of new activity, and so on; 4. To create and wind up all posts including and

A curious buyout

SUDHA MAHALINGAM

THE National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), with reserves of Rs.12,000 crores, is to buy out its poor cousin, the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC), for a whopping Rs.4,500 crores. The Government hopes that the decision will not raise the hackles of trade unions since both are public sector units. On the face of it, too, the move seems non-controversial, since the Government will continue to retain control over the NHPC through the NTPC and will get a bonus of Rs.4,500 crores in the bargain.

However, the arrangement is a problematic one. The NTPC is a profit-making enterprise and has the largest installed capacity in thermal power generation. Its track record of adding capacity is good and contrasts sharply with the failure of the private sector to come up with the expected level of investments in the power sector. The move to make the NTPC buy out the NHPC will cause the diversion of precious resources from new capacity creation to the acquisition of existing hydel capacity.

It would not be unreasonable to assume that the main objective of privatising the power sector was to attract investments to bridge the demand-supply gap – investments which the Government could not mobilise by itself. The NTPC has been able to mobilise resources and has core competence in the power generation business. Instead of allowing it to do what it knows best to help narrow the demand-supply gap, the Government is now directing it to fritter away its resources by acquiring another PSU, one that is on the verge of a debt-trap.

The NTPC would have been able to add capacity to the tune of 1,000 megawatts at current rates with the Rs.4,500 crores it is to pay to buy out the NHPC. Had it leveraged this capital to raise further resources, it could have raised four times the amount. This would have enabled it to set up 5,000 megawatts of additional capacity. Instead, it has to use its strength to raise resources for the NHPC.

Union Power Minister P. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, who was asked about this issue during the Economic Editors' Conference, failed to come up with a convincing defence. All that he could say was that the acquisition would unleash the synergies that the NTPC would require to get into hydel generation.

The Power Minister did not dispute that the funds will go into the government's kitty. He appeared to be quite satisfied with Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's promise that some of it will come the Power Ministry's way. It is surprising that the Minister should be so sanguine even after what the Government did to the oil pool account and the road cess fund. ■

to those of non-board-level directors (the ard will be given powers to make appoint-nts up to this level, including the power effect internal transfers and redesignation posts); 5. To structure and implement nemes relating to personnel and human ource management, training, voluntary compulsory retirement, and so on; 6. To se funds from domestic capital markets d to borrow from international markets, bject to the approval of the Reserve Bank India/Department of Economic Affairs, be obtained through the administrative nistry; and 7. To establish financial joint ntures and wholly owned subsidiaries in dia or abroad with the stipulation that the aity investment of the public sector enter-se (PSE) should be not more than Rs.200 res in any one project, or 5 per cent of net worth of the PSE in any one pro-t, or 15 per cent of the net worth of the E in all joint ventures/subsidiaries put together.

The amendment is in tune with what the Government had proposed for all Navaratna public sector undertakings (PSUs). "It will give us the necessary autonomy to take commercial decisions to improve share-holder value," Rajagopalan said. He believes that the step will lead to a positive reaction in the market and push up MTNL share prices. Even so, he would like to look for a major catalyst that would push the price of the MTNL scrip high enough for a chunky divestment, whether it is in the domestic market or through the GDR route. That catalyst could come in the form of the coveted Chennai circle, for which some preliminary negotiations are on. It could cost up to Rs.1,000 crores, but for a company that is sitting on reserves of over Rs.5,000 crores, it is not awesome.

The amendment to the articles of association would also enable MTNL to place privately its equity with select investors. During the earlier GDR issue, British Telecom, France Telecom and Italian telecom companies had offered to take sizable stakes in the company. But, in lieu, they wanted their representatives on the MTNL board, a proposal that was not acceptable to the company.

The other option is to offload a sizable chunk of shares in the domestic market, at the risk of their all being mopped up by any one interested investor. A third proposal – to buy back MTNL's own shares and extinguish them – is also under consideration. The company has a paid-up capital of Rs.630 crores and Rajagopalan believes that downsizing the equity base will enhance value for the remaining shareholders.

THE company, with reserves and surpluses of Rs.5,619 crores, is chalking out plans to deploy its reserves gainfully. "We have a geographic limitation that prevents us from expanding horizontally. So we have to think of vertical integration," Rajagopalan said. Acquisition of companies that manufacture fibre optic cables and telephone instruments is also on the cards. MTNL is holding talks with companies manufacturing fibre optic cables. It may also buy out smaller telecom ventures, offering both basic and cellular services. There is also a proposal to take up basic telephone services in the satellite townships of Delhi. The company proposes to replace its 16 lakh cable lines with fibre optic cables.

Also on the anvil is a 100 per cent subsidiary, Millennium Telecom, which will take over Internet and other value added services. Its paid-up capital is likely to be around Rs.50 crores. MTNL plans to seek a strategic partner for the subsidiary once it is launched. Singapore Telecom has evinced interest in the venture and might participate in the equity as well, in which case MTNL's reserves will swell further.

Meanwhile, DoT has joined issue with TRAI on the Calling Party Pays (CPP) regime with a separate petition in the Delhi High Court: DoT has challenged TRAI's authority to issue directives asking that fixed-line subscribers be charged more for calls to mobile lines under the Telecommunications Inter-connection (charges and revenue sharing) first amendment. MTNL has also filed an intervention petition challenging TRAI's order on CPP, which, it claims, was issued even as the matter was being heard by the court. A Division Bench comprising Justice S.N. Variava and Justice S.K. Mahajan will hear the three petitions, of MTNL, DoT and TRAI, on November 30. ■

A politician and a painter

An exhibition in Delhi reveals another facet of former Prime Minister V. P. Singh.

SUNEET CHOPRA

THE exhibition of the drawings paintings and graphics of former Prime Minister V P Singh at the Arpana Gallery of the Academy of Literature and Fine Art in Delhi to be followed by another in Mumbai s Jehangir Art Gallery is an important event Its importance does not lie in the fact that a former Prime Minister paints or writes poetry There are many examples of it in recent history British Prime Minister Winston Churchill used to paint Chairman Mao of China wrote poetry Thailand s King Bhumibol is a composer

What is important however is the fact that V P Singh s paintings reflect the importance of a politician being cultured at a time when specialisation has reached a level where a human being is reduced to a mere instrument of the overpowering might of bankers Their might is expressed in the globalisation of capital flows without any parallel let up on the immigration of people in direct contrast to this Money is free whereas people are constrained And slaves are not creative except in their struggle for liberation Creativity reflects the degree of freedom a people exercise in making choices about things concerning their lives And this is very important at least in the subcontinent today

It is in a challenge to this constraint of a totalitarian and monopolistic capitalism wanting everyone to fit neatly into a specialised slot that we can see the importance of V P Singh s works They reawaken the Renaissance concept of a person accomplished in various fields And this reawakening necessarily involves changes in an artist s attitude to the life around him as well

These changes show up in V P Singhs works too Whereas in the beginning his tendency was to appropriate a moment in time an object or an animal and render it in a drawing a graphic or a painting in keeping with the colonial artistic tradition his later works show just the reverse His art is no longer acquisitive It is an expression that goes out to the world today and in the future reflecting not only the growing stature of artists in India and the recognition of the fact by a former Prime Minister

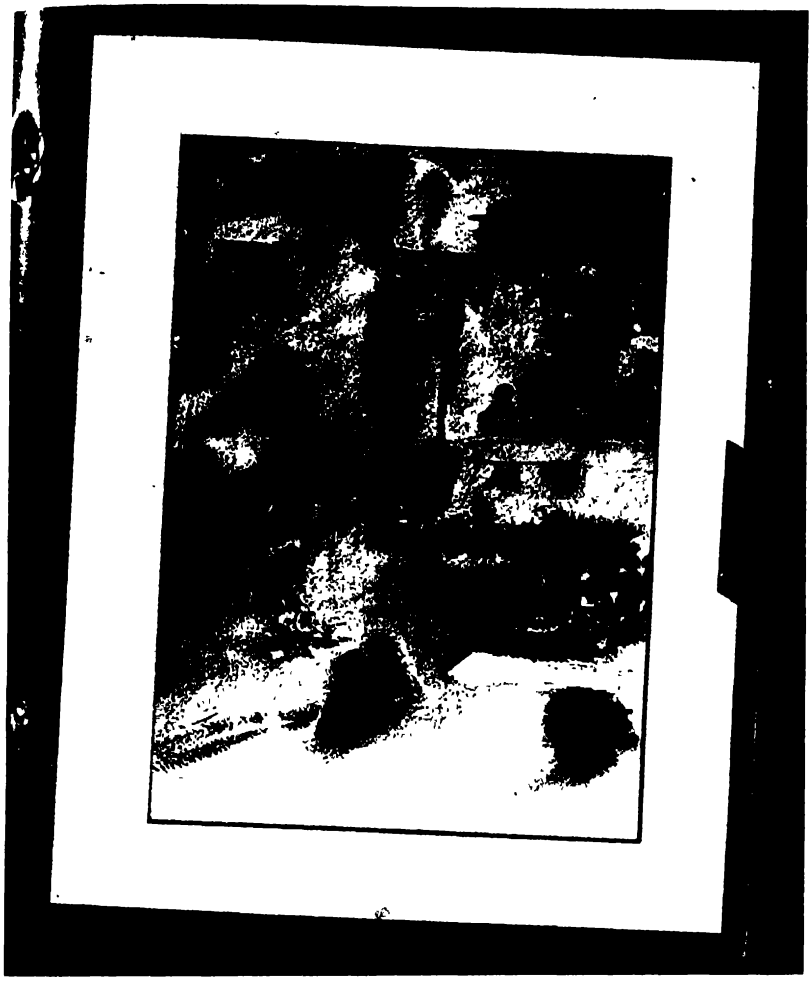


Animal Head, water-colour on paper.

This is borne out by the influence of a number of our artists in his work There is the crow of Anjolie Ela Menon the abstract landscapes of Bimal Das Gupta the flowing line of Bendre and the superimposed planes of water colour of Subroto Kundu and Paresh Maity He has known many of these artists and has learnt techniques from some of them but his expression is his own

This comes out most strongly in his imagery It is the expression of his experience and cannot be influenced so directly There is his image of a small man casting two large shadows on a wall The image communicates how no matter how grand and varied the accomplishments of any human being the reality is only as large as the body is This essential concern with the material comes out in other images too for in art all spirituality hangs from a material peg an object Objects both amounts of pigment or images, then express the artist s reality, just as handcarts lined up like cannons in one of V P Singh s more powerful works open up our eyes to both the organised character as well as the militancy of the working class

In one of his graphics a screen-print of ants coming together, we can see the collective power of small things in a big world, a theme that keeps recurring in his work But the vision that overpowers his expression is the coming



Street Scene, water-colour on paper.

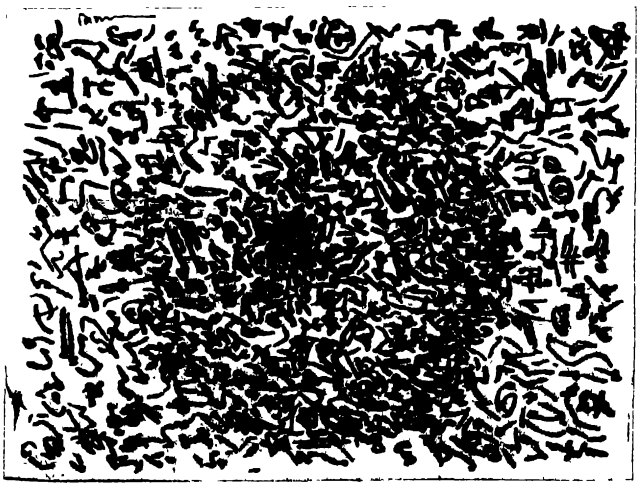
together of opposites in a single space, the very essence of motion not only in the dialectical process in thought, but also in life. When an artist is able to express this naturally and unself-consciously, he can be said to have come into his own.

In this process too, however, the artist exercises a conscious choice. He may work either to highlight or harmonise opposites. And the artist does both at will. The best exercise at harmonising opposites is in his water-colour of an animal head, where the opposing sockets of the eyes and nostrils are held together by the form of the skull. The confrontational element is evident in his canvas of two shadows arguing against a wall.

The artist may do so spontaneously on the basis of aesthetic demands or on the spur of the moment. But once such works enter the world as finished products, they cannot just be treated as "pretty things". They have a close relation not only to productive processes, but also to society and the artist's perception of trends within it. An artist may not be fully aware of this. He or she may definitely "think" only with his or her hands. But even that thought is conditioned by individual experience of both society and the political attitudes in it.

In our age, anti-colonial, pro-poor and iconoclastic trends predominate. V.P. Singh reflects all of these. The handcarts arrayed like cannons; the street-corner worker being splashed by a passing taxi; the sacrificial goat; and the ill-omened crow, are all part of his repertoire. A particularly striking image is the "divided self", a small figure by a wall casting two large shadows or a dancer with one hand and one wing. It speaks volumes about the contradictory processes unleashed by man, whose creator and victim he is at the same

THE connection between V. P. Singh's politics and art may not be a direct translation from one to the other; but it definitely is transcreation. One can see in this exhibition a complex being, looking askance at the sharp dualism of wealth and poverty, backwardness and modernity, beauty and ugliness and trying to come to terms with it. We can see in the artist the man who some 30 years ago built a school in Koraon, carrying mud and bricks on his head or built a road to his family seat of Manda, doing voluntary labour alongside the local peasantry.The artist in him tries to draw as many strands together as he can. But then the politician in him takes a stand as in a drawing of hand-carts arrayed like cannons on a battle-field. Indeed his best work is that which is not just something to see but also gives one something to think about. ■



Untitled, Ink on paper.



Shadows, oil on canvas.

Prison riot in Chennai

The riot in the Central Prison in Chennai on November 17, which led to nine deaths, point to the need for jail reforms.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN
in Chennai



IN the worst case of violence in the Central Prison in Chennai, nine prisoners and a jail official died on November 17. While the prisoners were killed in police firing, the official, Deputy Jailer S. Jayakumar, was burnt by prisoners.

Trouble erupted when rumours spread among the prisoners that "boxer" Vadivelu, who was in detention under the Goondas Act, had been beaten to death in the early hours of that day. (Jail officials maintained that he died of diarrhoea.) For about four hours in the forenoon, the prison compound turned into a battlefield. Hundreds of prisoners climbed on to the roofs of their blocks and atop trees and threw bricks, stones, tiles, knives, crowbars and so on at the jail staff and the police. Some of them twisted the aluminium plates supplied to them to have their food, into sharp instruments and attacked the staff. They ransacked the kitchen and threw out bags of rice and flour. Prisoners also hurled bricks on passengers at the adjacent Park suburban railway station

The police, who were outnumbered in the beginning, used teargas and rubber bullets and then resorted to firing. Police commandos and the Swift Action Force of the Tamil Nadu police opened fire after taking position on the staircase of the Park station, on a bridge and at other vantage points.

As arson went on inside the prison, flames leapt up from various points. The prisoners stabbed Jayakumar, set fire to the Remission Records Office and pushed Jayakumar in. He perished in the fire which destroyed records pertaining to thousands of prisoners. Thirty-seven year old Jayakumar is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

The intensity of the "war" was evident from the endless sorties made by ambulances and other vehicles carrying injured prisoners, jail staff and police personnel. Hundreds of screaming relatives of prisoners gathered on the bridge leading to the prison gates. At the nearby Government General Hospital, the police lathicharged a crowd of agitated relatives.

Three days after the incident, about a hundred persons had queued up before the prison around 9-30 a.m. seeking to see their relatives inside. Many of them had come from places outside Chennai. They had visited the General Hospital and two other major government hospitals in the city, at Royapettah and Kilpauk, looking for their relatives. Many injured prisoners were treated in the prison hospital itself.

Asokan, who came from Madurai, about 500 km from Chennai, to see his elder brother Kannan, said: "My brother has a bullet lodged in his neck. My mother has gone inside to see him. He was not taken to the General Hospital but treated in the prison itself. That means he is not in a bad condition, is he?"

THE Government was taken aback by the violence. Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi described the riots as unfortunate. Announcing an inquiry by a Judge of the Madras High Court, he said in the State Assembly on November 18 that the family of Jayakumar would be paid compensation and cash relief totalling Rs.8 lakhs. The families of the nine prisoners killed (one died in hospital later) would receive Rs.1.5 lakhs each. Karunanidhi said the Justice Ismail Commission (which inquired into the escape of a convict from the same prison nine years ago) had already made suggestions to improve jail administration. The new judicial commission would also be requested to make suggestions, he said. He denied that any prisoner had escaped from the jail during the trouble. There were 2,177 inmates; nine had died and 95 were receiving treatment (in hospitals outside), he said.

Earlier, Leader of the Opposition S. Balakrishnan of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) said the Government should accept full responsibility for the incidents. He demanded the resignation of Law Minister Aladi Aruna. Members of the Communist Party of India (CPI), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) sought a judicial inquiry. K. Subbarayan (CPI) said the riots could not be attributed to the death of Vadivelu alone. They had erupted because of bad jail administration, he alleged.

(Vadivelu, who belonged to the Kasimedu-Royapuram area in Chennai, led gangs that allegedly looted ships in anchor in the harbour. He gradually became a "dada" of the area: he mediated in disputes among local fishermen, traders and residents, controlled liquor trade, and owned fishing boats.)

Subbarayan said that since such riots had taken place earlier in the Central Prisons in Chennai and Madurai, the judicial inquiry should look into what fuelled them. Since there were rumours that Jayakumar had been burnt alive at the instigation of "some persons" inside the prison, the commission should go into the facts behind his death, he said.

Aladi Aruna, who gave an account of the sequence of events, said Vadivelu was jailed on January 25, 1999 following an incident involving fishermen. He was involved in two cases of murder. There were 30 cases of robbery and smuggling against him. He was the first accused in a case relating to the murder of two persons in the office of the Tamil magazine *Tharasu* in Chennai in 1991.

According to the Minister, Vadivelu had diarrhoea on November 16 and was treated in the prison hospital. He had diarrhoea again that night. Early next morning (November 17) he was taken to the General Hospital in the morning, where the doctor said that he was dead on arrival.

According to Aladi Aruna, in the morning Vadivelu's accomplices from



R RAGU

S R RAGHUNATHAN

oners from a bridge at the to the Central Prison; splay a banner which of the injured prisoners al, Chennai.



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When the Superintendent realised that it was not possible to save Jayakumar and that the prisoners might escape by smashing the main gates, he opened fire with his revolver When the situation went out of control, the police were called in In the police firing and in the rioting, nine prisoners were killed and 95 injured Thirty-five jail officials, includ ig the Superintendent, and 45 policemen were also injured, the Minister said

Informed sources said that following ie Chennai incidents, the situation in the entral Prisons in Coimbatore and Madurai was explosive Major riots had roken out in the Chennai prison in bruary 1995 The following month, ots rocked the Madurai prison Prisoners went on a fast from March 18 to 21 There were minor riots by Al-Umma prisoners in the Coimbatore prison

JUSTICE M M Ismail, former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, was asked to go into the escape of "auto" Sankar and his accomplices from the Chennai Central Prison in August 1990 In his report submitted in April 1992, he had made suggestions on improving prison administration Justice Ismail pointed out that although the prison building was in a bad shape, the Public Works Department was not prepared to spend money on repairing it According to him, the prison should be modified, taking into account the prisoners welfare, and run with a proper security system He suggested that educated persons be appointed prison staff and that they be trained for a year in treating the prisoners properly He also recommended that the number of prison staff be increased

In the report, Justice Ismail referred to his inquiry into the Emergency excesses in the Central Prison, Chennai, from February 1976 to February 1977 and said one-third of his report on the Emergency excesses dealt with reforms in prison administration

Justice Ismail had predicted that anything might happen inside the prison a prisoner might even be murdered by those charged with the responsibility of reforming him The standard of administration of criminal jurisprudence was the final arbiter of a society's culture and dignity, he added

The main recommendation was that Chennai prison, which is located in the heart of the city, be moved There was constant movement of people around the prison, he pointed It was not the proper place to keep undertrials, Justice Ismail said The prison is surrounded by the busy Central railway station, the Park station, the General Hospital and the Stanley road bridge Informed sources said the prison could be relocated on a vast tract of land away from the city They could be trained in handicrafts, agriculture, carpentry and so forth there This would have a calming effect on them The trades they learnt in prison would help them earn a living after their release The sources added "To the best of our knowledge, nothing has been done" on the recommendations of Justice Ismail ■

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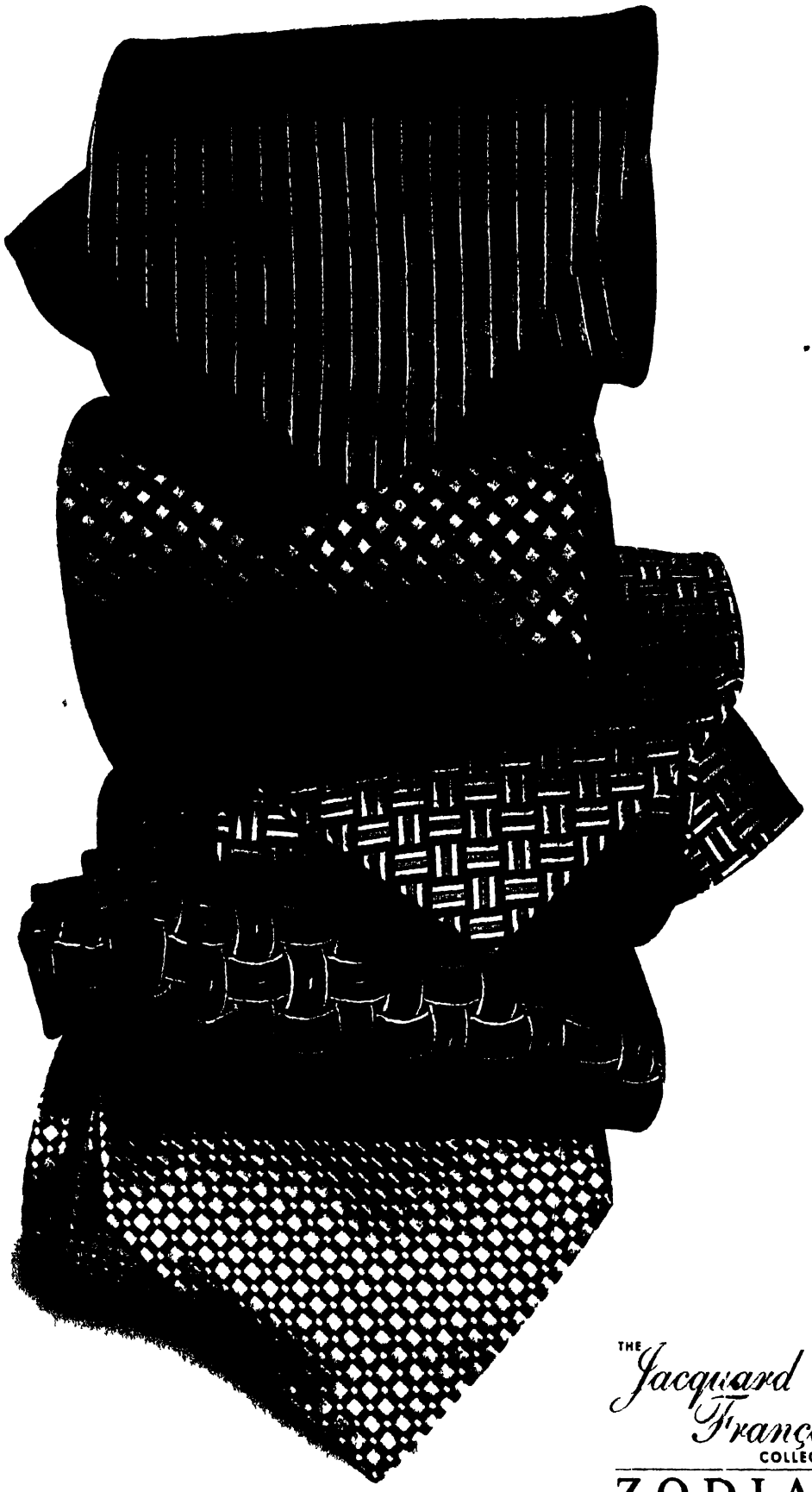
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Frontline



The Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle once again revealed that in the world of trade it is power and politics and not altruism that determines the rules of the game 4



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Correction In A contentious report on Page 41 of this issue the second sentence in Paragraph 5 should read The clashes between sections of Dalits and of people belonging to the predominant Thevar caste were triggered by an altercation between a bus driver and a student at a village in Tirunelveli district in July 1995 and not as printed

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LESSONS FROM SEATTLE

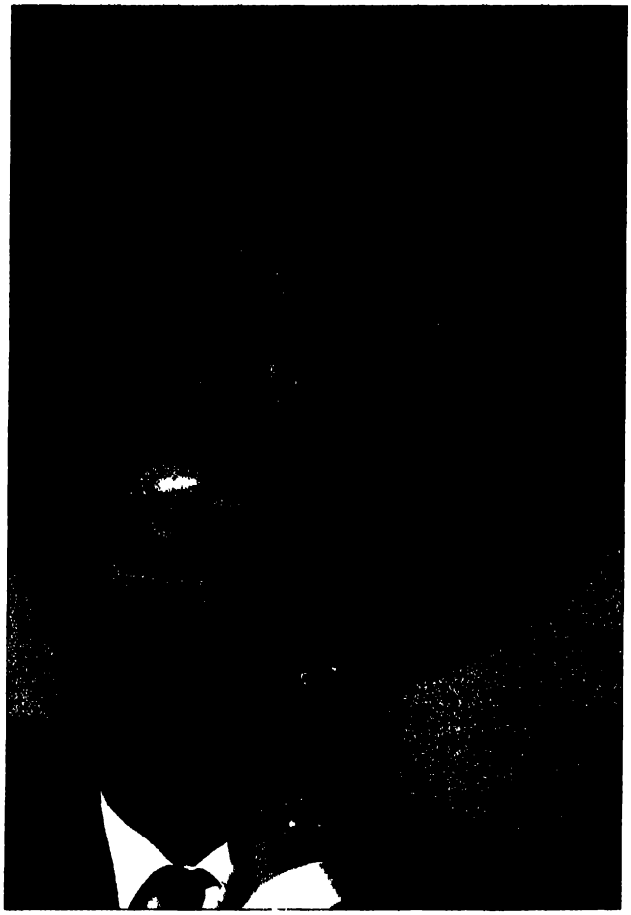
The Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle once again revealed that in the world of trade it is power and politics and not altruism that determines the rules of the game.

C P CHANDRASEKHAR

LAST fortnight, confusion ruled Seattle, the site for the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which began without a formal opening and ended without a formal declaration Confusion prevailed both within and outside the convention centre, the venue for the ministerial deliberations

Outside, on the streets and at the intersections, an odd combination of protesters, with widely varying and even contradictory motives, jostled with one another and the police, to demand an end to the process of liberalising trade overseen by the WTO Dominating the demonstrations, which resulted in a cancellation of the opening ceremony, were U S trade unions and Western environmental groups The unions are against freer trade because it ostensibly pits U S jobs against imports, which are believed to be cheap because of poor labour standards in the developing world The 'greens were concerned that freer trade would only benefit the big multinationals, which, in search of profits, were not merely threatening health by genetically modifying food products, but also relocating in countries with inadequate environmental safeguards, putting at risk everything from rainforests to dolphins, sea turtles and butterflies At the fringes of the protest, however, were those who felt that WTO governance of trade was diluting national sovereignty worsening unemployment and adding to poverty in the Third World Unlike many of their comrades in Seattle, they believed that an emphasis on labour standards and environmental protection could be turned by the Quad' group (U S , Canada, the E U and Japan) into protectionist levers that would further widen the North-South divide

Confusion, both organisational and



REUTERS



PETER DEJONG AP

Michael Moore, the recently-appointed Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. His formulation that the Third Ministerial Conference was "condemned to succeed" was proved wrong by the collapse of the trade negotiations in Seattle. (Right) U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky.



The Seattle police face demonstrators protesting against the ill-effects of the processes of trade overseen by the WTO. (Below) Commerce Minister Murasoli Maran addressing a press conference in Seattle. Developing countries, including India, had wanted greater attention to be given in Seattle to the iniquitous market access benefits that have flowed from the Uruguay Round.

ideological, permeated the conference venue as well. Many developing country negotiators arrived unsure of why they were there. They had started on the long road to Seattle more than a year back, with the idea that the principal task of the ministerial meet was to implement the mandate of the Uruguay Round and to complete its unfinished liberalising agenda in the areas of trade in agriculture and services. Further, given the inequities arising from the experience of implementing the decisions of that Round, they wanted the WTO to start a process of reviewing, reforming and, if necessary, partially rolling back some of the liberalisation already under way. Along the way, however, they were confronted by a suggestion from the European Union (E.U.), picked up and promoted by the U.S. and other developed countries, that Seattle should serve as the launch-pad for a new round of negotiations aimed



ELAINE THOMPSON AP

at substantially advancing the "opening up" agenda, with talk of investment agreements, competition policy, coherence and labour and environmental standards. The power of this group is such that by the time the Seattle meeting began, *The New York Times*, for example, declared that the meeting "is intended to open a new round of negotiations".

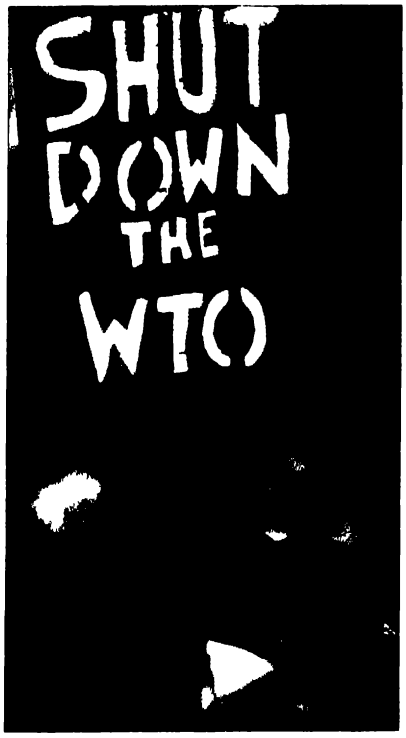
The E.U., in fact, was completely against review and reform in the contested agricultural trade arena, standing much to lose if it was forced to cut back on agricultural support and put an end to covert and overt subsidies. Japan and South Korea had also for long held that given its "multifunctional" character, touching even on lifestyles and cultures, agriculture cannot be treated on the same footing as manufacturing and services when trade liberalisation is discussed. They felt that focussing



LOREN CALLAHAN REUTER



BETH A KEISER A



REUTERS

An assortment of protesters, with widely varying purposes and motives, staged demonstrations on the streets of Seattle, during the WTO event. Some of them, dressed in sea turtle costumes, wanted trade to be linked to environmental protection measures; others demanded that international trade should be "clean, green and fair"; still others called for rather more radical action.

on a new round and new areas would get the heat off their back

E U Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy joined Clinton in using the protesters as backing for his cause, arguing that their demonstrations rendered it "even less possible" to give in to U S demands to wipe out E U agricultural subsides in order to help American farmers

The E U 's intransigence was indeed reflective of what trade liberalisation has come to mean It was willing to ignore the original in-built agenda of the Seattle meeting to start in year 2000 negotiations in the contested areas of agriculture and services, even though these negotiations were mandated by the Uruguay Round, since they were the two areas in which the least progress towards reducing trade barriers had been made at that time Of the two, some progress was made in the services area in 1997 Despite this unfinished agenda and pressure from the U S to open up its agricultural product markets, the E U managed to hold out because of the implicit support from Japan and South Korea and differences within the developing country camp While there were some developing-country members of the

Cairns Group of agricultural exporters and some pro-market ideologues who were for agricultural trade liberalisation, there were other nations and sections that were worried, for valid reasons, about the impact such multilateral liberalisation can have on their farming community and their food security in the long run.

These developing countries, including India, were for greater attention to be given to the iniquitous market access benefits that have flowed from the Uruguay Round in the area of manufactures. In practice, not only have developing countries lifted non-tariff barriers to trade and bound their tariffs at relatively low levels, but they have unilaterally reduced tariffs to levels way below the promised ceilings. However, the developed countries have failed to respond similarly in crucial areas such as textiles and leather, where liberalisation has been tardy and restricted to products where developing country competitive advantages were minimal. Further, they were joined by countries, such as Japan, in questioning the use of clauses relating to "dumping" of goods in export markets, which allowed the U.S., in particular, to impose high tariffs on not-so-substantial grounds of unfair competition. In response to this experience the developing countries wanted the summit to pay attention to what were cumbersomely titled "implementation issues".

With an eye to exploiting these divisions among the 135 members of the WTO to advance its own domestic political and international trading interests, the U.S., led by President Bill Clinton, chose to play the role of a bully in a chaotic school yard. It had a wide agenda for a new round, including concessions on agriculture from the E.U. and Japan, further cuts in tariffs on manufactures, an extension of the moratorium on taxes on e-commerce, and linkages between trade and labour and environmental standards. Its first tactic was to use the demands made by some of the protesters to advance this agenda, signalled by the President's gratuitous welcome to demonstrators pouring into Seattle. Later, while regretting the violence resorted to by a small group, Clinton said that it is important to heed (selectively) the voice of peaceful demonstrators and put the question of worker rights and environmental protection on the agenda. This was not only meant to appease powerful democratic constituencies that matter in the run-up to the next presidential election, but also served U.S. trading interests.

Clinton then went on to advocate a working group on labour under the WTO, so as to start the process of making the lack of core labour standards in particular countries a basis for imposing protectionist tariffs and quotas on them. Outside the convention, in an interview to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, he argued that the WTO should frame rules which allow for sanctions against countries violating core labour standards. Finally, in a symbolic gesture he signed in America's support for the treaty on child labour, which calls for a ban on what it treats as the worst forms of child abuse, including the use of child labour. The treaty, Clinton said, should serve as a model for enforcing other labour rights.

Given the clout of the U.S., it was not surprising that WTO Director-General Mike Moore chose to follow Clinton's strategy and pick on divisions within the developing-country camp to make a case for freeing trade further. Progress on this front, in his view, expressed in different ways, was crucial for the poorest of the developing countries. What he failed to note was the fact that the poorer and smaller developing countries were not being heard on the matter. According to the South-North Develop-ment Monitor (SUNS), the 67-strong ACP (Africa, Pacific and Caribbean) group of countries complained that their joint views (formally adopted at a meeting in the Dominican Republic) presented at a working group were not reflected in the Chairman's summary. Others were disappointed over the lack of transparency, and said that while the reports of the working group chairs claimed it was the result of consultations, it was not clear who had been consulted and where. As Victor Manuel, the trade representative of El Salvador, reportedly said: "They have continued with the old GATT way of doing business. They think they can meet in small gatherings and then announce that the two or three most important countries have already come to a consensus. It is very hard for small countries to have any influence on this process."

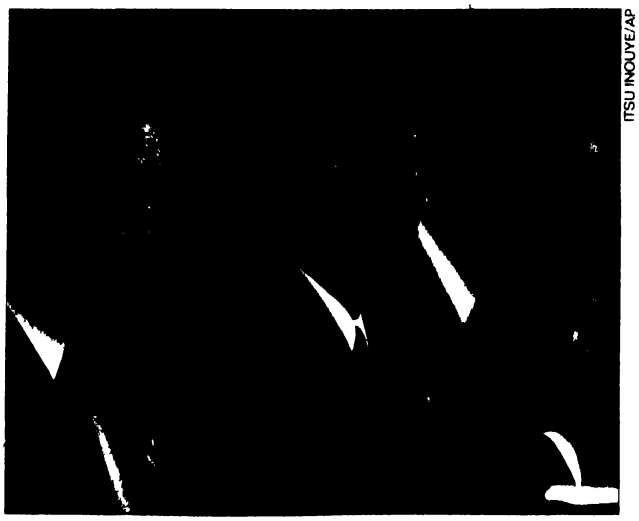


STEPHAN SAVOIA/AP

European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy.

The "big bully" attributes of the U.S. also came through in the way the convention was conducted by U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, who by virtue of being from the host country, shared the responsibility with Mike Moore. Choosing to go above the heads of most member-country representatives, she worked through secret dialogues with negotiators from the most powerful and recalcitrant countries, the results of which, if any, she expected the rest to go along with. One such result was a committee which was not authorised by the General Council of the WTO, to consider the possible linkage of trade and labour standards, which popped up midway through the meeting and received a hostile response from most developing countries.

The tenor of the U.S. strategy appeared to be that in return for minor concessions on what were the original items up for negotiations in the current stage of the WTO's record, the developing countries could be steamrollered into accepting a new



ITSU INOUYE/AP

The Japanese ministerial delegation in Seattle. The U.S., E.U. and Japan, which are the powerhouses of the global economy, had wanted Seattle to mark the beginning of a new round of global trade negotiations.

Confrontation in Seattle

SRIDHAR KRISHNASWAMI
in Seattle

SEATTLE will remember the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation for a long time to come. After the delegates and the journalists have headed home and the dust settles, the WTO meeting will come under intense scrutiny in this northwestern city of the United States, and for many wrong reasons.

The Mayor, city officials, the local police, the Federal and Washington State administrations, business houses and various protest groups will each have an assessment to make. No group can claim victory or state that its plan of action "worked". The bottomline is not who won or lost, but what went wrong.

The Mayor and the police viewed the disturbances not in terms of a "battle" but as an expression of "free speech"; but to the hundreds of delegates from over 130 countries and the nearly 3,000 mediapersons assembled for the largest ever trade event in the U.S., it was nothing but a fiasco, a bungling of huge proportions.

However, the view of several delegates that the police did not have a firm grip on the situation and over the protesters may not hold good in the U.S., where the laws do not give sweeping powers to authorities to do whatever they want to do. In a developing country, even in democracies, the police would have taken thousands of people into preventive custody. But it has been pointed out that this is not possible in the U.S.

City officials admitted that they were caught napping. They had anticipated large protests, even handed out permits for demonstrations and were seemingly preparing for the worst. In the end all hell broke loose. The law enforcement authorities were taken aback by the orgy of violence unleashed by a very small group of self-styled militants and anarchists, who indulged in widespread intimidation, vandalism and looting.

Business houses in this beautiful and otherwise calm city are still picking up the smashed glass outside their establishments and trying to remove graffiti spray-painted on their walls. The losses are still being calculated. It will run into millions of dollars in not just damages but in lost business. The Christmas season is round the corner too.



A protester gets a blast of pepper spray from the police.

Long-time residents of Seattle do not remember any other point in the city's history – except perhaps during the Second World War – when curfew had been imposed for consecutive days. This was done so that the law enforcement authorities could "get back" the city from the violent and well-organised protesters, who wanted their views to be heard loud and clear. In the information age, laptops, palmtops and cellular phones came in handy for the marchers to get reorganised quickly and challenge the police from vantage points.

By way of what was to become of the WTO, the writing was on the wall. That the Seattle talks would be a write-off was evident even before the formal deliberations and meetings got underway. On the eve of the meetings, thousands of demonstrators from all walks of life and representing a variety of causes – many of which had nothing to do with the WTO *per se* – had descended on the city and started clogging the streets. But city officials were perhaps under the impression that these "curious" onlookers would make some noise and leave.

To say that most demonstrators who showed up in Seattle indulged in violence or were keen on provoking the authorities is wrong. It was a small group of people wearing black hoods and black masks that started it all. Something suddenly changed in the carnival-like atmosphere.

The gangs assaulted delegates, spat on them or sprayed ink on their clothes, and even targeted stores, banks and anything else they could lay their hands on. While local television stations were showing it live, the police were outnumbered and could concentrate only on one or two areas. The police in full riot gear, the mounted police officers and even those in black armoured vehicles did not deter the arsonists.

And then came the red pepper gas, either sprayed or shot as small rubber projectiles. These rubber projectiles, called "stingers", were generally aimed below the knee; and according to one police official, "they really sting" to the point of momentarily incapacitating a person. This correspondent witnessed numerous instances of police spraying pepper gas, and finally dragging away small groups of people for arrest. The first day's tally of arrests was a "modest" 70 or so.

On the opening day, November 30, the ceremonies were scheduled at Paramount Theatre, where U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright,

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, WTO Director-General Michael Moore and U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky were to speak. None of them could make it out of their hotel rooms.

The opening ceremony was cancelled, Albright headed back to Washington D.C. without giving her speech and only a handful of delegates could make it to the convention centre for the start of the sessions, or to read out their "speeches". As night fell, came the painful decision of the 12-hour curfew. President Bill Clinton checked into his hotel suite while the curfew was on.

The National Guards were summoned and hundreds of other police officers and troopers were requisitioned from neighbouring counties and States to help out the beleaguered Seattle Police. Day Two seemed to start off peacefully. The local police, with the reinforcements, appeared to have the situation under control. The curfew seemed to help matters in the sense that the Streets of Seattle were finally got "back", even though this had to be done inch by inch.

Determined not to be caught flat-footed or allow the town to be in the hands of the protesters once again, the police went into high gear. They used force, made mass arrests and basically let the anti-WTO elements know who was running the show. The number of arrests stood at over 500 on the second day.

Sweeping restrictions on movement helped matters momentarily, but the protesters were only waiting until dark. They arrived with cannisters of pepper and tear gas, stun grenades and the works. Hundreds of defiant protesters changed tactics. Instead of focussing on the "ills" of the WTO, they chanted slogans on the aggression and heavy-handedness of the law enforcement agencies.

The police wanted the city back; the protesters, citing among other things the right to free speech, wanted their streets back. This resulted in a different kind of pressure on the Mayor and City Hall. On hand were charges of excessive use of police force and even a few instances of brutality, projected on local television stations. The Human Rights Watch called on the Governor of Washington and the Mayor to appoint an independent commission to inquire into the police action. The frenzy may be over, but it certainly will leave an impact on the Mayor's political fortunes. ■

round with a wide and damaging agenda.

In resorting to this strategy, the U.S. was clear that one fundamental "convention" adopted earlier in GATT and more recently in WTO proceedings would not be violated. This was that decisions would be based on consensus, allowing the developed countries to use their economic clout, stemming from their dominance over international trade and capital movements, to force some degree of compliance from the developing countries in trade negotiations. If that convention is dropped, and a vote taken based on the one-nation-one-vote principle provided for in the WTO's constitution, the issues of links between trade and labour and environmental standards would have gone out of the window, given the fact that the majority was against them.

Fortunately, partly because unity between the developed countries, especially on questions relating to agriculture and bio-engineered food products, could not be arrived at, and their combined pressure could not be wielded to try and enforce developing country compliance for a one-sided declaration heralding new trade talks, the Seattle negotiations collapsed and ended with no result.

The Seattle protests are confirmation of the increase in worker insecurity everywhere accentuated by the WTO and its dominance by the interests of MNCs.

Every section involved may claim success or refuse to accept failure. The protesters would say that they have been able to stall a new round, though not having such a round which covers labour and environmental standards could actually be a setback for U.S. trade unions and some environmental groups which seek to advance the environmental cause at the expense of everything else. The developing countries would return home saying that they have stalled the inclusion of these issues in future negotiations, even though no progress has been made on the demand to review and reform the trading framework created by the Uruguay Round agreement. The E.U. would be glad that it has, as yet, not had to retract on the question of agricultural support. And finally the U.S. would argue that it has put "implementation issues" on the backburner and brought to the front its principal concerns, especially the new ones relating to labour and environment, making them an informal part of any agenda for all future trade talks.

In fact, Barshefsky even made the collapse of the meeting an American 'decision', when she declared to weary negotiators: "My judgment and in turn the judgment shared by the Director-General ... was that it would be best to take a time out, consult with one another and find a creative means to finish the job." U.S. officials were still holding that their unfinished agenda would be revived in Geneva in six months' time. Meanwhile, Barshefsky held, talks on agriculture and services mandated by the Uruguay agreement can begin in January. Clearly, the U.S. view is that even though it has not clinched a deal, it has set the direction which any future talks would take. In the long haul it expects that, as happened with the last round of trade talks, which took almost a decade to get going in 1986 and end in 1994, WTO members can be tired into arriving at some agreement along the lines it desires. There are important lessons here for developing countries such as India. First, the Seattle talks once again reveal that in the world of trade it is power and politics and not altruism that determines the rules of the game.

The belief, therefore, that a multilaterally brokered liberalisation of trade would result in fair trade is completely misplaced. Second, the view that there are no choices other than participation in the WTO needs to be rethought if such participation is a sure route to turning the world trading system further against developing-country interests. Finally, if the most powerful in the world do not want to give up protection in traditional areas such as textiles and agriculture, and are seeking to win for themselves new instruments of protection in the form of labour standards and environmental conditions, going ahead with unilateral liberalisation of external economic policies at home would be mistaken, since the world trading system itself may foreclose the export benefits such liberalisation is expected to offer. The Seattle protests are confirmation of the increase in worker insecurity everywhere (including in the U.S. and the E.U.), accentuated by the WTO and its dominance by the interests of multinational corporations. It is time that developing countries recognise that this is true of their workers too. ■

Uncertainties ahead

The fiasco at the WTO event was in some ways predictable, given the diverse agendas and the antagonisms that surfaced in the run-up to Seattle; but its ramifications could well prove incalculable.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

WITH acrimony mounting and chances of a decisive outcome to the Seattle Ministerial Conference hitting a trough, WTO Director-General Michael Moore came up with a memorable formulation: "Condemned to succeed." In other words, the Ministers and officials cramming Seattle's convention centre could not continue arguing at cross-purposes. As the deadline for agreement neared, discord would simply have to give way, since the stakes involved were too high to condone failure.

By the time these words were uttered, the atmosphere in Seattle was already bristling with new antagonisms. U.S. President Bill Clinton had made his appearance with all the trappings of an imperial overlord come to visit his flock. As the chief host of the conference, he was received with courtesy and heard with exceeding politeness. But the contents of what he said only deepened the sense of disquiet about the host's intentions, transforming the gathering into a quarrelsome multitude that could not possibly reach an adequate compromise.

Moore was altogether too complacent in assuming that there was an underlying harmony in the attitudes of the diverse nations assembled in Seattle. It was a presumption that flowed from a rather uncritical appreciation of the process of globalisation and the supposed benefits it conferred on all parts of the world.

The months leading up to Seattle had been marked by the kind of discord within the WTO that should have provided Moore with an adequate foretaste of the odds he faced. First, there was a months-long stalemate over choosing a person to head the organisation, with the Asian bloc strongly pressing the claims of a Thai politician against the West's advocacy of Moore. An election would have ruptured the WTO convention of decisions through consensus, with incalculable consequences for its entire method of operation in the future. Finally, a tenuous compromise was worked out, under which the two candidates would split the six-year term evenly between themselves.

More ominously, an effort to hammer out an agreed agenda for Seattle broke down just a week prior to the meet. This was the culmination of a tortuous process at the WTO headquarters in Geneva which saw the U.S., the European Union and Japan – the three powerhouses of the global economy – rapidly raising the pitch of mutual recriminations. An early draft reflected some of the concerns of the E.U. and Japan, in its emphasis upon investment rules, competition policy and anti-dumping regulations. A revised proposal submitted by the U.S. played down all these concerns, instead highlighting the liberalisation of trade in agriculture and services. The E.U. and Japan rejected the proposals on sight, accusing the U.S. of seeking to "rig the agenda" for a new round of global trade negotiations.

In the prelude to Seattle, the U.S. also sought to dilute the elements of a draft agenda that would provide the least developed countries a degree of flexibility in meeting WTO commitments. Going into the ministerial meet, the writing was already on the wall. With a shrewd appreciation of the odds, *The Economist* of London, as energetic a drumbeater for free trade as any, warned of the dangers ahead: "There is indeed a danger that Seattle will turn out to be a fiasco: no agreement on an agenda, or a half-hearted one that will obviously lead nowhere. If that happened, it would encourage anti-WTO groups to go on the offensive. America, the E.U. and Japan would increasingly be tempted by managed trade. The E.U. and America would redouble their efforts to carve up markets through regional preferential trade agreements that can only undermine the multilateral approach to trade."

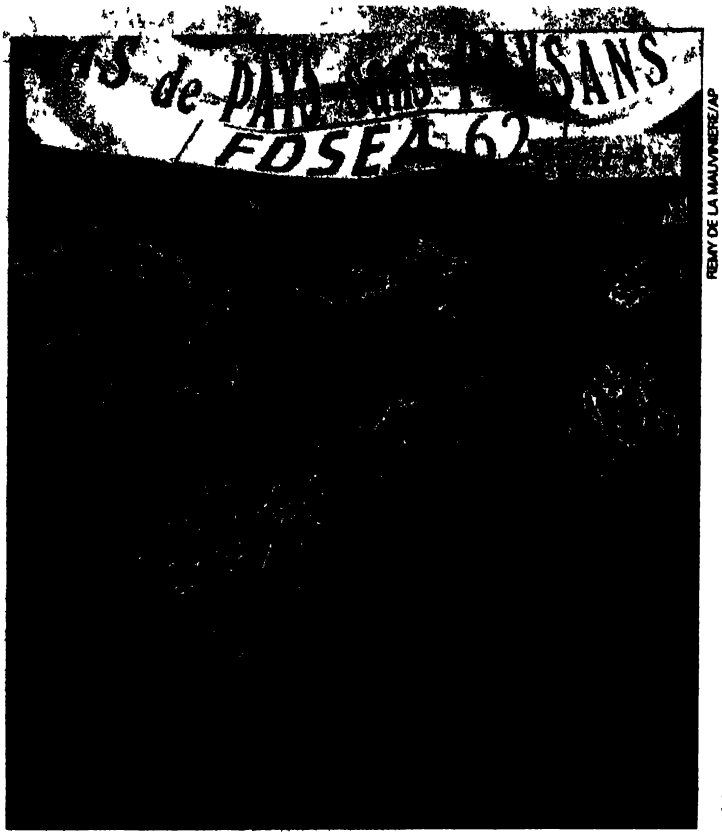
President Clinton had been the most assiduous in urging that Seattle should mark the beginning of a new round of global trade negotiations. Since the U.S. has always been the driving force behind its predecessor – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – there seemed little amiss about its effort to steer the WTO in a particular direction. But there were seri-



PAT ROUGE/AP

A protest outside the U.S. embassy in Manila to coincide with the start of the Seattle conference. Most of the issues that proved contentious in Seattle, such as agriculture and services, will be taken up in Geneva early next year as part of the outstanding mandate of the Uruguay Round.

ous hazards inherent in the temporal coincidence between the WTO meet and the start of the U.S. presidential election process. For Clinton, Seattle was little more than an occasion to establish how he was intent on exerting the leverage offered by the U.S' uniquely influential global profile to secure the interests of American labour unions. The WTO ministerial was, in this sense, a barely disguised overture to the trade union vote bloc on behalf of Clinton's designated successor, Vice-President Al Gore.



REMY DE LA MAUVINIERE/AP

Farmers carry sheaves of wheat in Paris on November 25 in protest against U.S. demands to European Union member-countries to cut back on agricultural subsidies. The banner reads: "No countryside without farmers."

TRADE union insecurities had been compounded by the mid-November deal between the U.S. and China, which effectively cleared the most serious obstacles to the admission of China into the WTO (*Frontline*, December 10). On November 19, John Sweeney, president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organisation (AFL-CIO), the most influential trade union confederation in the U.S., spelt out his concerns at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Repeatedly invoking the threat of a "confrontation" in Seattle, Sweeney warned: "The attempt to bring China into the WTO intensifies our determination, because we believe it is less likely to reform China, as its advocates claim, than it is to further deform the WTO. And it is more likely to detract from the WTO's already questionable legitimacy than to add to it."

Sweeney's worries were transparent. China's human resources would constitute a grave threat to the global dominance of U.S. industry and thereby endanger union interests. He was openly contemptuous of the arguments advanced on behalf of free trade: "Editorials pose a choice between free trade and protectionism, between engaging China and isolating it. This is nonsense. The debate is not about free trade or protection, engagement or isolation. We all know we are part of a global economy. And we are so engaged that we are already running a $60 billion deficit with China."

In other words, the trade deficit – virtually a chronic feature of U.S. economic performance over the last decade and more – is synonymous with an export of American jobs overseas. And if the WTO fails to inscribe into its charter uniform rules for labour all over the world, it would represent an unfair disadvantage for American labour. "So every day," said Sweeney in moral outrage, "some 250 million children across the world go to work rather than to school, making goods that flow freely across national borders. Every day, tens of thousands of workers are chained into forced labour and prison camps, slaving to make products that enrich global corporations and dictatorial governments."

It is an irony that these acute insecurities have cropped up at a time when the U.S. economy is celebrating its longest-ever phase of uninterrupted growth. There is perhaps an implicit comment in Sweeney's sentiments, as also in President Clinton's anxiety to accommodate them, on the stability and sustainability of the current economic boom in the U.S.

The inside story remains to be told, but there is an effort to spin out an interpretation that the U.S. President's strong message, invoking the possibility of trade sanctions against countries that failed to meet agreed labour standards, was his own initiative. In this narration, in his effort to secure the trade union vote for his designated successor, Clinton went well beyond the more subtle bargaining position that his negotiating team had adopted.

FUTURE historians may find it enlightening to excavate the truth behind these stories. For immediate purposes, it is sufficient that the President's remarks provided an insight of startling clarity into his country's ultimate intentions with the proposed new round of negotiations. The remarks made by his top negotiator, U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, just two days earlier, suggested an effort to work the labour standards issue into the WTO negotiating agenda without immediately pre-empting its outcome. The occasion was her address to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a body that has rendered immense service to the U.S. cause during the Cold War and today stands in the vanguard of the struggle for universal labour standards.

Interestingly, Moore had on November 28 firmly ruled the issue of labour standards out of court in his appearance at the same forum: "What is true for the advanced economies is true for developing economies as well. Imposing trade sanctions – making developing countries even poorer – will not stop children being put to work. Or lift the living standards of their families. Just the opposite. Poverty, not trade, is the main cause of unacceptable working conditions and environmental degradation. And the answer to poverty is more trade and business, not less."

Moore suggested that rather than appropriate the mandate of the International Labour Organisation, the WTO should work in cooperation with it: "Most of the 135 members of the WTO are also members of the ILO. We represent the same taxpayers, the same governments, the same constituents. All these governments have an interest in improving their social and labour standards... All WTO's membership signed up to the Singapore

Tussles over trade

RAJESH VENUGOPAL
in Seattle

WHEN news emerged late in the night of December 3 that talks at the World Trade Organisation conference had failed, the protesters on the streets of Seattle let out cheers and greeted one another with "high-five" handshakes. Even though the talks collapsed primarily owing to serious differences between the United States and the European Union over the issue of agricultural subsidies, the protesters, who had faced rubber bullets and batons for four days, felt all the satisfaction of having won a hard-fought battle.

The clash between the WTO and its critics that exploded in Seattle had been brewing for almost a year. Activists and non-governmental organisations, emboldened by their success in scuttling the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) at the meeting of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1998, moved quickly when they heard of the WTO meeting in Seattle and of the possibility that the investment treaty could resurface there under new aegis.

In this age of "Internet activism", organisers across the U.S. set up Web sites, newsgroups and e-mail list-serves to connect activists and participants throughout the world. Web sites such as www.seattle99.org and www.wtoseattle.org have been operating for months, providing directions, background information, schedule of events, accommodation outlets and even safety guidelines to those planning to attend. Some mischievous e-activists set up fake Web sites such as www.gatt.org that look otherwise identical to the official WTO site, but whose links lead to articles that lam-

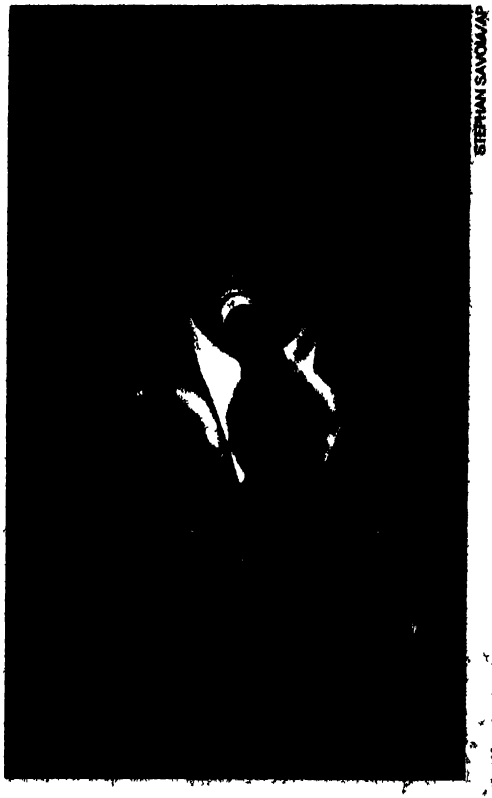
While the Clinton administration tried to justify its agenda of introducing labour and environmental standards into the WTO saying that it was merely responding to public sentiment, the reality was more complex. At least 10 different organisations, representing a wide variety of concerns, came together in Seattle. They included trade unions, environmentalists such as the Rainforest Action Network, grassroots groups such as Direction Action Network, and even animal-rights groups such as the Humane Society.

THE common cause that unites many of these groups is not labour and environmental standards – something that India and the other developing countries sharply reject. Rather, it is a deep concern that the rules of the WTO permit multinational corporations to subvert the democratic will expressed by national electorates. The Rainforest Action Network, for example, is fighting the WTO because the latter puts trade provisions ahead of the laws of nations, so that power is shifted "away from local communities and given to corporations". People for Fair Trade, which organised many parallel events in Seattle, says that "the WTO speaks only for corporations and has become a global coup against democracy. It is the dismantling of democracy disguised as a trade pact." For example, the U.S. was forced by the WTO in 1996 to repeal sections of a 1990 pollution control law that were found to discriminate against imports from less-sophisticated Venezuelan refineries. Similarly, European regulations against the import of hormone-treated U.S. beef were ruled illegal despite the fact that European consumers are overwhelmingly in favour of tight restrictions on hormone-treated and genetically modified foods.

A number of NGOs have focussed on the fact that the benefits of free trade are often unequally distributed, and have damaging consequences for the most marginal segments of society. In a workshop presentation, veteran activist Walden Bello placed the WTO within a larger paradigm of economic development linked to the neo-liberal approach of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is deeply flawed, he said, because it dogmatically imposes a single model of economic development on all countries and negates the economic and social consequences of growth and trade.

Bello, along with Miloon Kothari, a Delhi-based NGO activist with the Habitat International Coalition, is among those who advocate a fundamental restructuring or dismantling of the WTO. Kothari was in Seattle as part of an alliance of NGOs that are concerned that the newly devised trade rules of the WTO will cause governments to compromise on or roll back earlier commitments on human rights, such as the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. "Trade has become an end in itself," he said. "We think trade should be a means by which people can achieve human rights objectives that countries have agreed to in the past."

There was some disappointment over the last-minute cancellation of Cuban President Fidel Castro's visit to Seattle. Meanwhile, the debate between Jagdish Bhagwati and Vandana Shiva offered some moments of excitement. In a public debate between the proponents and opponents of globalisation, U.S. consumer activist Ralph Nader joined Vandana Shiva to speak out against



STEPHAN SAVOIA/AP

Martin Khor, director of Third World Network, the Malaysia-based non-governmental organisation, addresses the NGO Symposium in Seattle on November 29. Most of the NGOs that came together in Seattle shared the concern that WTO regulations would permit multinational corporations to subvert the democratic will of

David Aaron, the U.S. Under-Secretary of Trade, and Bhagwati, a Columbia University Professor and an expert on trade. The acrimonious two-hour debate was high on sound-bites but low on substance as the two sides argued past each other to occasional applause from the packed audience. Bhagwati, polite and professorial, appeared confused in the debate, and occasionally scored points for his opponents by contradicting and disagreeing with Aaron. In the end, Ralph Nader and Vandana Shiva had outgunned their opponents with their rhetorical skills and thundering accusations that left Aaron looking hapless.

BUT the rancour and tension at the debate was nothing compared to what took place at the ministerial meeting itself. It is not clear if the fiery demonstrations on the first day shook the delegates' nerves, but the official deliberations remained without resolution after four days of tense and protracted negotiations. Delegates arrived in Seattle steeled for battle. Many, like those from India, came prepared with carefully worked out positions backed by strong political will and powerful domestic constituencies. But if much of the first day was lost in the protests, the proceedings on the second, third and fourth days were deadlocked in virtually every committee. The last two days saw non-stop negotiations as delegates struggled to make progress, and the final day's session was even extended by a few hours.

Many of the smaller developing countries complained bitterly that they were sidelined at the talks. But the dynamics of the WTO are such that it is inevitably dominated by the U.S., the E.U. and Japan that together control three-quarters of world trade, and consequently wield considerable influence over it. These three found enough stumbling blocks among themselves, from anti-dumping laws to export subsidies, to cause the entire proceedings to crash.

With protests outside and failure inside, the Seattle ministerial will go down as a major ignominy both for Clinton and the WTO. Many negotiators felt the talks would be re-ignited within six months, but the failure to launch a new round of trade liberalisation talks will leave a psychological burden of frustration and weariness that will take some time to overcome. ■

Declaration in 1996 committing them to core labour standards, opposing the use of labour standards for protectionist purposes and agreeing that the comparative advantage of countries – particularly low-wage developing countries – must in no way be put into question."

On behalf of the U.S., Barshefsky stated her opposition to this posture very clearly the next day "Today, in a formal sense, the WTO does not recognise that links between trade and labour exist This is not a position which can endure it is intellectually indefensible, and it will over time weaken public support for the trading system Thus we are not only seeking closer collaboration between the WTO and the International Labour Organisation, but also creation of a Working Group on Trade and Labour to examine seriously, in cooperations with institutions like the World Bank and the ILO, questions such as safety nets, the relationship between trade and internationally recognised core labour standards, and the best means of adjustment to heightened competition '



BARRY SWEET AP

John Sweeney, president of AFL-CIO.

THESE subtleties of interpretation were, of course, decisively brushed aside when Clinton invoked trade sanctions as the appropriate antidote to member-countries' default on core labour standards. Far from being an occasion that elevated the meet to a higher level of purpose, the presidential appearance in Seattle only hastened its unravelling

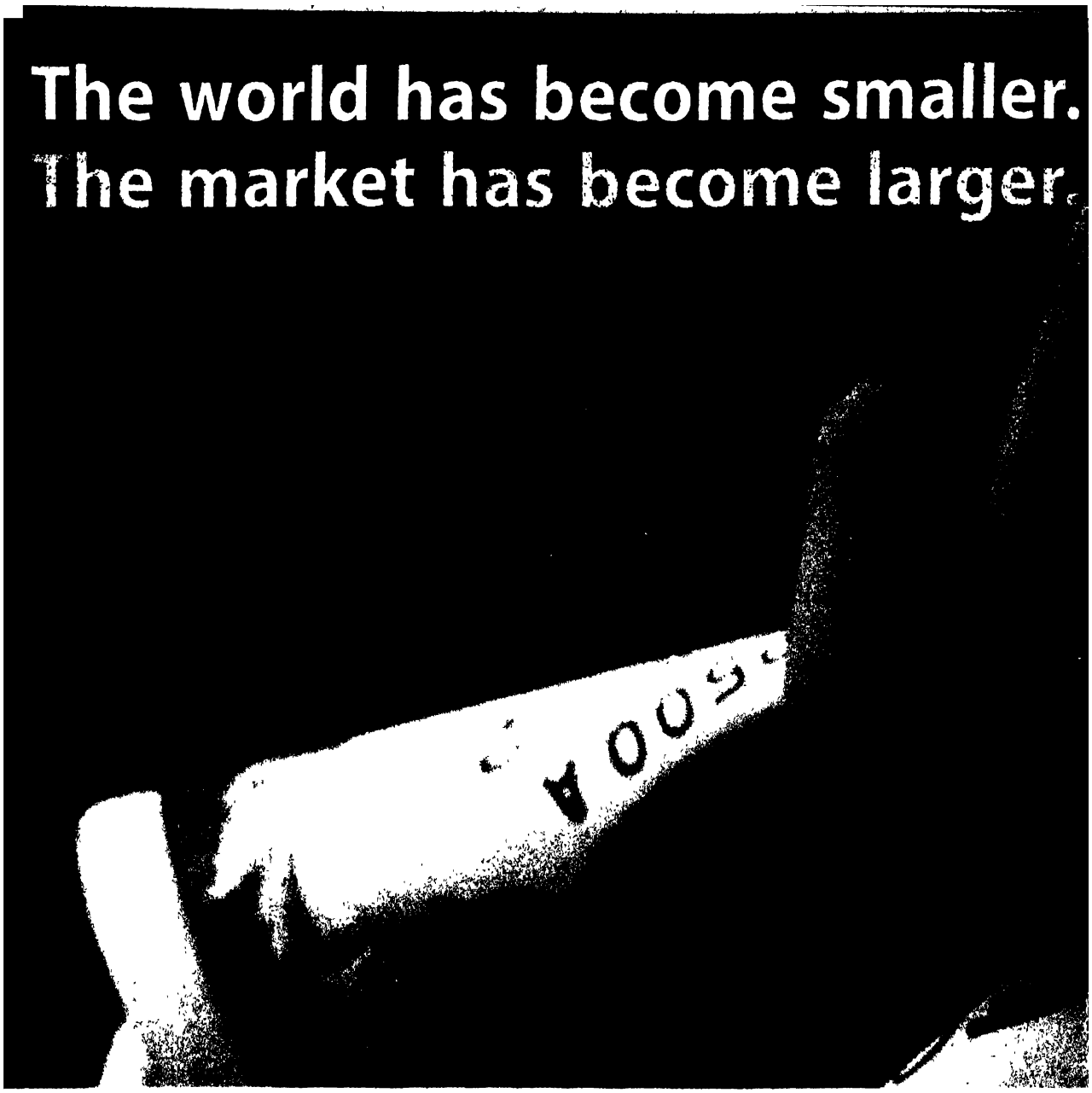
In the two remaining days, the U S tried every option to win an agreement On agriculture, it remained insistent on a final elimination of farm subsidies, but seemingly conceded some ground on "multi-functionality" – recognising European and Japanese claims that agriculture represented a special category of activity, intimately connected to the environment, national cultures and ways of life, that could not be equated with industry and manufacturing To win Japan s assent on the labour standards issue, it even offered to bring on board its specific grievances on the frequent American recourse to anti-dumping regulations But against the background of dissent from the more important developing countries, none of these stratagems could quite salvage the Seattle talks

In retrospect, to anybody who followed the tumultuous build-up to Seattle, it must seem rather outlandish that forecasts of a decisive outcome did for a while enjoy a certain credibility The fiasco of the WTO ministerial does not in itself represent a fatal blow to the global trading system It is not inappropriate to recall that the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, which gave rise to the WTO, went into a seemingly irresolvable deadlock in 1990 It snapped out of the stupor only when Arthur Dunkel, Director-General of GATT (as it was then known), produced the *fait accompli* of an agreement that was known as the "Dunkel Draft' – providing the U S with the basis for individually working on all the recalcitrant elements and wearing down their resistance

A similar effort may be unnecessary right now, since most of the issues that proved contentious in Seattle, such as agriculture and services, will be taken up in Geneva early next year, as part of the continuing mandate of the Uruguay Round. In this context, it is worthwhile to probe into the recent conduct of the U.S Government to uncover its true motivations in seeking to launch a new round of global negotiations It is unlikely that the answer ultimately will need to go far beyond one factor The current conjuncture is a rare moment of global hegemony for the U S – an ascendancy as seemingly absolute as it is multi-dimensional Since ministerial meetings every two years have become standard procedure for the WTO, the U S obviously decided that the moment was appropriate to exert the leverage afforded by its economic, military and cultural power, to force an outcome of its choice in global trade rules

The effort came a cropper for the simple reason that the moment of absolute U S power is also one of maximum global disharmony Indeed, not in several decades has the global economy been as out of joint as it is now Cycles of growth and stagnation, which once were closely synchronised between the main global economies, are today completely desynchronised The growth that the U S econ-

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omy is today witnessing – with its attendant phenomenon of a massively bloated stock market and rampant speculative activity – strains credulity for the simple reason that it is seemingly isolated from the rest of the global economy.

Digging slightly under the surface, the infirmities in the American economic miracle begin to emerge. First, economic growth today is being underwritten as never before by massive consumer spending. The growth in consumer spending today is the highest since the mid-1980s. This, in turn, is premised upon the appreciation of share values. Household incomes alone can hardly sustain the kind of consumer spending that is seen today. What is evident, instead, is the "wealth effect" – of households incurring massive debts in the belief that the appreciation of share market values will more than balance their books in the long term.

Optimistic projections of continuing economic growth assume that household expenditure will be in excess of income for the next five years, pointing to a faster accumulation of debt. Crucially again, much of this debt is incurred to overseas creditors, through a burgeoning American trade deficit. Over the last few months, the U.S. trade deficit has been just over 3.2 per cent of GDP. This represents a substantial change over a decade ago, when it was just 1.5 per cent of GDP. A part of this is explained by higher investments by American industry, which could conceivably bring in returns in future. But a large part of the explanation lies in debt-financed expenditure by American households. This is indeed the true face of the "export of jobs through trade" phenomenon that American trade unions have made much of.

To be able to sustain this situation, the dollar value must continue to remain high so that overseas creditors continue to put money into U.S. government guaranteed bonds. But the longer the dollar remains high, the greater will be the difficulty of bridging the U.S. trade deficit. Further, Japanese financiers have of late been giving indications that they will be shifting their investments, as the Japanese Government gets ready with a massive revival package for the ailing economy. The U.S. economy today is confronting what has appropriately enough been described as "an impossible balancing act". The Seattle meeting was perhaps an effort to impart a sense of stability to the U.S' precarious perch. And while the fiasco of the WTO ministerial was perhaps predictable, its many ramifications could well be incalculable. ■

■ COVER STORY

A high-stakes agenda

The Seattle talks collapsed owing to a hardening of negotiating positions by governments following an attempt by President Bill Clinton to raise the stakes on implementing labour standards.

SRIDHAR KRISHNASWAMI
in Seattle

FOR President Bill Clinton, who had set great store by the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle, the outcome is, in some senses, a setback. Administration officials may now try to convey the impression that all is not lost, and that the pieces of the failed trade negotiations can be continued from where they were left off, but clearly this is not going to be easy.

United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky put a gloss on it and claimed that it was best to "take a time-out" and find "creative means" to finish the job. However, a senior delegate from Thailand seemed to sum it up a lot more realistically: "It started off on the wrong foot and we scrambled to get into gear. We couldn't get the big picture."

To say that the WTO fumbled because of the street protests would be stretching facts. The protests were certainly a factor, and the delegates were shocked by the level of violence, looting and intimidation witnessed during the first two days. But the talks failed because these act were compounded by a host of factors and issues. The negotiating positions of governments had become entrenched and the stakes had been raised at the last minute by none other than Clinton.

After having set artificial timelines and in some instances come to Seattle without getting a firm grip on the technicalities to be sorted out, a majority of the delegates from the 135 member-countries were appalled at the way the process was unfolding at the convention centre. Miffed at being left out of the negotiating process and concerned that the U.S., Europe and Japan were trying to hammer out deals behind the backs of the developing nations, they only hardened their stance. The African delegates were particularly incensed that they were being marginalised.

When the talks collapsed, those who had been keen on results argued that the way the meetings were structured would have to be reviewed. The developed countries perhaps believed that the select meetings in the "green rooms" would deliver results and that the agreements fashioned thus could be presented as a *fait accompli* to the developing nations. However, it had precisely the opposite effect.

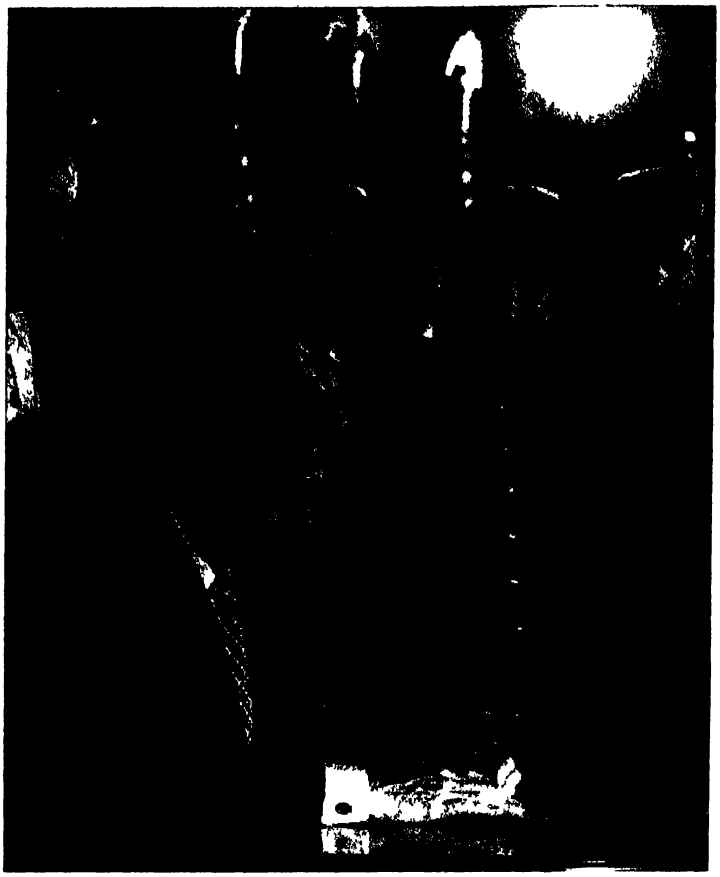
As he does in most crisis situations, Clinton worked the telephone lines, calling a number of world leaders, including Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. But many gaps remained and it became apparent in the last few hours that it would just not be possible to bury the differences and start a "millennium" round of trade negotiations.

It was not merely opposition from countries including India to the efforts by developed countries to link trade to the so-called core labour standards and environmental issues that torpedoed the talks. There was tough bargaining over various other issues – agricultural subsidies, anti-dumping measures, industrial tariffs, "multi-functionality" and the scope of a new three-year round that was to be launched in Seattle.

Some observers reasoned that it was owing to differences relating to agricultural subsidies that the meeting failed. The U S. and the 15-member European Union were involved in a heated debate over agricultural subsidies; the E.U. was unwilling to concede ground to those who demanded a pruning of these subsidies. Japan and South Korea pushed for efforts to maintain import barriers for rice. The U.S. and the Cairns Group were opposed to the use of "multi-funtionality" in the final text: the term relates to the concept that agriculture performs a variety of societal roles, including preserving rural culture and protecting the environment. Japan and the E.U. were keen to include this in the final statement.

The lack of transparency in the proceedings and persisting differences on agricultural issues were by no means the

only hurdles. There was a widespread feeling among representatives of the developing nations that the industrialised world, particularly the U.S. and the E.U., was trying to browbeat the Third World with tough talk on the farm trade and on the labour and environmental issues. Clinton's remark that the WTO should consider imposing sanctions on countries that did not comply with core labour standards strengthened suspicions about U.S. intentions, and that had a spillover effect in other areas.



KHUE BUI/AP

In Seattle on December 2, President Bill Clinton signs an international treaty which calls for a ban on "the most flagrant forms of child abuse", including the use of child labour.

THE Indian delegation led by Commerce Minister Murasoli Maran made it clear right from the start that India would not compromise on its principled refusal to discuss issues that were not directly related to trade matters – such as labour standards and the environment. In his statement to the conference, Maran said that India was firmly committed to environmental protection and sustainable development but that it would strongly oppose any attempt to change the structure of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment or the mandate which then could be used to legitimise unilateral trade-restrictive measures.

On the subject of labour standards and workers' rights, Maran told the Ministerial Conference: "India resolutely rejects renewed attempts to introduce these in the WTO in one form or another. Any further move will cause deep divisions and distrust that can only harm the formation of a consensus on our future work programme." A senior Commerce Ministry official who was part of the delegation repeatedly made the point that India would not yield on this aspect. "We believe it is a Trojan horse for protectionism and our political mandate is to oppose it," the official added.

At the end of the conference, Maran told Indian mediapersons that when the delegation came to Seattle, it expected a more positive outcome that would advance the case for a multilateral, rule-based, non-discriminatory trading system. "Significant advances have been made. But in some areas, particularly non-trade related issues, there were wide divergences that could not be bridged," the Minister remarked.

India, said Maran, opposed the efforts to link trade to core labour standards, environmental issues, coherent global architecture, investment issues, involvement of non-governmental organisations in WTO negotiations and competition policy. "We hope that in the ensuing consultations a more constructive outcome will emerge on all issues for a balanced and equitable package," he added.

Among the developing countries, India was a major player in Seattle, but not the only major one. A few other countries in the Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America also protested against the manner in which non-trade issues were being brought onto or linked to the trade agenda. A top Malaysian official said: "Cheap labour does not necessarily mean exploitation... Is it too difficult to accept that countries have different levels of development? Some countries are just not as rich as other countries."

Clinton may have wanted to make gains from the conference and add it to his list of foreign policy "successes". It is not as though he had an ambitious agenda set out at Seattle and put little on the negotiating table. The problem was that Clinton had a political agenda and he raised the stakes at the very last minute. Prior to his arrival in Seattle, where curfew was in force, in an interview to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Clinton used the 'S' word – sanctions. Calling for the delegates to adopt the U.S. position for a working group on labour that would develop core labour standards which would then be part of every trade agreement, Clinton said, "... ultimately, I would favour a system in which sanctions would come for violating any provision of the trade agreement." The President also said that Americans should not buy products from companies that exploit workers. Senior officials scrambled to say that the President's comments were only to be seen as a "goal" and not a negotiating plank for the WTO ministerial. But the damage had been done.

Labour and environmental groups are core supporters of the Democratic Party; Clinton perhaps wanted to play to this gallery and see if he could have it both ways. Clinton reckoned that if, by talking tough on issues of agriculture and farm trade and in speaking up for labour rights and human rights, he had got the delegates to sign on to his agenda, he would have had the labour and the environment groups on his side.

In Clinton's calculation, even if the WTO ministerial ended without an agreement, he would have had these groups on his side: to them, "no deal is better than a bad deal". The conference collapsed not so much because it was held in Seattle under siege-like conditions, but because it was held in a country where politicians and special interest groups have set their sights on the presidential and congressional elections due in 2000.

Big business at work

Multinational corporations, the prime movers of globalisation, are becoming involved ever more actively and visibly in setting the agenda for international trade negotiations among governments, in which big business has tremendous stakes. The Seattle meet was no exception.

V. SRIDHAR

"The idea was simple to identify those barriers to trade or opportunities for liberalisation on which both business communities (in Europe and in the United States) could agree as targets for government action We should put the business 'horse' before the government 'cart'"

– Timothy J Hauser, former acting Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, in a testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means, Hearing on the New Transatlantic Agenda, July 23, 1997

"We want neither to be the secret girlfriend of the WTO nor should the International Chamber of Commerce have to enter the WTO through the servants entrance"

– Helmut O Maucher, chairman of Nestle and former president of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), in the *Financial Times*, December 6, 1997

IF the World Trade Organisation is all about free trade, and if giant business corporations are the principal agents of globalisation, what was big business' stake at Seattle?

Considering the immense clout of these corporations, the media at large covered surprisingly little about their role in the run-up to the Seattle conference For instance, it is little known that the Seattle Host Organisation (SHO), the key organiser of the ministerial meet, was co-chaired by the heads of the two Seattle-based global leaders in their respective lines of business – Microsoft and Boeing. At Seattle, corporate sponsorship rose to new heights, epitomising the predominant role that multinational companies play in world trade

During the run-up to Seattle, the SHO sought corporate sponsorship of the event. It said that "supporters will be welcome to participate in a series of private sector programmes organised by the SHO, and, where appropriate, the SHO will look first to sponsoring firms for key speaking roles During the WTO week, sector-specific conferences will take place, bringing together industry leaders, specialists and participants engaged in the key issues for the next round of trade talks The attendance for these sessions is limited, allowing for the greatest possible interaction between participants, officials and guest speakers" The SHO also said it would provide 'special briefings to contributing firms prior to the WTO Ministerial to ensure that they receive constant updates on the status of the ministerial meetings"

"Supporters" were entitled to invitations to the ministerial dinner, opening and closing events and private sector conferences The number of invitations issued to companies depended on their level of support For instance, "Emerald level" sponsors, who contributed $250,000 each, were allowed five guests for the ministerial dinner, the companies who had committed support, apart from Boeing and Microsoft, included General Motors, Ford, Deloitte and Touche (a consultancy and accounting multinational), UPS and Honeywell "Diamond level" sponsors, who paid between $150,000 and $249,999 each, included Hewlett Packard, Motorola, Lucent Technologies and the Port of Seattle Companies at the "Platinum level" included IBM, Caterpillar, Lufthansa, each of which paid up to $149,000 There were other sponsors – at gold, silver and bronze levels Signage and corporate material of the supporting companies were allowed at the conference, and the SHO's official Web site had links to the sponsoring companies' Web sites Sponsors provided about $9 million to conduct the meet



STEPHAN SAVOIA/AP

A campaigner draws attention to "corporate tyranny". At Seattle, corporate sponsorship operations rose to new heights.

The Seattle meet was not the first major international event for which such corporate fund-raising had been undertaken. Earlier this year, the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was sponsored by U.S. corporations. About a dozen companies contributed a quarter of a million dollars each and their heads were directors of the host committee of the NATO summit.

CRITICS of the WTO recall the agenda-setting role of multinationals during the Uruguay Round process which laid the basis for the transition from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the WTO between 1986 and 1993. The large business corporations played a key role in bringing new issues such as Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), trade in services and other issues on the agenda. These issues were traditionally outside the scope of the GATT process, which was mainly concerned with tariffs on goods trade. Business interests in the Quad – the U.S., Canada, the European Union (E.U.) and Japan – were particularly active in bringing the Uruguay Round to a successful conclusion.

In the U.S., the Coalition of Service Industries lobbied the Government to form a separate regime for international trade in services. Multinationals such as Federal Express, Citicorp and American Express, and Arthur Andersen, the accounting and consultancy multinational, are part of the Coalition. The Intellectual Property Committee, a forum for 13 major U.S. corporations, including Monsanto, DuPont, General Motors and others, worked to incorporate TRIPS in the Uruguay Round. The former chief executive officer of Pfizer remarked in 1996 that "our combined strength enabled us to establish a global private sector government network which laid the groundwork for what became TRIPS". Critics have also pointed out the "strikingly similar" positions put forth by industrial lobbies and those presented by the official U.S. delegation during the talks on TRIPS during the Uruguay Round. Of the 111 members of the U.S. delegation, as many as 96 were from the corporate world.

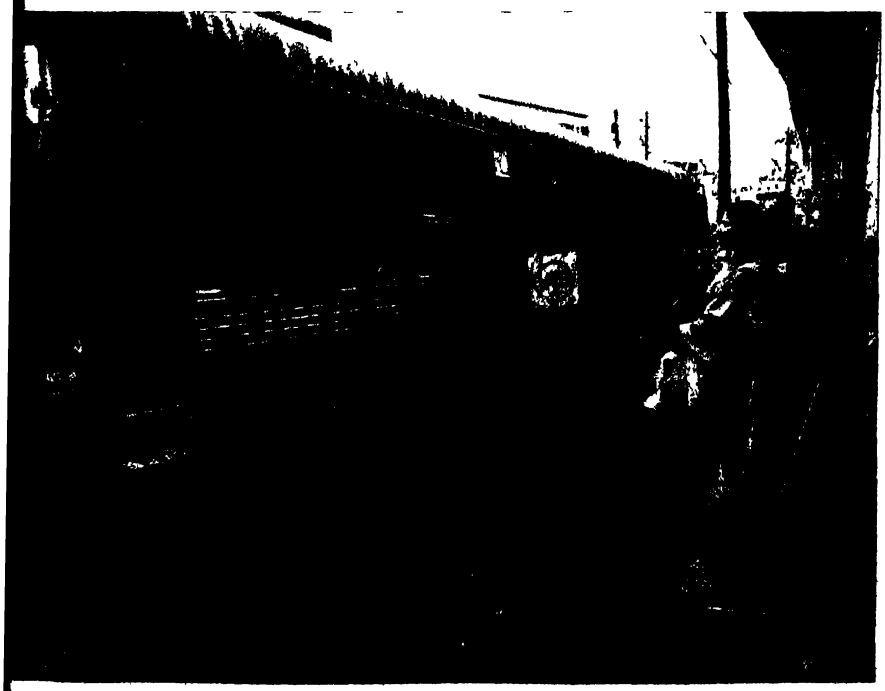
In the U.S., the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACPTN) includes representatives from leading multinationals such as AT&T and associations such as the Motion Picture Association of America, Inc. Representatives from multinationals such as Eastman Kodak, Monsanto and IBM account for nearly half the strength of the 42-member Committee.

In Japan, the Japanese Federation of Economic Organisations, the Keidanren, liaises with the Japanese Government and Parliament. Representatives from Mitsubishi Electric Corporation, Nissan and Toyota chair major committees in the Keidanren. In Europe, while the members of the European Round Table (ERT) lobbied with national governments, the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederation of Europe (UNICE) worked closely with the E.U. leadership. In the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC), of which the ICC is an important part, plays an important role in shaping the industrialised countries' agenda at the WTO.

Lobbying by business played a key role in clinching the three international agreements that were signed at the WTO in 1997 – on Information Technology (IT) products, on telecommunications and, most significantly, on the liberalisation of financial services. All three, said former E.U. Trade Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan, were "jewels in the WTO crown."

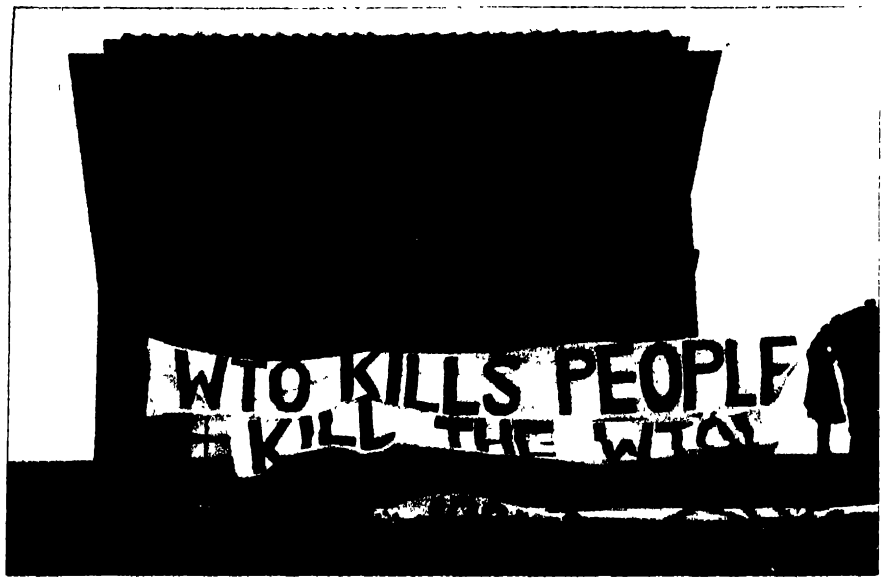
The agreement on financial services, which came into force on March 1, 1999, is expected to liberalise 90 per cent of the world market in insurance, banking and brokerage services. The agreement marks a significant step in opening up markets in the countries of the South to the multinational financial entities. Although the agreement allows countries to file specific reservations, it locks them in terms of liberalisation and market access, preventing the establishment of controls at a later date.

The E.U. and the U.S. governments lobbied extensively in Asian and Latin American capitals to clinch the agreement on financial services; the role played by corporate lobbying, however, received less attention. The Financial Leaders Group (FLG) played a key role in "identifying barriers to trade in other countries", according to the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs. The FLG included some of the world's biggest financial players – Barclays, Chase Manhattan, ING Group, Ford Financial Services Group, the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, Goldman Sachs and several other banking, investment and insurance companies. In a speech in Washington in September 1998, Brittan remarked that "the close links established between E.C. and U.S. industry... were an essential factor in obtaining the final deal." Brittan also said that the "high-level momentum to the negotiations" was provided by the E.U.-U.S.-FLG involvement. Brittan also said that the relationship will serve as a "model" for the "next round of services



BARRY SWEET/AP

Members of the Direct Action Network, and their vehicle of grassroots-level activism, in Seattle.



A banner with a telling message outside the WTO headquarters building in Geneva. There is intense anger worldwide directed at the WTO framework that has increasingly challenged national laws in several spheres.

liberalisation negotiations."

According to the WTO's critics, the E.U., emboldened by the success of its alliance with the FLG, initiated the formation of the Investment Network (IN). The IN, which brings together more than 50 giant companies, including Daimler-Benz (now merged with Chrysler), Fiat and British Petroleum, was established to articulate key issues to be brought on board the agenda for an international agreement on investment. The E.U. has also suggested the formation of a European association of service industries to "advise E.U. negotiators on the key barriers and countries on which they should focus on in these negotiations." A critic of the business-E.U. relationship observed that "by working closely together, the Commission presents the member-states with a negotiating strategy pre-approved by European industry."

SINCE its formation in 1995, the Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD), in which the biggest corporates from the E.U. and the U.S. participate, has focussed on the agenda that governments should take up at the WTO negotiations. Among the points raised by the TABD is the expansion of the "in-built agenda" which includes services, agriculture and TRIPS. The E.U. position, which favoured an expansion of the agenda at Seattle, is seen as a reflection of business lobbying at the TABD. The TABD also called for the conclusion of an Agreement on Forest Products and on electronic commerce.

At the TABD's fifth annual conference held recently in Berlin, over 100 CEOs from leading multinationals gathered to articulate their agenda for the Seattle meet. They focussed attention on non-tariff barriers to trade in the E.U. and the U.S. These related to genetically modified agricultural products, eco-labelling and recycling schemes in the E.U. They also demanded that the U.S. administration review its public spending provisions which are aimed at supporting local communities.

A commentator points out that the TABD is not an organisation but a "framework drawing on the resources of existing companies and organisations, to deliver joint industry messages." This is perceived to result in more efficient interaction than the "traditional structures for government-business consultation." The TABD is reckoned to be "arguably one of the most far-reaching and influential corporate-state alliances."

The ICC, which represents the interests of some of the biggest multinationals, was a major player in the move to float the controversial Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). It also maintains close ties with the WTO Secretariat. An ICC official said that the ICC "has always been a vector for business input into WTO work... since the beginning of the multilateral trade negotiations." It also had "several informal contacts with the WTO on the new issues that the WTO is looking at," a senior ICC official said earlier this year. Its Seattle campaign started in May 1999 when an ICC delegation met German Chancellor Gerald Schroeder just before the G-8 summit. On the eve of the Seattle meet, ICC secretary-general Maria Livanos Cattaui, said: "Progress of multilateral trade liberalisation must not be allowed to falter... The rules-based multilateral trading system is one of the finest achievements of the twentieth century."

CRITICS of the WTO point to the increasing collaboration between business and some of the key figures involved in international trade negotiations since the Uruguay Round. For instance, Arthur Dunkel, who presided over much of the transition from GATT to the WTO, is on the board of Nestle, one of the world's biggest food companies. Dunkel also chairs the International Trade and Investment Commission of the ICC. Dunkel's participation in a WTO dispute settlement panel also raised questions of a conflict of interest.

Peter Sutherland, former Director-General of GATT-WTO between 1993 and 1995, now chairs the board of British Petroleum and is also an associate in Goldman Sachs International. According to the Friends of the Earth, Charlene Barshefsky, the United States Trade Representative (USTR), was earlier a lobbyist for the Canadian timber industry.

The dispute settlement mechanism in the WTO has come in for criticism on the ground that it is non-transparent; more seriously, the system is perceived to be iniquitous to resource-poor countries or to smaller companies operating from the developing countries. In the WTO, only member-states are allowed to raise disputes: when a company believes that it is affected by unfair trade practices in another country, it has first to convince its own government that the issue must be raised at the WTO. More important, governments must also act in defence of companies based in their countries which have been affected by unfair trade practices of entities in other countries. To protect themselves, companies must therefore have a good relationship with their governments if they want the authorities to pursue their case.

In many of the high-profile trade disputes that have arisen recently, corporates and their own governments have gone hand-in-hand to fight their case at the WTO. In the banana war between the E.U. and the U.S., Chiquita Brands International, which owns plantations in Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico,

joined legal action against the E U In fact, Chiquita, which controls a large part of the banana trade, helped the governments in these countries fight the case

In the beef and milk war in 1997, Monsanto, the U S National Cattlemen's Association, the U S Dairy Export Council and other interest groups lobbied with the U S Government to initiate action against the E U for its ban on hormone-treated beef imports on health considerations European animal health products companies, the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industry Associations (EFPIA) and lobbied at the F U for a withdrawal of the ban because they claimed that it was affecting their interests as well

The Japanese and European governments acted on behalf of companies such as Sony, Toshiba Siemens and Philips Electronics against a Massachusetts law which penalises government purchases from companies that deal with entities in Myanmar which is under military rule They complained that the U S administration had also fought Kodak s case against Fuji for a share of the Japanese market for film and photographic paper Incidentally Kodak s CEO is a member of the ACPIN

THE WTO framework has increasingly challenged national laws related to trade, environment, food, technical standards, labour, and biotechnology, in trade jargon, these are together called "non-tariff barriers to trade' More than any other entity in the world, multinational corporations are equipped to engage in the globalisation process The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that more than two-thirds of world trade involves at least one multinational company Half of this is traded between companies belonging to the same multinational group These corporations are truly global Being the prime movers of globalisation, they have enormous stakes in managing the contradictions that arise between governments, which are answerable to people within their borders, and global business, which wants investment and trade to move freely in a seamless world.

Perhaps nothing epitomises the growing nexus between governments and big business as the spectacle of briefcase-toting Trade Ministers from across the world engaged in bargaining in Seattle. International trade bureaucrats and negotiators are another part of this spectacle.

To ensure the survival of the weakest

Interview with Dr. M.S. Swaminathan.

Dr. M.S Swaminathan sometimes recalls the excitement and effervescence during that period in the decade of the 1960s when a major revolution was brewing in the laboratories and fields of India The explosion in food production brought on by the introduction of high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice in India (and later in other parts of the developing world) created agricultural history With characteristic modesty, he deflects credit for his role in changing the face of agriculture in the developing world, but instead draws attention to the many lessons of what came to be called the Green Revolution Apart from its more obvious and recognised ones, he underlines the important political lesson drawn from that experience The Green Revolution disproved Malthusian predictions of famine and mass starvation for India It made India self-sufficient in food, a factor that played no small role in strengthening the country's political sovereignty and ability to withstand international pressures at a critical juncture

Yet it is clear that at the heart of his quest for a better, more equitable and healthier world is the challenge posed by contradictions of a situation where there is food self-sufficiency for a nation on the one hand and hunger for a growing a number of people on the other.

If there is one strand that runs through Swaminathan's distinguished five-decade public career as agricultural scientist administrator, innovator and thinker it is the concept of human welfare, a vision rooted in the ideals of socio-economic equity, women's equality, environmental conservation and ethics. For him, the food and livelihood security of nations, and of different groups and communities of persons within nations, perhaps constitute the foundation of human development Hunger gives rise to economic and social discord and leads to violence In a fundamental sense, therefore, Swaminathan s contributions to the theory and practice of human welfare have strengthened the movement for both



K. PICHUMANI

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equity and peace.

Recognition for Swaminathan's work and contributions to agricultural practice, environmental conservation, poverty eradication through the strengthening of opportunities for productive employment, women's empowerment, protection of indigenous conservation traditions and practices, and other pathsetting initiatives, have come from across the globe. He has held a series of front-ranking appointments – Director-General of the International Rice Research Institute, the Philippines (1982-1988); Independent Chairman, FAO Council (1981-85); Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large of Cornell University, United States (1989-95); Trustee of the Ford Foundation (1989-97); and President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. He currently holds the UNESCO Chair in Ecotechnology at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. He is the recipient of several Indian and international awards and prizes, most notably the Padma Vibhushan, the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership (1971), the Albert Einstein World Science Award in 1986; the first World Food Prize in 1987; the Honda Prize of the Honda Foundation in 1991; the UNESCO Gandhi Gold Medal in 1999, and the Volvo Environment Prize, 1999. He is the second Indian to be chosen for the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 1999.

In 1989, Swaminathan founded the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai. Here many of his ideas on a multi-pronged approach to poverty eradication are experimented upon through field projects. He leads a large and dedicated team of scientists and social researchers and is personally involved in each area of the Foundation's functioning.

This interview was given to **Parvathi Menon** in Pondicherry where Swaminathan had gone to attend an evaluation of the Biovillage project of the Foundation, an action plan envisaging the sustainable development of the land and water resources for improving the livelihood security of those communities which live in the 19 villages that come under the project. Here Swaminathan responds to a range of questions on the World Trade Agreement and its likely implications for India's agricultural and informal sectors; the sorts of initiatives that India and other developing countries can and must take in conferences such as the Seattle Round; the possible fall-out of the imposition of a regime of intellectual property rights for national and global diversity; the concerns that surround the issue of genetically modified organisms; and other related matters.

Excerpts from the interview:

► *In your Nehru Memorial lecture, one of the points you made was as follows. "Globalisation is creating new threats to the livelihood security of men and women living in poverty." Today the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has become the global forum where many issues relating to food security and the economic sovereignty of nations are being negotiated. Could you comment on the Seattle round and its implications for India and other developing nations in respect of these issues?*

Globalisation, indicating the removal of economic policies which protect the vulnerable sections of society, has certainly led to growing inequity between nations and within nations. The available data from the United Nations and World Bank sources show that in the last 20 years the global domestic economic product has grown from about $10 trillion in 1980 to over $30 trillion now, an increase of almost three times. This money has largely gone to about 12 to 13 countries, mostly industrialised. And in the poorer nations where some growth has taken place, most of the additional income has gone to the already well-to-do. Seven or eight years ago it was mentioned that one billion of the world's population was earning less than one dollar a day. Now this one billion has gone up to 1.3 billion. And according to the Asian Development Bank, one in three Asians is poor and lives below the poverty line, earning less than one dollar a day. Most of the poor, 900 million people, live in our part of the world, South Asia and South-East Asia.

Growth has not been even, and has been highly skewed in terms of countries and in terms of communities within the countries. There are other indications of the increasing marginalisation of the poor apart from their poverty status.

Why has this happened? Growth has not been even, and has been highly skewed in terms of countries and in terms of communities within the countries. There are other indications of the increasing marginalisation of the poor apart from their poverty status. Although the World Food Summit in 1996 called for the halving by 2015 of the numbers of men, women and children going to bed hungry, the Director-General of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) has said that the position has worsened in many countries since 1996.

As we approach a new century and millennium, we will have to think about how we can reverse the paradigm, to start with the poorest and make poverty elimination and hunger elimination the basic aim of all development. The other implication of globalisation and economic competition is the fact that large companies are swallowing up smaller companies. Efficiency is being measured in the industrialised countries and in the large multinationals in terms of the level of downsizing of the workforce. This is what the late Mahbub-ul-Haq called jobless economic growth, and that has caused much greater hardship to the poor.

► *What about the specific impact of the WTO for India and other developing countries?*

The WTO is five years old, and the Seattle Round is going to review what has happened. The World Trade Agreement (WTA) has a number of provisions, obviously to provide what is called a level playing field. For example, if the phasing out of subsidies has to be done by the industrialised countries in five years, developing countries can take ten years. But unfortunately, there is no level playing field in the world in terms of trade because one has to look at the enormous economic growth in the industrialised nations.

Take, for example, agriculture. You find even today in our country, paddy or rice drying is done on the roads in many parts of South India, Assam and so on. If you go to a North American or Australian farm, there is an enormous infrastructure investment that has been made through public funding in the last 50 years. I would say our investment in some of these areas like post-harvest technology is a minute fraction of what exists in these countries. National investment in rural development and rural infrastructure is generally going down, largely because of the debt servicing burden, the enormous cost of bureaucracy, the Pay Commission commitments and so on. There is hardly any money left

for development. As a result, where is the level playing field?

What is the purpose of trade, the ultimate human purpose of trade? I would say the world trade negotiations in Seattle should come to a mission statement on what trade is all about, what is it that we want to accomplish. If we all agree that trade has to be a very powerful mechanism to provide an opportunity for creating a productive life for every human being, then it takes a new meaning in terms of new rules and regulations. At the moment the countries of the European Community want to ensure that the high subsidies they are giving to their farmers are retained under some garb or the other. If you see the provisions for exemptions from the Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS), you will find that many areas, research and technology for example, have been exempted because they make a massive investment in frontier technologies like biotechnology and so on.

The developing countries have by and large been reactive and not proactive. The richer nations create the agenda, they prepare the first draft. Then you change a comma here and there, you have small victories, get something deleted or added. This is because we have not ourselves gone with a very clear agenda. The rich countries and those who draft the agenda will always have a fallback position. They take an extreme position and then say that they have given up so much. So I think the negotiations themselves have not been between equal partners.



K. PICHUMANI

▶ *Did India present an alternative agenda during the Uruguay round?*

We should have had a clear alternative from the time of the Uruguay negotiations, but many papers were just classified as secret, confidential and so on. There was no public debate, or public awareness, until suddenly one day the WTO came into existence and then everybody started looking at it. I think that India has not been guided by a commitment to poverty alleviation. Otherwise we would not be in this kind of position, where we have as many people below the poverty line as the entire population of India at the time of Independence.

▶ *Why do you think our government did not have the kind of commitment to use the WTO the way it should have?*

As I said, the initial drafts were all prepared by people from industrialised nations, the so-called experts, many of whom may have been well-known names in their fields. They see trade as a method of putting into practice the Darwinian hypothesis of the survival of the fittest. That is the very foundation of modern competitive trade. People who cannot compete will disappear. This is the problem. So the slate was their slate, it was a Western slate in which we dotted the i's.

▶ *Successive Indian governments have advanced the there-is-no-alternative argument as the reason for participation in the WTO on the terms set by the industrialised countries. Do you find this argument acceptable?*

If we did not become a member of the WTO we would have had to negotiate our terms of trade with each country separately and there we would always have been the loser; it is very difficult to negotiate with big powers. Therefore a multilateral mechanism with a dispute resolving mechanism is a much better one. Which is why China wants to enter the WTO; they know that being out of it is a disadvantage.

Somehow we did not develop a cogent public policy, develop a consensus among political parties, among different shades of opinion. Looking back I would say that if we had had an impact analysis on the poor as one of our policies, then we would have been in much better shape. Just as I am now saying that our Commerce Ministry's policy statement on import and export must have a livelihood impact statement. It has a sobering influence, because then you start looking at what is really going to happen. For example, if India begins importing so much of milk powder and puts milk powder on the OGL (open general licence) list, what is going to happen to the National Dairy Development Board's efforts which over a long period of time have led us to the first position in milk production in the world? Because ours are very small producers. This also holds true in many sectors – whether it is in the broad area of textiles which generates over 60 million jobs in this country, or the dairy sector which gives eight crore or 10 crore people in the rural areas additional livelihoods through ownership of a cow or a buffalo. Our production process by and large still falls under the small-scale sector and today poverty alleviation depends upon offering credit to small-scale industries.

Will the WTA consider micro-credit and micro-enterprise at all? In my view there must be a chapter, like TRIPS, in the Seattle Round on micro-entrerprises supported by micro-credit. That chapter should be prepared by us and given to them for their reaction. This would be supported by all South Asian countries, including China which also has enormous problems of providing livelihoods for each Chinese. As I said, one in every third Asian is poor. We should develop the first draft and give it to the rich countries for them to dot the i's. In a preambular statement you can quote their own words from the G-7 and G-8 resolutions on poverty, or the Copenhagen Summit, which has what is called an agreed text, or the World Food Conference, or the United Nations poverty reduction goal of 2015, and then say that if you want to achieve all this, the trade policy should be geared to ensuring the survival, not of the fittest, but of the weakest because we are trying to make them strong.

▶ *So you do think that there is negotiation space in the WTO for countries such as India?*

There is a lot of negotiation space, but that space has to be clearly defined, it has to be defined in ethical and human terms.

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You see, our large conglomerates of industries that dominate our economic policies are concerned with their own competitive ability – CII (Confederation of Indian Industry), FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) or ASSOCHAM (Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry). They look at their own self-interest, of course they have to be competitive. So they are the ones whom governments consult in such matters. They are concerned with trade and unfair competition in the automobile industry and so on. But how many are concerned with unfair competition that micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit face? That would be very high on the agenda if I were to have anything to do with the WTO because you can quote the resolutions on poverty alleviation supported by governments of rich nations, and say that if you are really serious, then this is what is needed.

► *What has been the level of India's preparedness for the Seattle Round? Do you have any comments on that?*

I think that the present Minister for Commerce, Mr. Murasoli Maran, has taken the right steps. He has tried to consult different people and political parties although the time available to him was very little.

In my view, we must define what are the four or five goals of trade. What is the principal mission statement of the WTO? Is it to produce a more equal opportunity world in which there will be a level playing field for the poor, and that trade should really become a means of promoting human security and happiness?

► *So your view is that India can swim against the tide in the WTO, we have negotiation space, we can protect our interests.*

We should look at the total picture. If we do, there is enough space. For example, if all South Asian governments have the same aim of poverty alleviation and hunger elimination, then we have a space there. We can join together and say that one of the potent tools of poverty alleviation is small-scale and decentralised enterprises that are environment-friendly and are supported by micro-credit. You may find that the richer nations may make some bargaining points but they will not be able to disagree unless they want to contradict the anti-poverty statements they made elsewhere.

One of the contemporary problems in terms of harmonising commitments made in different inter-governmental fora is the fact that different viewpoints are expressed in different U.N. fora. For example, member-governments of the FAO accept the concept of farmers' rights. Most governments, barring the U.S., have ratified the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) which places heavy emphasis on ethics and equity in the sharing of benefits from genetic resources. The same is true in many other global fora and summits such as the Copenhagen Poverty summit, or the Beijing Women's conference. There is an overall commitment in these to the eradication of poverty, to fair play, to justice, to fair, and not free, trade. But all this finally gets operationalised at the forum of the WTO. So unless governments also take a similar stand in the WTO then whatever they have said in the other fora do not make sense, because the WTO forum is really the main pathway to which the other commitments can be operationalised.

► *How prepared do you think India is to protect its genetic reserves? How would you evaluate our* sui generis *legislation which has still not been passed in Parliament but which you have had some involvement in helping to draft?*

The CBD is the first major international legally binding convention which has principles of ethics and equity incorporated in it – of both gender equity, social equity and ethical principles in relation to exploitation of bio-resources. Since we ratified it we have not yet had a legislation to convert the principles of CBD into an effective legislative position. There are now two major legislation that need to be passed – one dealing with Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) on plant varieties and farmers' rights, the other the Biodiversity Act. This should also include geographic appellations, because after the basmati patent it has become clear that we should also have some legislation to safeguard our unique products of various kinds.

We hope the present Parliament will provide high priority to providing a legal framework that is effective. For this it would also have to be realistic. For example, we should have a community gene management system from the bottom up. You can have at the State level a biodiversity board, then a national bio-diversity authority. The challenge in the Biodiversity Act is the question of management at three levels – conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits. The last is the most important. These are community contributions. We must have legal methods of recognising and rewarding communities. In the draft I prepared on the Plant Variety Protection Act , I called it a community gene fund. The community should decide in what way they will use it.

Both these acts have undergone debate and discussion in the last five to six years. They should be such that they should not be used to harass legitimate researchers. We should not be of the view that it is only our material that is being exploited. If you take our major crops like wheat, maize, jowar, bajra, in fact all cereals except rice, everything came from outside. Take all our plantation crops – rubber, tea, coffee – nothing is our own. The world has benefited from an approach of give-and-take. Therefore, when we develop these legislation we should also not have the feeling that we are the only ones who are giving and not gaining. Unless we have strong South-South collaboration, we will find that many of our breeding projects like those for rice and wheat will be in difficulty. We should not have a siege mentality. Instead we should look upon our bio-resources from the angle of bio-prosperity, or rural prosperity.

► *Does our draft* sui generis *legislation reflect that?*

Well, I have not seen the final drafts. They will probably be placed in Parliament soon. We have been pleading that plant varieties protection and farmers' rights should be linked. If we do this, we will be the first country in the world where breeders rights and farmers' rights are linked as mutually reinforcing. I think that some provisions have not really been understood, like the Community Gene Fund. If we have national commitment, we must have a one per cent cess on agricultural commodities that should be credited to the Community Gene Fund. That should go towards revitalising and rewarding the conservation traditions and ethics of tribal and rural families, the large invisible unrecognised community conservation process. Look at the very poor parts of Orissa. We have got a database on their contributions towards conservation of plant species. It is very moving, as the very poor are not working for recognition or reward. But it is people such as these who have saved the food security system of the world, and we must realise it.

So I think we should really use our *sui generis* system for achieving the triple purpose of promoting conservation, making it a people's movement; ensuring its sustainable use with participatory breeding programmes done with farming families; and ensuring equity and ethics in benefit sharing. Those behind the large unrecognised community conservation efforts

must be recognised, given social prestige and economic rewards.

▶ *What are your views on the ethics of patenting of life forms? Could a global consensus be built up against this?*

As a rule patenting of life forms is unethical. But the distinction was made by the Supreme Court in the *Diamond vs Chakravarti* case by saying that where something is a completely novel creation by human ingenuity, it can be patented. For example, you should not patent the human genome sequences because all that you are doing is studying something with the help of sophisticated technologies. You can 'discover' a new plant species and name it after yourself, that is not an invention. Invention is the product of the human brain, where something never existed but because of your effort it happened. Well, I think inventive people must be rewarded because that is how the world progresses. There is nothing wrong in honouring invention. But we must see to it that there are some international ground rules in this whole rush for patents on all kinds of things. In all patent regulation there must be a provision for compulsory licensing of rights. Suppose I discover a new rice variety which is resistant to a particular disease, it should be available to everybody, poor or rich, not only to those who can pay.

▶ *On TRIPS, in the Seattle Round, what do you think of India's position?*

India had already taken a position on a number of issues. On trade liberalisation, access to markets. But on the fundamental issues of TRIPS, I think India's position should be that we should try to promote a *sui generis* system that contains recognition and reward to farmers' rights. But we must develop a consensus among other countries also, because you must have a critical mass of countries which have the same viewpoint. So during this process we must have a national stand, a regional stand among those countries which have a high degree of poverty, like Africa, India, Latin America. There is no use pretending that we are all well off. Thirdly, I think we must insist that there is some harmonisation in global negotiation, particularly in terms of ethics and equity. We should insist on benefit-sharing, access, prior informed consent, and so on. We must move to make UPOV, the Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties, a Union for the Protection of Breeders' and Farmers' Rights. So in this way you must set the ball rolling towards a more equitable world in the new century.

"We have over 106 million farm families in the country, the largest free enterprise segment. It is important that they have choices, that they can keep their seeds, they can sell their seeds in the neighbourhood and so on. If all this is destroyed you can call it genetic enslavement."

▶ *Without this pro-poor lobby in the WTO do you think its decisions will have an adverse impact on agriculture and livelihood security?*

It will continue to have adverse implications. I have already said that importing pulses and oilseeds, as India is doing, is a measure of the neglect of dry-land farming. What are the crops of dry-land farmers? The most important are pulses and oilseeds.

In agriculture there have been two major questions. One is market access to other countries. The hope was that if the European Union and North America really reduce subsidies to their farmers, then we will have a comparative advantage. The other aspect is the quantitative restrictions. So far we find that market access has not happened. Protectionism and subsidies are very high, and now they have introduced non-tariff barriers, forms of protections like environmental concerns, pesticidal residues or even social concerns like child labour. So how far we are going to have free market access is one question. Of course we are also not really geared to compete in a big way as our post-harvest technology is poor as are our sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures. So we must make a major investment here if we are going to have a competitive advantage in terms of exports. At the same time, the industrialised countries should really improve market access and provide a level playing field by reducing subsidies.

The second aspect of quantitative restrictions is the one where we have to be very careful. If foods like pulses and oilseeds are imported indiscriminately it can kill incentives for the improvement of our dry-farming areas. So we should be careful in importing commodities that will destroy livelihoods of the poor. There should be a consensus on this, and as I said, a separate chapter or section in the revised WTA should be put which deals with trade and poverty alleviation, trade as an instrument of poverty alleviation.

▶ *You have warned about the possibility of India's 'genetic enslavement'.*

When I use the word genetic enslavement it means two things. One is to have very few options – large areas being covered by one particular strain, which ties the farmer to the company. The second include techniques like Terminator. The companies call this genetic-use restriction, which means the farmer will have to buy from them every year. That will certainly lead to the farmer's own control over his agricultural destiny being destroyed. We have over 106 million farm families in the country, the largest free enterprise segment. It is important that they have choices, that they can keep their seeds, they can sell their seeds in the neighbourhood and so on. If all this is destroyed you can call it genetic enslavement.

▶ *What are your concerns on genetically modified organisms (GMOs)?*

These concerns are now universal. There are those of an environmental nature; for example, the creation of super weeds, or the studies on the monarch butterfly, which suggest harmful effects from pollen containing the BT toxin. Also, in human beings, we do not know the kind of hay fever that may spread with new kinds of pollen. Similarly there is the food safety aspect, arising from the use of antibiotic markers in genetic engineering; when you really need them you would have developed a resistance to them. Then there are ethical issues such as the one involving the Terminator. So we have food safety concerns, we have environmental concerns, we have the whole area of ethical concerns. All these come under the blanket cover of bio-safety. Under the CBD, there should be an internationally agreed protocol on bio-safety which addresses these issues. I have always felt that there should be a broad-based National Commission on Genetic Modification for Food and Health Security to look at bio-safety issues in India.

▶ *Do you think there should be a moratorium on GMOs?*

Moratorium not in terms of research but in terms of the commercialisation of GMOs. I would say that there is no harm in waiting for a few years until the clinical, nutritional, medical and environmental trials, the ethical guidelines, are complete.■

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■ GOVERNMENT

A RUSH OF BILLS

The NDA Government rushes through with a slew of legislative measures.

SUDHA MAHALINGAM
in New Delhi

WITH the preliminaries over in the previous session, the winter session of the 13th Lok Sabha began on November 29 intent on doing serious legislative business. Emboldened by the greater security of numbers it enjoys in the Lok Sabha, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government was in a tearing hurry to push through laws that are likely to change the course of the country's economy as well as polity.

Eager to prove its reformist credentials to the international community in order to win its approval, the Government has speeded up the process of economic reforms, a sector which the Congress(I) has trodden with caution.

In the truncated first session, the Government had set the ambitious legislative agenda rolling with the introduction of three bills with major ramifications – the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Bill, the Prevention of Money Laundering Bill (PMLB) and the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Amendment Bill. The session ended without a debate on the legislative proposals. On the first day of the winter session, four more bills, all of economic importance, were tabled. They are: the IRDA Bill, the Foreign Exchange Management (FEMA) Bill, the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill and an amendment to the Securities Contracts Bill. The strategy of burdening the House within a short span with a slew of legislation, which require expert inputs for the conduct of any meaningful debate, appears to have paid off. The House passed four of the bills in the first week itself without any meaningful debate. In fact, the controversial FEMA Bill and the ineffectual PMLB were taken up and adopted on December 3, at the fag end of the week when several MPs were leaving for their respective constituencies. In fact, the House barely had a quorum. What better moment to put the bills to vote and get them passed?

With more bills on the anvil, the floodgates would be opened for the introduction of a clutch of World Trade Organisation (WTO)-ordained bills, which are under various stages of preparation. The current Lok Sabha will perhaps be remembered as the fastest law-maker in Indian legislative history.

The Congress(I), the main Opposition party with a majority in the Upper House, had initially made a song and dance about the IRDA Bill and kept the Government on tenterhooks over whether the legislation would get its support. In fact, it hardly had any ideological differences with the Government on this issue, having authored the initial phase of the reforms in the first place. Not unexpectedly, it finally decided to play ball, but only after proving a point. It premised its support to the bills on certain changes that it wanted incorporated in the IRDA Bill. The Bill, which throws open the insurance sector to private and foreign investors, was passed after incorporating the amendments prescribed by the Congress(I), despite stiff opposition from the Left parties and the insurance employees. A smirking Congress(I) now sees itself as the patron critic of the reforms process.

The IRDA Bill was rushed through hastily even as Roopchand Pal of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), who is a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, demanded the setting up of a Petitions Committee to discuss a petition signed by 1.5 crore persons against the passage of the Bill in its current form. This merely indicated the Government's cavalier attitude to popular sentiment. Deputy Speaker P.M. Sayeed did not consider it necessary to wait for the setting up of the Petitions Committee before the Bill was taken up for discussion and adoption. Vayalar Ravi of the Congress(I) urged Sonia Gandhi not to allow the passage of the Bill, but the Congress(I) had other plans.

The amendments make it mandatory for all insurance companies to invest a portion of their funds in the social and infrastructural sectors. The Congress(I) had originally sought a commitment on 75 per cent of the insurers' investible funds in these sectors. But the Government has left it to the Regulatory Authority to specify the quantum. A clause suggested by the Congress(I) that failure to comply with specified provisions be made punishable with penalties of up to Rs.25 lakh and even cancellation of licence



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan outside Parliament House on the opening day of the winter session.

A large contingent

V.VENKATESAN

PRIME Minister A.B. Vajpayee's Council of Ministers is the largest ever for a Union Government. Yet, at 74 it falls short of the size recommended by the Administrative Reforms Commission in the 1960s – 11 per cent of the combined strength of the two Houses of Parliament.

When a 70-member Ministry was sworn in on October 13, it was assumed that Vajpayee wanted to have as big a Council of Ministers as possible in order to avoid pressures for further expansion. But when he inducted three Cabinet Ministers and one Minister of State with independent charge on November 22, apart from effecting a minor reshuffle, it was dictated by corrective as well as electoral factors.

The inclusion of Shukhdev Singh Dhindsa, the Akali Dal Rajya Sabha member, as Minister for Works and Estates, was dictated by the compulsions of coalition chemistry. The absence of representation to the Sikh community in the Ministry had irked the Akali Dal, a key ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Akali Dal had won two Lok Sabha seats. Its entry into the Ministry was out of question as it did not have the minimum of six sears needed to claim a berth. The party missed the "chemistry" quota too owing to bickerings among its senior leaders about who should get a berth. Dhindsa's inclusion, which followed a process of reconciliation within the party leadership, was a corrective step, taken in order to assuage the feelings of the party and Sikhs in general.

The inclusion of Rajnath Singh, Rajya Sabha member and Uttar Pradesh BJP president, as the Cabinet Minister in charge of Surface Transport, was a foregone conclusion. The BJP wanted to reward him for having accepted the high command's nominee, Ram Prakash Gupta, as Chief Minister. Rajnath Singh had projected himself as the candidate for chief ministership in the place of Kalyan Singh. Another factor behind Rajnath Singh's entry into the Cabinet is the long-time grievance of the forward community of the State of neglect shown towards it during the tenure of Kalyan Singh. As part of a post-Kalyan Singh package, Rajnath Singh's induction was also a corrective measure. Nitish Kumar, who was earlier allotted the Surface Transport portfolio, has got Agriculture.

The inclusion of C.P. Thakur, the BJP MP from Patna who is a Bhumihar, was also done with a view to correcting a perceived imbalance in the representation of various castes from Bihar. Bihar, which has the largest contingent in the Ministry, has been showered with favours in view of the coming Assembly elections. C.P. Thakur is the Cabinet Minister for Water Resources.

The BJP's Rajya Sabha MP, Arun Shourie, is now Minister of State for Planning, Statistics and Programme Implementation. He will also be in charge of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, which is headed by the Prime Minister. Shourie seems to have been deliberately kept out of Personnel, considering his past crusade against corruption. The Department of Personnel has under it the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The Home Ministry has a role only in the case of Indian Police Service (IPS) officers. Vasundhara Raje assists the Prime Minister in the Department of Personnel and Training. Shourie had a major role in drafting the party's manifesto, and his induction from the BJP's quota is a sign that the party wants to be seen as recognising talent.

In addition to the Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, Pramod Mahajan has been allotted the newly formed Ministry of Information Technology, the relevance of which is being widely debated in industry circles (article on page 86). Satyanarayan Jatia is the new Labour Minister.

Minor changes have been effected in the portfolios of six Ministers of State. Significant among them is the shifting of Bangaru Laxman from Planning and Implementation to Railways. Mamata Banerjee, the Railway Minister, now has two Ministers of State in her Ministry. This has caused her disappointment, although she denied that she had expressed unhappiness over the reshuffle.

The allocation of portfolios suggests a deliberate move to have at least one BJP Minister of State in the Ministries headed by the alliance parties. ■

granted to the insurer in case of persistent failures, has been included in the Bill. Another amendment provides for preferential registration of those companies which seek to provide health insurance cover to individuals and groups of individuals as part of their life and general insurance policies. The Government also conceded the Congress(I)'s demand that the private companies offer insurance cover to backward, rural and the unorganised sectors. This would include crop insurance policies.

EMPLOYEES of the insurance sector staged a protest outside Parliament House. The All-India Insurance Employees' Association condemned "the haste with which the Government is proceeding towards the enactment of the IRDA Bill, 1999, despite allround opposition." Class II, III and IV employees of the Life Insurance Corporation of India and the General Insurance Corporation went on a day's strike on December 1 to protest against the adoption of the Bill. The Left parties, which believe that the passage of the Bill amounts to the betrayal of the working class, will oppose its passage in the Rajya Sabha.

However, it is possible that the IRDA Bill will have to return to the Lok Sabha for consideration of certain embarrassing clauses that have crept into the document. The Bill allows insurance companies to invest 25 per cent of their funds in securities of the Government of the United Kingdom or those guaranteed by that Government. This fact came to light when the Bill was taken up for discussion in the Rajya Sabha.

THE PMLB and FEMA constitute a composite piece of legislation. If FEMA is passed by the Rajya Sabha, for the first time in independent India, violations relating to foreign exchange will be treated as civil offences. Despite Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's assurances that capital account convertibility will not be allowed, experts feel that the loopholes in the Bill will result in large-scale flight of capital. One glaring loophole in the Bill is the arithmetical definition of a resident Indian. Anyone who has resided for more than 182 days in the course of the previous financial year alone will be reckoned

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as a resident Indian for purposes of liability under FEMA Under its predecessor, the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) no arithmetical formula was applied to determine a person's resident status FERA was more concerned with the nature of activities he or she was engaged in while abroad and his or her intention determined liability While FEMA may remove any discretion that the agency investigating the violations may have had in determining a person's culpability, it also makes it possible for anyone intending to violate FEMA to remain abroad for over 182 days during the course of a financial year in order to escape the provision of the law

Sections 6(4) and 9(d) of FEMA, which define the circumstances under which a resident Indian can hold own, transfer or invest in foreign currency, foreign security or immovable property abroad appear to have been designed specifically to shield certain persons currently being investigated for FERA violations Section 15, which allows compounding offences, further weakens an already weak law But the most controversial provision in the Bill is Section 40 which gives the Government the power to suspend or relax the operation of any or all provisions of the Act This is a blatant authorisation of governmental intervention in investigations and is unprecedented Finally, Section 49 (3) sets a time-frame of two years from the commencement of the Act for the completion of all ongoing investigations under FERA Is this time-limit realistic for investigating transnational crimes involving protracted procedures, not to mention banking secrecy laws in many parts of the world?



Employees of the insurance sector protesting against the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Bill in New Delhi.

THE Mines and Minerals (Regulation & Development) Amendment Bill, 1999 seeks to effect three changes First, it proposes to delegate to the States certain powers hitherto exercised by the Centre Based on the recommendations made by the B B Tandon Committee in December 1996, the Bill proposes to authorise State governments to grant and renew prospecting licences and mining leases for those minerals listed in schedules A and B The Bill seeks to confer full powers to the State governments for grant of mineral concessions in respect of limestone It seeks to review existing laws and procedures governing the regulation and development of minerals in order to make them more compatible with changed policies It also seeks to check illegal mining The Bill contains the new concept of reconnaissance operations' Reconnaissance as a stage distinct from prospecting operations has been included in the Bill and a person or company can apply for a reconnaissance permit for a total area of 10,000 square kilometres The statement of objectives and reasons appended to the Bill states that this will facilitate investments through the deployment of state-of-the-art exploration technologies and accelerate exploration of mineral resources The moot question is whether this is consistent with national security The Bill generated some debate with Left party MPs opposing some of the provisions. It is yet to be passed

The Lok Sabha also passed the amendment to the Securities Bill seeking to allow derivatives trading Two more amendments to the Securities Laws Bill were also tabled The amendments seek to regulate the business of dealing in securities, to promote the development of the securities market and to provide for regulation of depositories in securities

The WTO-related bills that are being drafted include the Patents Amendment Bill, the Bill to amend Copyrights, the Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Protection Bill, the Designs Bill, the Geographic Indications Bill and the Cyber Laws Bill If the Government manages to push all these bills through in the winter session as it well might it might even attempt to do the same with the Central Vigilance Commission Bill and the Women's Bill

IN an important development a BJP MP has introduced a private member's Bill to amend the Constitution to bar persons of foreign origin from holding the offices of President, Vice-president and Prime Minister Introduced by Kirit Somiaya, after prolonged wrangles, it is widely seen as an attempt to target Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi It drew protests from Congress(I) members who argued that Parliament did not have the legislative competence to consider a Bill that amounts to altering the basic structure of the Constitution They argued that the Bill sought to make a distinction between "natural born' citizens and those who acquired citizenship and therefore sought to tinker with the structure of the Constitution

The Congress(I) members objected to the Bill also on the ground that it had not been cleared by the committee on private members' bills Prime Minister A B Vajpayee, for his part, said that the issue of "foreign origin" formed part of the NDA's manifesto and that every member had a right to introduce any legislation on any issue

The NDA Government is not likely to be take up the Small States Bill, which would have enabled the formation of Vananchal, Uttarakand and Chattisgarh States The introduction of this Bill is being resisted by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). The rumblings within Andhra Pradesh for a separate Telengana State is behind the TDP's stand. ■

A party adrift

The Congress(I) leadership's recent actions and also inaction on various crucial issues, point to rank confusion.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in New Delhi

THE political pantomime in Orissa over the issue of replacing Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang has indeed been a reflection of the current state of affairs in the Congress(I). Hit very badly by a cyclone, what Orissa needed was concerted relief efforts by the government besides those by social and political organisations. But at that very moment, the primary concern of the ruling party, the Congress(I), seemed to be inner-party power struggles. On the one side, former Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik and Basanth Biswal, a Minister in Gamang's Cabinet, were trying to overthrow the Chief Minister, while on the other, Gamang was trying his best to hang on to the Chief Minister's post. Worse still, the central leadership, under party president Sonia Gandhi, became enmeshed in this inopportune political game instead of making efforts to set things in order.

Almost all the moves made by the Congress(I) since the beginning of the winter session in Parliament have been characterised by an absence of positive political direction or purpose. The party leadership appeared to be flitting from one organisational and political initiative to another without actualising any of them. And the result is rank confusion.

THE party leadership began its preparations for the winter session based on the premise that it had to advance its struggle on the demand to delete former Congress(I) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's name from the charge-sheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the long-running Bofors pay-offs case. The party was under the impression that it had made gains on this front during the previous session of Parliament, on account of the statement made by Home Minister L.K. Advani on the floor of the Lok Sabha during the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address. Advani had said that he could "understand Sonia Gandhi's sentiments and feelings on the issue" and that "the government was considering all aspects relating to the inclusion of Rajiv Gandhi's name in the Bofors charge-sheet". The Congress(I) saw this as a positive gesture, and believed that it needed to take this gesture to its "logical conclusion". It hoped to put to use its numerical strength in the Rajya Sabha as also the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government's eagerness to complete its "second-generation economic reforms", in pushing its own case.

The Congress(I) was aware that the Government needed its support to pass its bills in the Rajya Sabha, starting with the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) Bill. Leaders such as Pranab Kumar Mukherjee had been indicating that the Congress(I)'s support would not be forthcoming if the Government failed to act suitably on the matter of the Bofors case charge-sheet. In fact, observers believe that this was the real reason behind the conciliatory-sounding statement made by Advani in Parliament.

However, the Congress(I)'s hopes of exerting pressure on the Government on the basis of its support for the pro-reform measures fell flat on the first day of the



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.

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Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi receiving the AICC introspection Committee Report from committee chairman A.K. Antony in New Delhi on November 30.

winter session. Making it clear that the Government had no intention of following up on the "conciliatory gesture", Advani told the Lok Sabha that any move to delete Rajiv Gandhi's name from the charge-sheet would amount to interference in the CBI probe. He said that the Government had sought the opinion of the Attorney-General on whether it was permissible to seek to delete a name from the charge-sheet, and whether any proceedings should be initiated under Section 321 of the Criminal Procedure Code for this. Advani said that the Attorney-General had stated that Section 321 of the CrPC – which empowers the Government to proceed for withdrawal of prosecution – was not applicable in this case because the process of framing the charges and launching prosecution had not been initiated. The same day, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee said that the provisions of the relevant laws did not favour the deletion of the late Prime Minister's name.

Under these circumstances, what remained to be seen was whether the Congress(I) would go through with its threat of not cooperating with the Government on the legislative business. In the next four days it became clear that it was only an empty threat. On December 1, the Congress(I) supported the IRDA Bill in the Lok Sabha, even as the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party (S.P.) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) registered their opposition and staged a walk-out.

The Congress(I)'s only consolation was that the Government adopted four amendments moved by it, including a social obligation clause that would bind insurers to invest in social and infrastructural sectors, and a penalty provision to deal with defaulters. Clearly, it was the Congress(I), rather than the BJP-led Government that got the wrong end of the stick *vis-a-vis* the pro-reform bill.

Three streams of opinion had clashed within the Congress(I) on this issue before the pro-reform lobby prevailed, compelling the Congress(I) to support the Government. Broadly, Jairam Ramesh, Manmohan Singh and Vayalar Ravi represented the three streams. When Manmohan Singh, who put the economic reforms process in place, advocated "reforms with a human face" that would, with its pro-poor slant, focus on issues such as primary health care and education, Jairam Ramesh pointed out that pro-poor policies have to be in tune with the larger liberalisation framework and cannot be pursued just to gain populist support. Vayalar Ravi and Congress Working Committee (CWC) members such as Rajesh Pilot and A.K. Antony were of the view that the reforms process has to be reviewed in terms of the Congress(I)'s original policies that laid greater emphasis on building an egalitarian society. Manmohan Singh's contention on the IRDA Bill was that the Congress(I) should introduce amendments such as the social obligation clause, a proposal that was supported by leaders such as Madhavrao Scindia. The opposition by Ravi, Pilot and others to the basic approach of the IRDA Bill was brushed aside on the strength of the majority view – a combination of Manmohan Singh's and Jairam Ramesh's perceptions. Consequently, the Congress(I) cooperated with the Government despite the fact that it failed to get the expected results with regard to the Bofors case charge-sheet.

THE Congress(I) suffered yet another reverse when the party's government in Goa, which had come to power in June with a clear majority, collapsed (story on page 52). The collapse highlighted the lack of coordination between the party's central leadership and its State units. Sonia Gandhi continued to maintain that the Congress(I) government would stay in power – even as a non-Congress(I) Ministry was being formed! The party president was obviously unaware of the dynamics within the State unit.

THIS trend of confusion continued on the organisational front too, even as the party completed the process of analysing the reasons behind the reverses it suffered in the Lok Sabha elections. A 200-page report was submitted by an 11-member committee led by A.K. Antony and comprising leaders such as Mani Shankar Aiyar, P.M. Sayeed, Motilal Vora and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. The committee made 20 sets of recommendations on improving the party set-up in terms of organisational structure and inner-party discipline and its image. The report has apparently recommended action at both national and State levels. However, the leadership, especially party president Sonia Gandhi, has not moved to implement the recommendations. The official explanation is that the CWC has to study the report in detail before any step is taken. But party insiders say that the leadership is apprehensive about rubbing the power lobbies in different States the wrong way.

According to them, although the committee has gone into the party's failings in detail, it has not acknowledged one important point raised by many of the respondents – Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. Although many respondents are believed to have said that it was a major handicap in the election campaign, the committee glossed over it. The views expressed are, however, reported to have been incorporated in the report as an appendix. Given the fact that an important body like the introspection committee has indulged in cloak-and-dagger tactics, there are doubts in the party over

the success of any organisational and political restructuring exercise.

The constitution of a few more committees under the leadership of senior leaders to look into various aspects of organisational restructuring, as was done after the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, is on the cards. It is another matter that the recommendations made by the committees set up in 1998 are yet to be implemented and the bodies themselves are increasingly being perceived as vehicles of indecision and procrastination.

THE Orissa episode brought to the fore the same malady. In the absence of a purposeful central leadership, the party's State-level leaders are stooping to new lows in their efforts to retain their hold over party and governmental positions and widen their ranks. Gamang and the dissident leaders accused each other of wanting to pocket the relief funds from international sources.

Another aspect that became clear as the game of oneupmanship progressed was that the balance of power among various groups in the party is such that the process of selecting a successor is difficult. The most powerful group that opposed Gamang was led by J.B. Patnaik. However, the numbers in the CLP being what they are, Patnaik cannot think of returning as Chief Minister without the support of the Hemanth Biswal group. The Biswal group, on its part, was trying to use this to project its own leader as an alternative candidate for the chief ministership. The central leadership's inability to take a tough decision and force the issue became obvious when a team led by CWC member Madhavrao Scindia and comprising leaders such as Vayalar Ravi, returned from Bhubaneswar twice without finding a solution.

IN the final analysis, these goings on have only contributed to strengthening the perception that Sonia Gandhi does not really have it in her when it comes to leadership capabilities. More and more middle and junior level leaders have begun to express their dismay over the way the party is being run. Whether this will snowball into a major inner-party movement, and if this happens, who will lead that movement, are two questions doing the rounds.

It is clear that the party cannot hope to advance its political ambitions until certain corrective measures are taken either under Sonia Gandhi's leadership or outside of it. ■

POLITICS

Familial conflicts

Their merger plans gone awry, the Janata Dal (United), the Samata Party and the Lok Shakti struggle to stay afloat as a combine.

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in New Delhi

LOK SHAKTI leader Ramakrishna Hegde's exclusion from the second round of appointments in the Union Cabinet on November 22 is an early sign of imminent discord within the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. It also shows that all is not well in the much heralded "Janata parivar".

Except in the upper echelons of the Samata Party, it was generally assumed that the Cabinet expansion would provide a pretext to accommodate Hegde. Prior to the expansion, Hegde was known to have met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee twice. Other meetings with senior functionaries of the "Janata parivar" had appeared almost to guarantee the disgruntled Hegde, who was looking to be mollified with a significant elevation, a Cabinet berth. As it happened, all the speculation was unfounded.

The turn of events will prove a setback to the proposed merger of the Lok Shakti with the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United). Any friction within the Janata parivar could in turn seriously impair relations among its various constituents and the BJP. Given that the BJP-JD(U) alliance was forged in Karnataka amidst hostility from the State BJP unit, it seemed only a matter of time before the euphoria of the NDA's election victory would wear off.

Protesting loudly over his exclusion, Hegde lay the blame squarely on Defence Minister George Fernandes, who is also the leader of the JD(U) Parliamentary Party. The Lok Shakti unit in Delhi held a protest demonstration outside Fernandes' residence, accusing him of "stabbing Hegde in the back". The Samata Party said that the decision to keep Hegde out was taken jointly with the JD(U).

Meanwhile, Union Minister for Civil Aviation Sharad Yadav left no stone unturned to bring about a rapprochement between the Samata Party and the Lok Shakti. He met Hegde more than once in a bid to mollify him, but with little success. A close aide of Sharad Yadav's told *Frontline* that overcoming mutual resentment was proving difficult.

On October 30, the JD(U) steering committee met in the absence of Fernandes and adopted a resolution that stated that the "failure to consult and communicate with Mr. Hegde is an alarming lapse that casts serious doubts on the future functioning" of the NDA. Articulating its position, the Lok Shakti said: "It has not enhanced the image of the new government. It has created a crisis of confidence." The NDA was reminded of its commitment to "sincere and genuine consensus" among all its constituents.

Holding out the promise of an alliance-in-the-making, Sharad Yadav, Fernandes, Hegde, Paswan and J.H. Patel had shared a podium at a "unity" rally in Bangalore on August 7. The "socialist bloc" within the NDA seemed to seek a greater salience in the affairs of the ruling coalition. The election results, however, drove a wedge in its plans. The reunified Janata Dal suffered a drubbing in Karnataka, though its robust performance in Bihar partly redeemed its position. Hegde was largely held responsible for the setback in Karnataka, though he was not given credit for the outcome in Bihar.

Differences cropped up among the three Janata Dal splinter groupings soon after the first list of Cabinet Ministers was announced on October 13. JD(U) leaders Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan – newcomers to the NDA – earned important Cabinet positions, while Hegde, an older ally, was left out. In apportioning the limited quota of Cabinet berths available to it, the Janata parivar faced a thorny problem. It was important to maximise the representation from Bihar, in order to boost the chances of the alliance in the March 2000 Assembly elections. Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan earned their positions by virtue of this calculation and Hegde was eliminated on account of the



V. SUDERSHAN

From left, Ramakrishna Hegde, Sharad Yadav, J.H. Patel, George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar at a press conference in New Delhi in July 1999.

fact that Karnataka had lost its priority after the elections.

It has become politically expedient for the NDA to give importance to the leaders from Bihar, especially Sharad Yadav who defeated Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president Laloo Prasad Yadav in Madhepura.

Samata Party sources said that the choice of ministerial candidates was made collectively, keeping in mind the coming Bihar Assembly elections and the ground reality of the Lok Shakti's poor performance in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Karnataka. The final decision rested with the Prime Minister, he added.

Referring to Hegde's protests, a Samata Party leader said: "He should have shown statesmanship by not making an issue of his exclusion but rather contributed in helping out with the coming Bihar elections." As far as the Samata Party was concerned, Karnataka was a closed chapter while Bihar was "yet to come". The leader said: "The fact is that the Lok Shakti exists only in Karnataka. The Samata Party is a political force in Bihar and exists in Manipur as well." Making an oblique reference to the JD(U), he added: "But for us, Laloo Yadav could not have been defeated and our party people want that fact to be acknowledged. We would also not like someone else to take credit for our sacrifices."

It is not clear whether or not Fernandes played a role in denying Hegde a ministership. Though originally from Karnataka, Fernandes' political fortunes today are inextricably tied up with Bihar. He may have felt inclined to plead on behalf of Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan and sacrifice Hegde's interests. Moreover, as the vote percentage of the alliance between Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress(I) had gone up in the Lok Sabha elections, he had a strong incentive to ensure that the Janata parivar in Bihar remained united. Moreover, Samata Party leader Nitish Kumar had won the election by a narrow margin.

The Assembly elections in Bihar would put pressure on the parties of the Janata parivar to accelerate their merger process and project a degree of credibility as a political force within the NDA. During a visit to Patna recently, Ram Vilas Paswan gave expression to these sentiments. The delay in formalising the merger, he said, "sent wrong signals to the people". "I fail to understand the reasons for the delay when we contested the Lok Sabha poll on a common symbol and reaped a rich electoral harvest in Bihar," he added.

The names of two or more chief ministerial aspirants from the Janata parivar are doing the rounds in Bihar, Paswan and Nitish Kumar being among them. Rumblings over seat-sharing among the BJP, the JD(U) and the Samata Party have begun, with some sections going public with their demands.

Matters are not helped by the tenuous character of relations between the Bihar units of the Samata Party and the JD(U). The induction of an RJD leader, former Union Minister Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav, in the JD(U) also put a spoke in the wheel. Not only did this displease the JD(U) unit in Bihar, the Samata Party unit expressed reservations over what it called a "unilateral decision" by JD(U) president Sharad Yadav. There had been some heartburn in the Samata Party when a senior leader from Uttar Pradesh, K.C. Tyagi, joined the JD(U) earlier. Despite their pivotal role in the Bihar elections, party workers felt that they were being taken for granted by Sharad Yadav.

However, according to Samata Party sources, the "crisis of confidence" cannot be resolved merely by allocating a ministerial berth to Hegde. Sections close to Fernandes in the Samata Party say that a merger makes little difference to the situation on the ground, as elections were fought along with the JD(U) and the Lok Shakti on a common symbol, the arrow, and can be fought again for the Bihar Assembly elections. Samata Party general secretary Jaya Jaitly said: "Ideologically, we are on the same plane regarding social justice and corruption in Bihar. It would have been better if we were a larger, cohesive group to avoid uncertainties and splits."

Organisational details remain to be worked out, including a decision who will be the president of the unified party. The party symbol also remains to be decided by the Election Commission. The merger may be further delayed if seat-sharing arrangements in Bihar run into rough weather. But as the three parties represent different caste banks, it is in their self-interest to maintain their opportunistic alliance until at least the next round of elections. ■

Axe on autonomy

In its pursuit of a sectarian agenda, the BJP-led Government decides to retire two perceived ideological opponents from the Prasar Bharati board.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN
in New Delhi

WHATEVER its underlying rationale, the Government's decision "retiring" two members of the Prasar Bharati board on November 22 showed a shrewd appreciation of infirmities in the law. The matter of propriety though, is something else, since the two individuals concerned – historian Romila Thapar and Hindi litterateur Rajendra Yadav – have been zealous in guarding the Prasar Bharati mandate against dilution. It was an attitude that meant almost axiomatically that they were the most liable to run into conflict with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), never known to be overly scrupulous in its regard for the integrity of autonomous institutions.

Rationalising the Government's action, Arun Jaitley, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting, resorted to certain curious locutions. His initial justification was that the electronic media needed a dose of professionalism – a mission to which the talents of a historian and a literary figure were supposedly superfluous. On closer interrogation about the political motivations underlying the retirement of two known critics of the BJP style of politics, Jaitley sought to reverse the onus. Since there was no political intent read into their appointment, none, he argued, need be read into their removal from office. And then, as a lawyer of fair eminence, Jaitley's final recourse was legalistic. "We have done nothing illegal," he declared and if the affected persons thought there were sufficient grounds, they were free to take the Government to court.

In pursuit of the new mantra of professionalism, Jaitley has appointed an "expert committee" to review the entire gamut of organisational issues connected to the electronic media. Bearing the onerous responsibility of proposing the new structure of Doordarshan and All India Radio are N.G. Narayanamurti, chairman of the sofware firm Infosys, Kiran Karnik, chief executive of the Discovery Channel, and Shunu Sen, the well-known management consultant. Rajiv Ratna Shah, Chief Executive Officer of Prasar Bharati, will be the convenor of the committee and official representation will be secured through the presence of R.C. Mishra, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.



P V SHIVAKUMAR

Arun Jaitley, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting.

AUTONOMY was a greatly desired goal in the days of stifling official control over the electronic media. The basic framework of autonomy was spelt out in the Prasar Bharati Act, adopted by Parliament in 1990. It was a goal that the BJP had endorsed with few qualifications.

In the following years, a fairly well-structured set of attitudes towards media law has been in evidence among the main political parties. The Congress(I) has been indifferent towards the cause of autonomy and sluggish in its response to global changes. The Janata Dal, largely responsible for the enacting of the autonomy law, wrote its logical sequel during its next brief spell in power. For S. Jaipal Reddy, Minister for Information and Broadcasting in the I.K. Gujral government, notifying the Prasar Bharati Act in July 1997 – in less than three months since taking office – was an act of personal commitment, in the face of overwhelming political indifference.

In October 1997, Jaipal Reddy issued an ordinance that sought to iron out some of the rough edges in the Act. This exercise was necessitated in particular by the burgeoning growth of the electronic media since the Act was adopted in 1990. From being the relatively simple task of writing rules for one broadcaster, the mission of policy had been transformed into the multi-dimensional one of regulating the complex, technology-driven growth of the entire electronic media. Some of the provisions of the Prasar Bharati Act were in this reckoning best transferred to the jurisdiction of a Broadcasting Act, which would be much wider in scope. Jaipal Reddy's effort to kickstart the Prasar Bharati through ordinance was integrally connected to the legislative agenda he unveiled in November 1997, through the introduction of the Broadcasting Bill in Parliament.

The matter remained inconclusive, since the Gujral government resigned on November 27 over the patent triviality of the M.C. Jain Commission's interim report. Significantly though, the Prasar Bharati board had been partly constituted before the government quit. Following a formal communication of October 30, 1997, from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Vice-President Krishan Kant had begun consultations towards the appointment of the board. Under the terms of the Act, the Vice President, the Chairman of the Press Council of India and a government nominee constitute the authority that appoints the members of the Prasar Bharati board. Jaitley's argument – that the board had been put in place by the United Front in its last days – is a non sequitur, since the entire process is outside the purview of the government.

Of the seven part-time members appointed to the Prasar Bharati board in November 1997, the eminent journalist Nikhil Chakravartty was designated Chairman. All the appointments were to a fixed term of six years, in accordance with the October ordinance. In the political flux that ensued, the ordinance was not brought before Parliament for ratification, which in effect meant that the provisions of the 1990 Act were restored to application.

Since May 1998, when the BJP first

assumed office at the Centre, the government has made no effort to frame rules under the Prasar Bharati Act. When the opportunity arose though, it was quick to seize upon the provision of the Act which requires that one-third of the members of the board retire every two years. Chakravartty's demise and the elevation of another member to a gubernatorial position meant that there were five members to choose from. Prasar Bharati itself was of the opinion that if the requirements of the law were to be met, the two retiring members could be chosen through a random draw of lots. Decrying this procedure as arbitrary, Jaitley chose to wield his hatchet against those he saw as dissidents with the BJP world-view.



M. LAKSHMANAN

Romila Thapar.

Romila Thapar's response was measured: "They have deliberately picked up the two persons who they thought were ideologically opposed to them. Quite clearly, it confirms their fear of people who do not share their opinion." The issue, she argued, was not confined merely to two individuals. Rather, it had a bearing on the autonomy and integrity of the institutions of democracy. On display was the same tendency to first hobble and then commandeer institutions by packing them with individuals of a particular political inclination.

Rajendra Yadav was more outspoken. Since the electoral process was set under way, he recalls, he had assumed the authority on behalf of the Prasar Bharati board, to monitor public grievances about the quality of political coverage in the electronic media. He had in this capacity received no fewer than 1,500 complaints from viewers about Doordarshan's unseemly bias towards the BJP. For every individual who writes, he argues, there must be at least a thousand who share the same perception. His experience in this respect reflects a fairly widespread sense of disaffection with the management of the electronic media by the BJP-led government. It is not in the character of the BJP, he concludes, to tolerate institutional autonomy or cultural diversity.



R.V. MOORTHY

Rajendra Yadav.

Jaipal Reddy for his part has denounced the government's action as "outrageously improper and clearly illegal". He has given notice for a parliamentary discussion on the issue and expects the backing of the Left parties in his endeavour to hold the government accountable. He has reason to be incensed. Until he infused life into the notion of autonomy in 1997, the government had begun to get lazily complacent over its absolute control over the media. The lull that followed that phase of activity has, however, created a massive burden of ambiguity in the domain of broadcasting law. Failing the enforcement of public scrutiny, it is a situation that seems ideal for the pursuit of the BJP's own rather sectarian agenda.

Rajendra Yadav is not yet quite prepared to give in. On December 2, he filed a petition in the Delhi High Court, challenging the government's decision to remove him from the Prasar Bharati board. Wide-ranging in its contents, the petition alleges that the Ministry's action betrays fundamental anti-intellectual and anti-democratic tendencies. The legal requirement only stipulates that two members should retire every two years. Since one of the six part-time members has already resigned on being appointed Governor, the needs of law would be met merely by retiring one of the remaining members. The Ministry has in this regard overstepped its authority and given transparent expression to its ideological biases, by choosing two known critics of the BJP for retirement.

The petition is scheduled to be heard on December 20. Clearly, the last word has not been said on the tortuous saga of media autonomy in India. ■

■ CONTROVERSY

T.K. RAJALAKSHMI
in New Delhi

THE Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), which recently faced a controversy over amendments made to its its original trust deed, is in a spot again. Among other things, the amendments had sought to make five members of the IGNCA Trust, including Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi, life members. Now, the stepping down of former President of India, R. Venkataraman, from the post of life-trustee, and an audit report submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India which has identified financial irregularities in the functioning of the trust, have added to the controversy.

While the CAG report has cheered the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has been calling for a top-level reconstitution of the IGNCA, the Congress(I) finds itself in an embarrassing position over the life-trustee issue. The other life-trustees are P.V. Narasimha Rao, H.Y. Sharada Prasad and Kapila Vatsyayan, academic director.

Venkataraman is believed to have stepped down after his attempts to persuade the Board of Trustees to stick to the original trust deed went unheeded. Observers, however, link the step to a public interest petition challenging the amendments to the trust deed, filed by Naresh Pandey, an advocate, in the Delhi High Court. Of late, Venkataraman is known to have had a congruence of views with the BJP on several issues, especially on a proposed constitutional amendment to ensure fixed terms for the Lok Sabha, supposedly in order to ensure the stability of governments. His decision to step down has buttressed the BJP-led Government's case to reconstitute the IGNCA.

Interestingly, although the public interest petition was filed in August 1998, it hit the headlines only during the run-up to the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. An affidavit was filed by the Human Resource Development Ministry (*Frontline*, July 30, 1999). The BJP-led caretaker government's move was seen by many people as part of its efforts to gain political mileage vis-a-vis the Congress(I). The government contended that the amendments made to the trust deed were invalid on three counts: one, the condition that "prior written approval" be obtained under Clause 24

More trouble at IGNCA

The exit of a life-trustee and the findings of a CAG report add to the woes of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts.

of the trust deed was not complied with; secondly, "the rules of the Government of India relating to matters which may concern two departments" were overlooked; and thirdly, Rule 7 of the Rules which requires Cabinet approval for proposals to vary or reverse a decision previously taken by the Cabinet, was also not complied with. The affidavit stated that the amendments were, therefore, "invalid and have no standing in the eyes of the law."

The affidavit held that since the government had not received any response from the IGNCA regarding the legal position set out in two letters dated November 3, 1998 and January 27, 1999, the government would initiate appropriate proceedings and adopt measures that are necessary to ensure that obligations under the trust deed are discharged in conformity with the unamended provisions of the deed, besides taking necessary steps "to protect the interests of the government in respect of the moveable and immoveable properties made available by the government to the IGNCA, including resumption of the land, if required."

The IGNCA had another setback when a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court on September 23 allowed the Union Government to proceed against it (*Frontline*, October 22, 1999). Expressing its displeasure over Sonia Gandhi being made president of the trust, the Bench asked "how being the widow of a former Prime Minister conferred any qualification of being an expert on art and culture and entitled her to be president of the trust without authority from the government." On the issue of the IGNCA having received government funds over a period of time, the Bench observed that "merely because some eminent people are involved does not mean that the trust should be given largesse."

THE CAG report has come up with a fairly long list of irregularities. The first one relates to the sanction of an initial corpus fund of Rs.25 crores in March 1987, besides additional grants of Rs.25 crores between 1992-95. The audit report states that the provisions of the General Financial Rules of the government were violated in that grant of funds in the nature of a corpus is not allowed. A subsection of the Rules stipulates that sanction can be considered only on the basis of viable and specific schemes drawn up in detail by the institution concerned. Besides, interest accruals to the tune of Rs.24 crores were not used for IGNCA's programmes, but were re-invested in order to increase its income.

The IGNCA, which chose to remain silent on the issue of the trust deed, maintaining that the matter was sub judice and that the court was the ultimate arbiter, chose to react to the CAG report. It stated that the extra amount of Rs.25 crores was released by the Government of India on the recommendation of the Planning Commission's Working Group on Arts.



Former President R. Venkataraman.

The CAG report states that the IGNCA utilised only a small part of the Rs.3 crores sanctioned to it for observing the 10th death anniversary of Indira Gandhi, and that it had failed to return the Rs.2.85 crores that was unutilised. The IGNCA maintains that the money was transferred by the Department of Culture *suo motu* to the IGNCA on March 31, 1995, to be utilised as per the IGNCA's directions.

The CAG report charges the IGNCA with having received grants in excess of the actual requirement for constructing a building complex in 1995-96, and again in 1996-97. The IGNCA's response to this is rather ambiguous. It states that since March 1998, the construction of another building had been taken up, and that up to 90 per cent of the money released – which the CAG places at Rs.84.55 crores – had been utilised. The CAG, however, found that only 51.43 per cent of the grant released for construction was utilised. Justifying the receipt of extra funds, a press release from the IGNCA states: "This is normal in any building project, since expenditure is low in the initial stages and increases only as the work progresses." Against a total expenditure of Rs.45.52 crores required for constructing a complex, the IGNCA had, up to March 1998, received Rs.84.55 crores as separate grants, and had by March 1997 accumulated Rs.1.49 crores on investments from these grants, with the total amounting to nearly double the stipulated expenditure.

The CAG report stated that although the board of trustees was in favour of a government body serving as the construction management agency, the Central Public Works Department had been overlooked in favour of a private company, resulting in an extra expenditure of Rs.2.40 crores. The IGNCA, however, termed this "factually incorrect". The CAG also said that the architect selected to design the building failed to meet the deadline, as a result of which the estimated cost of the project increased from Rs.100 crores to Rs.330 crores. Although the architect could have been penalised under the terms of the agreement, the provision was not exercised.

THE CAG report and the trust deed issue are likely to keep the Congress(I) busy over the next few months. The petition in the High Court is scheduled to come up for hearing in January. For now, neither the IGNCA nor its political patron, the Congress(I), is in a confrontational mood.

An IGNCA spokesperson told *Frontline* that the amendments had taken the "spirit of autonomy in the original deed" to its logical conclusion. Rebutting the charge that the IGNCA was being run like a private trust, he said that no property, moveable or immoveable, could be alienated without the approval of the government. ■

Towards elections

The suspension of Kalyan Singh from the BJP has set in motion political processes that seem to lead inexorably towards early elections to the State Assembly.

VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN
in Lucknow

UTTAR PRADESH is heading for early Assembly elections This is evident from the developments within the Bharatiya Janata Party and the coalition government it leads in U.P., as well as the responses of the main Opposition parties in the State – the Samajwadi Party (S.P), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Congress (I).

The new political signals have come in three bundles First, it is the commotion within the State unit of the BJP as well as the coalition – involving partners such as the Uttar Pradesh Loktantrik Congress (UPLC) and the Janatantrik Bahujan Samaj Party (JBSP) in the wake of the suspension from the BJP of Kalyan Singh, former Chief Minister and one of the national vice-presidents of the party Secondly, the populist measures adopted by the State Government led by Ram Prakash Gupta, who has replaced Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister Thirdly, the manoeuvres by parties such as the S P and the BSP at the grassroots level



SUBIR ROY

Former U.P. Chief Minister Kalyan Singh with his successor Ram Prakash Gupta in Lucknow.

The suspension of Kalyan Singh from the party came on November 27, after three days of heated exchanges between him and the party leadership, including Union Home Minister L K Advani, who was once considered to be his benefactor The decade-old feuds between the supporters and detractors of Kalyan Singh had intensified to such a level that the central leadership was compelled to sacrifice a leader who was considered to be its biggest vote-catcher in Uttar Pradesh for nearly 15 years. The suspension reinforced Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's position in the party as its uncontested leader. The immediate provocation for Kalyan Singh's suspension was his sustained and vituperative campaign against Vajpayee, whom he held responsible for his removal from the Chief Minister's post.

Although party leaders sought to describe the suspension as a bold step meant to convey the message that no leader was indispensable to the party, the fact remains that it is bound to generate new complications for the party in U.P. Given Kalyan Singh's image as a champion of the backward castes, his expulsion could lead to an erosion in the party's base among these sections. Questions regarding Suspended from the Bharatiya Janata Party, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Kalyan Singh is clearly in a belligerent mood. He is even prepared to take on the might of the party establishment. In particular, he holds Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee responsible for his suspension. But even his closest supporters do not seem to know how he will fight the BJP establishment.

Small groups of Kalyan Singh's followers have been assembling at his Mall Avenue residence in Lucknow almost every day since his suspension from the party. Meeting them, he resorts to stock phrases to describe his intentions. "I am waiting for the mango to ripen. I will not pluck it raw, nor will I allow it to overripen." Despite this tone of confidence, the general impression is that his pronouncements do not set out a clear political path.

In Lucknow, **Venkitesh Ramakrishnan** talked to Kalyan Singh about his plans and why he went against the "iron-cast discipline" of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.

Excerpts:

▶ *After you were removed from the Chief Minister's post, you virtually invited suspension by going hammer and tongs against the Prime Minister. What made you do it?*

I was accused in a show-cause notice of bringing disrepute to the party and its office-bearers. The notice stated that I had done this repeatedly in the near and not-so-near past. I have been a loyal party worker for 45 years. I would like to know from the central leadership, including the respected Kushabhau Thakreji, to show a single instance of intemperance on my part. Nothing was pointed out in the notice.

The fact of the matter is that a group of BJP leaders, with the blessings

On the path of struggle

Interview with Kalyan Singh.

and sometimes under the active leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, was keen to defame me before the people and party supporters. One thought that this would stop once I stepped down from office in the larger interests of the party. But that did not happen. I had no alternative but to speak my mind on some issues. This has been branded as indiscipline. It is clear that they had decided to throw me out of the party.

Even while succumbing to the wishes and stratagems of this self-seeking group of party leaders and stepping down as Chief Minister, I expressed a wish that I be allowed to die as a party worker and my mortal remains covered in the party flag. These people have denied me even that one wish.

▶ *What will be your future course of action?*

Obviously, it is the path of struggle. Struggle for truth and justice and for the self-respect of the oppressed and the downtrodden. The BJP was once committed to these ideals. But from the look of things, the present leadership under Atal Behari Vajpayee seems to be giving up all its traditional slogans. My struggle is to revive all that. I know that this will be a strenuous exercise. But I am ready to wage a long and arduous battle to achieve it. I am repeatedly telling my followers that only those who are capable of hard and prolonged battles need join me. The initial response to my call has been very encouraging. I have received a favourable response not just from Uttar Pradesh but also from Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar and Rajasthan.

▶ *Would bringing down the present U.P. government and campaigning against the BJP in States where Assembly elections are imminent also be part of the struggle?*

I have no interest in toppling the government of the day. But it is already perceived as a weak government led by a weak Chief Minister, which is incapable of advancing the interests of the State and its people on independent strength and assessment. Hence, it will collapse under its own weight. If I want, this government would fall in less than 24 hours. But that is not the aim of my struggle. My struggle will be based on ideals and principles. As for campaigning against the BJP, I will take a decision when the time comes.

▶ *What socio-political slogans have you chosen to inspire your struggle?*

You won't have to wait long to find out. In a few days the slogans will emerge.

▶ *You have been concerned about the negligence of the backward castes by large sections of the upper-caste dominated BJP leadership, a stance that made you appear to be working in tandem with Mulayam Singh Yadav and the Samajwadi Party. At the same time, you have reiterated your commitment to the Hindutva agenda advanced by the Sangh Parivar. How will these issues be reconciled in your proposed struggle?*

Let me make it clear that I am not working in tandem with anybody. I have not approached any party, nor has any party approached me. The issues I raised with respect to the BJP are not merely with regard to the neglect of backward castes but of all oppressed sections. And in advancing this cause, Hindutva will be one of my guiding philosophies, whether some people like it or not. For me, Hindutva is a synonym for nationalism, Bharatiya identity, Bharatiya culture and Bharatiya heritage. My Hindutva does not differentiate between religions, classes, communities and beliefs. It is a concept that even illiterate people understand and one that is virtually the life breath of our country.

▶ *But during the Ayodhya agitation that culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Hindutva stand was distinctly inimical to a minority community.*

That is a wrong assessment. And it is also not right to say that the disputed structure, which was demolished, was the Babri Masjid. I have repeatedly told my Muslim friends that in Ayodhya only the Ram Mandir can come up at the Ram Janmasthan. I have told them that they should cooperate in the construction of the Ram Mandir and Hindus would cooperate in building a beautiful masjid at a different spot in Ayodhya itself. This cooperation will become the finest symbol of communal harmony in the country.

▶ *You have been a worker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for long. In the context of your expulsion from the BJP, what ties will you have with the RSS?*

When I was a seventh standard student, the RSS started a unit in my village. I joined it and I learnt the lessons of Hindutva from the RSS. The values and principles it represented will always be an asset for me and I too will always be an asset for the RSS. There will be no contradiction between the two.

▶ *Leaders such as former Jan Sangh leader Balraj Madhok who were ousted from the recognised political wing of the RSS made similar claims when they formed new political organisations. But they failed to make any real impact on mainstream politics.*

It is quite possible for history to change. ■

ing the party's strategy to meet such a situation do not evoke a clear reply from BJP leaders.

On the face of it, the BJP Legislature Party's immediate response is satisfying to the leadership. The response proved wrong Kalyan Singh's claim that he has the support of around 150 of the 175 party MLAs. Going by the number of MLAs who have met the former Chief Minister after his suspension, it seemed that he did not have any significant following even among the 60-odd MLAs belonging to the backward castes. In the first week after his suspension, merely six MLAs met him – and two of them belonged to the Samata Party and the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP). Of the four BJP MLAs, only Kailash Rajput was actively mobilising support for Kalyan Singh. He organised small gatherings of party workers at the residence of Kalyan Singh, who addressed them.

The BJP leadership, however, is cautious. There is apprehension in the party that Kalyan Singh is biding his time, allowing his supporters to remain in the party and the government and enjoy the fruits of power for the time being, only to strike during the Assembly session due within a month. Kalyan Singh himself has stated that he has a secret plan for his supporters in the Legislature Party. As a

counter-strategy, the leadership is planning to elevate a few other backward caste leaders to key positions in the party and the government so that they could claim Kalyan Singh's mantle. Among the names being mentioned are Premlata Katiyar and Omprakash Singh, who have been considered Kalyan Singh loyalists all along. The attempt is to drive a wedge between Kalyan Singh and his supporters by winning them over. One of the posts that is likely to be offered to them is that of a working president, who would function under Rajnath Singh, president of the State unit.

Given Kalyan Singh's image as a champion of the backward castes, his expulsion could lead to an erosion in the party's base among these sections.

Rajnath Singh is being projected as a key player. Apart from being retained as State president, he has been given the portfolio of Surface Transport in the Union Cabinet. The plan, according to BJP insiders, is to capitalise on Rajnath Singh's image as a more dynamic and cleaner leader than other faction leaders such as Lalji Tandon and Kalraj Mishra. Many party leaders believe that such manoeuvres would help the party face Assembly elections as early as in March-April. In the normal course, Assembly elections in U.P. are due in June 2001.

The party has also made moves at the governmental level that would come in handy during the elections. The Government led by Ram Prakash Gupta has initiated measures that smack of populism, aimed at sections of people who have been alienated from the party in the recent past.

Among other things, the Government has decided to roll back some of the policy initiatives taken by the Kalyan Singh regime in the fields of local administration and power. The Kalyan Singh Government had proposed to give a greater role for local administrations in core sectors such as health and education. Accordingly, the local administrations could appoint teachers in panchayat and municipal schools as also some of the staff in primary health centres. These moves evoked some resentment, especially among teachers' unions. In fact, this was seen as one of the causes for the party's setback in the Lok Sabha elections. The latest decision is bound to make the teachers' unions happy.

The Kalyan Singh Government had also decided to privatise the power sector partly, which would have led to an increase in the cost of power, especially for commercial users.

The Ram Prakash Gupta Government has also decided to put on hold the proposal of its predecessor govenrment to introduce entry tax in the State, netting Rs.30 crores a year for the government. The new Government has apparently decided to defer the proposal, which is seen as a sop to the trading community.

Ram Prakash Gupta has stated that he plans to convene a meeting of MLAs of the coalition in order to evolve a consensus on these measures. The Government's decision to raise the floor price of sugarcane has won the appreciation of ruling party MLAs from the rural constituencies, as also farmers.

ONE factor that seems to have emboldened the BJP leadership is the conspicuous confusion in the Kalyan Singh camp. At the time of his removal from the Chief Minister's office, he was considering two options to counter his detractors – to join hands with S.P. president Mulayam Singh Yadav and form a broad coalition of backward castes, or to pursue his pledge, taken a day before his resignation on November 11, to renew the movement for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The general view in the Kalyan Singh camp at the time was that he would have to exercise the first option in the event of his expulsion from the party. A coalition of backward castes would have led to a direct confrontation between these sections and the upper castes. And a combination of such a coalition and the support base of the S.P. among Muslims would create a formidable front in U.P., it was thought.

Combining both the options was perceived as an effective move if he continued in the BJP as a dissident leader. The calculation was that by combining the Ram temple card and the backward caste tag he would cause embarrassment to the upper caste leaders in the party, particularly Vajpayee whom Kalyan Singh accused of having forsaken the party's agenda merely to keep his allies happy and hang on to power.

However, many of Kalyan Singh's supporters are dismayed that he has chosen to combine both the options even while facing the prospect of expulsion from the party. In interactions with supporters and the media following his suspension, Kalyan Singh has highlighted the Hindutva agenda (see interview). This naturally would alienate Mulayam Singh Yadav and the S.P. from Kalyan Singh. Many of his supporters point out that Kalyan Singh emerged as the champion of the Ayodhya movement owing to the support from the organisational machinery of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In the absence of such support, his move to revive the Ram temple agitation might fail.

KALYAN SINGH'S repeated pronouncements in support of the Hindutva agenda has forced the S.P. to reconsider its approach towards him. The party has made it clear that Kalyan Singh would not be invited to the backward caste rally that it is planning to hold in Lucknow on December 19. Obviously, Kalyan Singh's tacit understanding with the S.P. during the Assembly election period and his tactic of using the wedding reception of Mulayam Singh Yadav's son as an occasion to launch a tirade against Vajpayee has not paid dividends. On its part, the S.P. is likely to use the "humiliation" of Kalyan Singh at the hands of the upper caste leaders of the BJP as an emotive campaign issue to win the support of the backward castes owing allegiance to Kalyan Singh.

The BSP has also started preparing for elections. Its leader Mayawati has given a call to party units to take the message of 'Bahujan Samaj' to every part of the State. Mayawati has apparently held informal discussions with a section of the BJP led by Kalraj Mishra and Lalji Tandon on a possible electoral alliance. Mishra and Tandon are of the view that Kalyan Singh's backward caste politics can be effectively countered by a BJP-BSP alliance. However, central leaders such as K.N. Govindacharya are against this proposal. According to them, the BSP will lose its Muslim base to the S.P. in the event of an alliance with the BJP.

Political observers in U.P. see two future events as crucial – Kalyan Singh's proposed tour of the State in the second week of December for a mass contact programme, and the session of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly due in late December or early January. These events will give an opportunity to gauge the extent of support Kalyan Singh enjoys among the masses as well as the legislators. ■

Sympathy factors

Pro-LTTE groups use the issue of death penalty to step up propaganda in Tamil Nadu even as the clemency petitions of four persons sentenced to death in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case await a decision.

T.S. SUBRAMANIAN

IN the guise of pleading against capital punishment, specifically the death sentence awarded by the Supreme Court to Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) groups in Tamil Nadu have again become active. These assorted organisations had kept a low profile after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by an LTTE member at Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, on May 21, 1991, as revulsion raged against the action. The Centre proscribed the LTTE the following year. The Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence against the four persons in May and October this year. Among the groups that have hitched on to the bandwagon of the campaign against capital punishment, none, barring the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), had taken a stand against the death penalty in the past.

Those who suddenly found their voice against the death penalty included top Tamil writers, who demanded on November 27 that "an eye for an eye, murder for murder, cannot be accepted in today's civilised society". Under the banner of "Tamil Writers Against Capital Punishment", writers such as Sundara Ramaswamy, Indira Parthasarathy, Ki. Rajanarayanan, Rajam Krishnan, Mu. Metha, Ponneelan, Kovai Gnani, Sirpi Balasubramaniam, Inquilab, and Pa. Jeyaprakasam said that there was a worldwide campaign against capital punishment and the time had come to abolish the death penalty in India. S.V. Rajadurai, a writer who belongs to PUCL, said that the campaign should cover not only Nalini, Murugan, Santhan and Perarivalan but all those who had been sentenced to death.

A number of organisations came together under the banner "Abolition of death penalty – Rally for humaneness" and organised a rally in Chennai on November 30. The explicit purpose of the rally was to appeal to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi to recommend (to the Governor) the commutation of the death sentences on Nalini and three others. The organisations included splinter groups of the Dravidar Kazhagam (D.K.) such as the Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam and the Tamil Nadu Dravidar Kazhagam, the Tamil Scholars' Association, the Tamil Tamilar Movement, the Tamil Nadu Marxist-Leninist Party, the Association for Humaneness, the PUCL and the Tamil Eelam Supporting Organisation. The rally was led by P. Nedumaran, a pro-LTTE leader and president of the Tamil Nationalist Party, and Panrutti S. Ramachandran, founder of the People's Liberal Party.

Thousands of people including women, took part in the rally. Many men in the rally wore black shirts, which D.K. volunteers wear. Several youth had a black hood pulled over their faces to signify a prisoner about to be hanged. They carried pictures of the condemned prisoners and raised slogans such as "They are our people, their lives are our lives", "They are Tamilians", "Let capital punishment die, let humaneness flower", and "Death penalty is legal murder by the government" The processionists praised Karunanidhi's statement that he was generally against capital punishment.

At the conclusion of the rally, Nedumaran submitted a memorandum to Karunanidhi He said that 57 countries had abolished capital punishment and in 15 countries it was used only in the case of war crimes. Although 26 countries still had it on their statute books, they did not invoke the rule. This only proved that the death penalty was "inhuman", Nedumaran argued. He said that the campaign had gathered steam after the trial court had "in an unprecedented judgment" sentenced to death all the 26 accused in the Rajiv Gandhi case. (Nedumaran had sent a memorandum to the officials concerned against the death sentence awarded to Govindasamy, who is now in the Central Prison in Coimbatore, for murdering a family of five in Erode district. He urged Karunanidhi to initiate efforts to get the death penalty scrapped.

The rallyists directed their plea to Karunanidhi as the Madras High Court



P. Nedumaran, president of the Tamil Nationalist Party, leading a rally in Chennai on November 30 against the death sentences awarded to Rajiv Gandhi's killers.

has ruled that as per the Constitution the Governor can act on commuting a death sentence only on the advice of the Council of Ministers. (The High Court set aside Governor Fathima Beevi's order rejecting the mercy petitions of the four prisoners. Justice K. Govindarajan ruled that the Governor's order cannot be sustained as "the procedure of getting advice from the Council of Ministers by the Governor" under Article 161 of the Constitution was "not followed". The judge maintained that "it is for the first respondent (the Governor) to pass a fresh order" on the clemency petitions of the four "after getting the advice of the Council of Ministers".)

On December 2, when reporters asked Karunanidhi whether a positive decision would be taken on the clemency petitions, he replied that it was the President who had to take a decision. On the High Court's decision that the Council of Ministers should tender its advice, he said the Tamil Nadu Government was consulting legal opinion on the order.

EVEN as the State Government was caught in a cleft stick on this politically sensitive issue, Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi, in a private meeting with President K.R. Narayanan, conveyed her family's "feelings" that the life of Nalini should be spared because she is the mother of a child. (Nalini married Murugan after the assassination, and a child was born to them in prison.) Sonia Gandhi said: "It is my personal feeling, keeping the need of a mother for a child."

Sonia Gandhi first spoke about her meeting with Narayanan to Mohini Giri, Chairperson of the Guild of Service, when Mohini Giri met her and pleaded Nalini's case. Mohini Giri had petitioned Narayanan for the commutation of the death sentences."Mrs. Gandhi told me that she had already conveyed to the President to commute the death sentence against Nalini and had no objection to our filing a mercy petition," Mohini Giri said.

Sonia Gandhi's position drew sharp remarks from some present and former leaders of the Congress(I). M.S. Bitta, former president of the Indian Youth Congress and chairman of the All-India Anti-Terrorism Front, is firmly against the commutation of the death sentence awarded to Nalini. Her punishment should "act as a deterrent for others", he said. If the sentence was commuted, it would encourage people pursuing the "politics of elimination" to use women as suicide bombers and target more leaders, Bitta said.

G.K. Moopanar, president of the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC), said that the pleas for the commutation of the death sentences were as horrendous as the murder of Rajiv Gandhi.

Vazhappadi K. Ramamurthi, president of the Tamilaga Rajiv Congress (TRC), said that Sonia Gandhi's stand showed her "immaturity" and that she had made the plea to gain "cheap publicity". Her stand hurt the feelings of Rajiv Gandhi loyalists, he said.

THE four condemned prisoners had sent separate clemency petitions to the Governor on October 17. The Governor rejected the petitions on October 27. They filed writ petitions in the High Court stating that the Governor had rejected the petitions in a "hasty manner", without seeking the advice of the Council of Ministers. This was "illegal, arbitrary and violative of the Constitution," they argued. (*Frontline*, November 26, 1999).

Senior advocate K. Chandru, who appeared for the petitioners, said that the Governor could exercise her power under Article 161 only after getting the advice of the Council of Ministers. Even then, the Governor was bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers, and so he/she had no discretionary powers. The power to grant clemency was a sovereign power, which lay with the people. In a republican system of government, the Governor was a figurehead and the real power lay with the elected Ministers. Therefore, Article 161 could be exercised only by the Council of Ministers in the name of the Governor, Chandru argued.

Additional Advocate-General T.R. Rajagopalan, who appeared for the State, argued that clemency petitions (filed under Article 161) were not a subject matter in Schedule No.II of the Tamil Nadu Government Business Rules. Schedule No.II contemplates cases that could be brought up before the Council of Ministers. Rajagopalan said that on this basis and also referring to Rule 35(1)(a) and Rule 35(1)(b), the mercy petitions with all the materials had been forwarded by the Chief Minister, who was also in charge of the Home Department, to the Governor. So the question of getting further advice from the Council of Ministers would not arise when the Business Rules did not contemplate such a procedure, he submitted.

Chandru said that if the Government had been forwarding clemency petitions since 1947 to the Governor without tendering the advice of the Council of Ministers, this was done contrary to the spirit of Article 161. Even if it was a practice adopted by the State as understood by it in terms of its Business Rules, such a practice was unconstitutional. Chandru referred to Rajagopalan's argument that the Council of Ministers had framed the Business Rules and it had willingly empowered the Governor to decide on clemency petitions. According to Chandru, the Council of Ministers cannot surrender its authority or power of giving advice under Article 161 and the Business Rules cannot run contrary to the Constitution.

In his order, Justice Govindarajan referred to several Supreme Court verdicts that had held that the Governor had no discretionary powers under Article 161. He quoted the verdict in *Kehar Singh v. Union of India*, which stated: "...the President's power under Article 72 falls squarely within the judicial domain and can be examined by the court by way of judicial review."

He quoted from the order in *Maru Ram v. the Union of India*, which said: "The State Government, whether the Governor likes it or not, can advise and act under Article 161, the Governor being bound by that advice." The apex court said: "It is not open either to the President or the Governor to take independent decisions or direct release or refuse release of any one of their own choice...The constitutional conclusion is that the Governor is but a shorthand expression for the State Government and the President is an abbreviation for the Central Government." In *State of Punjab v. Joginder Singh*, the Supreme Court had insisted on the requirement of the President and the Governor getting the advice from the Council of Ministers while exercising powers under Articles 72 and 161. In *U.P.P.S.C. v. Sureshchandra Tewari*, the Supreme Court said: "Neither the President nor the Governor is to exercise the executive functions personally."

Merely forwarding the material to the Governor could not be construed as giving advice, the Judge said. He supported this view by quoting from *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, in which the apex court had said: "The material placed before the President by the Minister/Council of Ministers does not thereby become part of advice. Advice is what is based upon the said material. Material is not advice."

A contentious report

A Commission of Inquiry that went into incidents of caste-related violence of two districts in Tamil Nadu in 1995 and a police outrage in a Dalit village, justifies the police firing and makes controversial recommendations for the abolition of "concessions" to socially deprived sections.

S. VISWANATHAN

ON November 23, at the fag end of a session of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Government headed by M Karunanidhi tabled the report of a judicial inquiry commission that had been lying with the government for nearly four years. The report of the Gomathinayagam Commission of Inquiry, which was appointed in September 1995 to go into incidents of caste-related violence in the two southern districts of Tirunelveli and Tuticorin in July and August 1995, was submitted to the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Government headed by Jayalalitha in March 1996.

The Commission held that the police firing in three places in the districts was "fully justified" and that there was "no excess" in the police action at the all-Dalit Kodiyankulam village in Tuticorin district on August 31, 1995.

The report drew flak from political parties representing Dalits, who were the victims of the police outrage at Kodiyankulam (*Frontline*, October 20, 1995), and from the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress and the Dravidar Kazhagam.

Two of the five terms of reference of the Commission were of a general nature: to report on the circumstances that led to the incidents and to recommend preventive measures. Others were more specific: "to inquire into and report whether in the police action in Kodiyankulam village of Ottapidaram taluk on August 31, 1995 there was any excess on the part of the police and the district administration and, if so, to give details of excesses and identify the errant police and other officials"; to find out whether the incidents of police firing at Sivagiri on July 30, 1995, Singathakurichi on August 25, 1995 and Kodiyankulam on August 31 were justified; and to make recommendations on payment of compensation to the victims.

The principal item therefore related to the brutal attack on the Dalits of Kodiyankulam on August 31 by a 600-strong police force, which gave a new dimension to the caste-related clashes that had rocked the two districts for over a month. The clashes, between sections of Dalits and of people belonging to the predominant Thevar caste, were triggered by an altercation between a bus driver and a Dalit student at a village in Tirunelveli district in July 1995. Following the disfigurement of a statue of U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, a nationalist and a leader revered by Thevars, the clash spread to the neighbouring Tuticorin district.

Eighteen persons, from among Thevars and Dalits, were killed and property worth lakhs of rupees was lost in the violence. In Tirunelveli district, where Thevars are larger in number and financially more sound, Dalits were the worst hit; in Tuticorin district, Thevars, being a minority in a number of villages, suffered the most in terms of human life and property. In both the districts, however, Dalits suffered the most at the hands of the police (*Frontline*, December 1, 1995).

The police action at Kodiyankulam was ostensibly aimed to arrest certain suspects in a murder case and seize explosive materials and lethal weapons believed to have been in the possession of Dalits. Observers, however, said that the police suspected that the people of this relatively affluent all-Dalit village (some of whose relatives were employed in the Gulf countries) provided moral and material support to miscreants in the surrounding area. The purpose of the four-hour-long police operation, according to observers, was to destroy the economic base of the village. Several villagers told visiting mediapersons that they had been brutally attacked by the policemen. Media reports, backed by photographic evidence, spoke of extensive damage to houses and a government-run fair price shop, destruction of household articles such as television sets, sewing machines and bicycles, besides tractors and lorries. There were



Dalit victims of the police action in Kodiyankulam village in August 1995. The Gomathinayagam Commission of Inquiry has concluded that there was no "police excess".

'An inhuman act by the police'

Interview with V. Vaikunth, former Director-General of Police.

"Never in my career spanning over 30 years have I witnessed such a totally inhuman act on the part of my own police." This was how former Director-General of Police V. Vaikunth described the plight of the people of Kodiyankulam following a massive police rampage in the village on August 31, 1995. As the then police chief, he visited the affected village on September 5 and saw for himself the "mindless violence" of the policemen. Now retired, Vaikunth became a bit emotional when he recounted in an interview to S. Viswanathan what he saw in Kodiyankulam. "Even now, after four years, it makes me sad and anguished when I recall the wailing and weeping of the hapless Dalits," he said. Excerpts:

▶ *The report of the Gomathinayagam Commission has ruled out any police excesses in Kodiyankulam in 1995. It is a matter of public knowledge, and there were media reports at that time, that you, as the Director-General of Police (DGP), visited the village and found to your shock that the police had indulged in "mindless violence" against Dalits of the village. There were also reports that you sent a note to Chief Minister Jayalalitha. A writ petition was filed before the High Court seeking a direction for the release of the report. Can you please enlighten the public on this sensitive issue?*

It is true that as the DGP I had received a series of complaints that the police had allegedly gone on a rampage in the village against Dalits. There were even writ petitions in the High Court, besides representations to the National Human Rights Commission, alleging police high-handedness. Political parties also raised a furore over the issue. The background to the alleged police violence at Kodiyankulam related to caste clashes which rocked Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts during that period.

It is in this context that I visited the village on September 5, 1995 to find out the truth for myself. En route to Kodiyankulam, I also visited a number of villages which had witnessed caste clashes. There were attempts to dissuade me from going to Kodiyankulam. I could sense that the people of the village were very annoyed with the police in general, but when they came to know of my visit, the village elders came to the outskirts and received me. That was a reflection of the confidence I had created among the public about my impartiality and neutrality during my service as the Superintendent of Police in the composite Tirunelveli district (in the 1970s).

What I saw at Kodiyankulam that day was heart-rending. The police had gone berserk in the name of repulsing an imaginary attack on them by the villagers. The policemen had reportedly gone to the village to secure an accused involved in the murder of a person belonging to a predominant caste in the region. They had indulged in mindless violence against hapless Dalits of the village – men, women and children. The police had ransacked their houses, damaged their television sets, ripped open the rice bags and thrown the rice on the streets. Worse and still more

also charges that the raid party poured diesel and pesticides into the public well in order to render it unusable. (The High Court had, in response to a petition, directed the district administration to ensure supply of drinking water to the village.)

That Dalits had lost faith in the police and the district administration was clear from a writ petition that had been filed in the Madras High Court by the Devendra Kula Vellalar Federation (which later became a political party named Puthiya Thamizhagam) led by Dr. K. Krishnasamy. It sought an enquiry into the incidents by a Central agency and prayed for legal proceedings under the Indian Penal Code and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against the District Collector, the Superintendent of Police and others responsible for the attack on Dalits. (On the orders of the High Court, the Central Bureau of Investigation is enquiring into the incident. P. Sampath, member, State Secretariat, of the CPI(M) and one of the petititoners seeking a CBI enquiry, told *Frontline* on December 4 that he would move the court again to get the enquiry expedited. Sampath was among the first political leaders to visit the affected village, as secretary of the district unit of the party.)

The Jayalalitha Government denied that police excesses had been committed at Kodiyankulam. Director-General of Police V. Vaikunth visited the village on September 5, 1995 and, on the basis of what he saw, sent a report to Chief Minister Jayalalitha (see interview).

A three-member team of Ministers sent by Jayalalitha met with hostility at Kodiyankulam. The Government ordered payment of about Rs.17 lakhs as relief assistance to the victims and appointed P. Gomathinayagam, a retired District Judge, as the one-man Commission of Inquiry.

THE Commission submitted its report to the Government on March 12, 1996. Dalits of Kodiyankulam and other villages boycotted the inquiry since the Devendra Kula Vellalar Federation had moved the High Court seeking a CBI inquiry.

The Commission examined 26 witnesses from the government, mostly police officials, including the Superintendent of Police, and 133 public witnesses. (Curiously, it did not summon Vaikunth to depose.) With Dalits boycotting the Commission, most of the public witnesses belonged to the other caste involved in the incidents, Thevars.

On the Kodiyankulam incident, the Commission observed, "There is not an iota of evidence to conclude that there was police excess." It, however, said that the police action "did not happen in the manner as told by the police and other officials." The Commission agreed with advocate P. Ganapathy Subramanian, who represented the Communist Party of India before it, that there were incongruities and discrepancies in the police version of the "combing operations". The Commission referred to the lack of any explanation from the police regarding two missing shells and said "this also throws some doubt" about the police operation. It took note of the failure of the police to produce the register showing the movement of police vehicles, which could have thrown light on the duration of the operation.

The Commission did not believe that the purpose of the combing operations was to break the economic base of the affluent Dalits of Kodiyankulam. It said: "Much was said about their affluence but there is no material to support this."

According to the Commission, the copy of the complaint lodged with the

inhuman was their act of pouring diesel in the drinking water well. The police had also torn to pieces the university degree certificates of the boys and girls of the village. The villagers started wailing and weeping and what I witnessed shook me to the bones. Never in my career spanning over 30 years have I witnessed such a totally inhuman act on the part of my own police. I believed every one of the villagers when they explained what happened, because I saw for myself the bitter trail of police violence. But then I wanted to convince myself about the truth. So I called the S.P. who accompanied me, took him aside and asked him under the shade of a tree in the village to come out with the truth. In the presence of the Deputy Inspector-General of Police of the range, the S.P. admitted to all that had happened.



I returned to Chennai and made arrangements to send relief at my level to the victims of the village Later, after getting the details of the pending criminal cases connected with the various caste clashes, I sent a note to Chief Minister Jayalalitha on September 15 suggesting certain immediate steps to be initiated to restore the confidence of the victims of violence: (1) To sanction adequate compensation to the villagers for the suffering they had undergone; (2) To send a team of Ministers who did not belong to any of the predominant castes of the district, with a view to assuaging the feelings of the villagers; (3) To constitute a commission of inquiry, and (4) To order dropping of action in all the criminal cases relating to the caste clashes (except cases involving violence and murder) in which I had found after my assessment that people belonging to either community had been implicated without basis.

Jayalalitha was so moved by my report that she sent for me on September 16 and told me that she had conceded all my suggestions. On September 17, the birth anniversary of Periyar (E V. Ramasamy), Jayalalitha was to garland the Periyar statue at the Anna flyover in Chennai. At that function, the three Ministers who had been deputed by Chief Minister Jayalalitha to tour the affected areas showed me copies of my note to Jayalalitha and requested me to suggest the steps they should take. On the basis of the findings of the ministerial committee, Jayalalitha announced a relief assistance of Rs.17 lakhs, the constitution of a committee of inquiry and the withdrawal of the cases. To be fair to Jayalalitha, this is one instance where she got a bad name for no fault of hers, because of the police violence (at Kodiyankulam) which, in fact, cost her heavily in the 1996 elections in the area.

▶ *But the Gomathinayagam Commission has totally ruled out any police excess.*

I have no comments to make because I do not know on what basis the Commission has come to that finding. But I can only say that what I found, which I have narrated now, is true, and what I wrote in my note to Chief Minister Jayalalitha based on what I saw was again true. ■

Maniyachi police station by a resident of Kodiyankulam on behalf of the residents, "the one important piece of evidence", speaks only of damage to houses, not to household articles The Commission said that during "local inspection" of Kodiyankulam some houses were found to be damaged "There is practically no explanation for this and at the same time there is not a shred of evidence to conclude that the police were responsible for the damage to some houses at Kodiyankulam," the Commission said

The Commission visited the affected villages. At Kodiyankulam he could see only one house and the well and had to cut short his visit when the people told him that they were boycotting the Commission.

The Commission concluded that the police firing at Kodiyankulam and in the other two places was "fully justified"

Stating that the genesis of the trouble (an incident at Veerasigamani village on July 15, 1995, when some students took a bus driver's scolding "for obstructing the free movement of the bus" as an insult) was "non-communal", the Commission observed that the incidents that followed could not be described as "communal clashes".

The Government took on record the Commission's finding that the term "communal clash" was a misnomer when used with reference to the incidents, and accepted the recommendations with regard to the other terms of reference (Interestingly, the DMK had in 1995 criticised the police action in Kodiyankulam and even used it as a campaign issue in the 1996 Assembly elections)

In its report accompanying the findings, the Government said that it had decided to examine the specific recommendations made by the Commission to ensure public peace and prevent the recurrence of such incidents The recommendations included a total ban on the erection of statues in public places and plans to eradicate illiteracy

THE Puthiya Thamizhagam, the Viduthalai Siruthaigal, the two Communist parties and the Dravidar Kazhagam have taken strong objection to, among other things, the Commission's recommendation that "all concessions to any community, whatsoever, may be abolished forthwith". CPI(M) State secretary N Sankariah said that any such move would do great harm to the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Classes The Government should, in fact, implement the reservation policy with earnestness and clear the backlog

Both Sankariah and Krishnasamy felt that the Assembly ought to have been provided an opportunity to discuss the report. Krishnasamy said that Dalits could not be expected to give up their hard-won claims to the concessions guaranteed by the Constitution Viduthalai Siruthaigal president R Thirumavalavan said that such recommendations only betrayed a lack of understanding of the social dynamics and the history of the evolution of the concept of social justice

CPI State secretary R Nallakannu, who rejected the report outright, wondered why the Commission, which had held that the incidents were not caste-related, thought it necessary to suggest steps to avert caste-related clashes Krishnasamy said that a government note accompanying the report contained the names of 126 persons belonging to Kodiyankulam and the amount of compensation paid to each on account of loss of property If the police had not caused damage to their property, who else did it, he asked "It is an all-Dalit village and people from no other caste lived there. So, the question remains," Krishnasamy said. ■

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The political storm

As pressure mounted on Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang to step down, the central Congress(I) leadership faced a difficult choice.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

WITHIN 10 months of his appointment, Orissa Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang was under heavy pressure (as on December 4) to relinquish his post. After a week-long tussle with his detractors in the State Congress(I), Gamang seemed to be on his way out, with the majority of his Cabinet colleagues and party legislators demanding his resignation. Congress(I) president Sonia Gandhi was not in favour of considering a leadership change, but following persistent demands from rebel legislators, including former Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik and Basant Biswal, former Deputy Chief Minister and then Agriculture Minister under Gamang, she sent three teams consisting of All India Congress(I) Committee members between November 30 and December 3 to ascertain the views of the MLAs on the leadership question, and also to quell wrangling in the State unit. The Congress(I) emissaries included Madhavrao Scindia, Vayalar Ravi, Motilal Vora and Ramesh Chennithala.

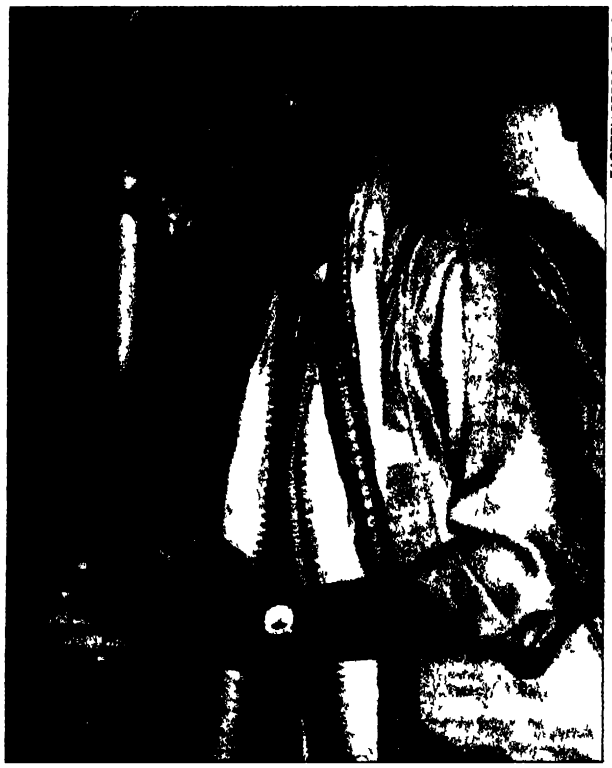
The leaders held prolonged discussions with the MLAs, Pradesh Congress(I) leaders and those leading the warring factions. They included Patnaik, Nandini Satpathy, (State unit president) Hemanand Biswal, Basant Biswal, Kanhu Charan Lenka, Jagannath Patnaik, Niranjan Patnaik, Bhagabat Prasad Mohanty, Raghunath Patnaik, Sheikh Mutlub, Durga Shankar Patnaik, and Bhupinder Singh. Matters had come to such a pass that at one point, Sonia Gandhi had to summon to Delhi J.B. Patnaik and Basant Biswal, who were leading the revolt against Gamang, to hear their versions. Gamang, who seemed determined not to step down, also rushed to Delhi. He demanded to know why he should step down when he was handpicked by Sonia Gandhi herself in place of Patnaik in February following the murder of Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his sons and also the Anjana Mishra rape case in the State.

From the outset, Gamang had insisted that he would not succumb to any kind of pressure to step down. He maintained that he would quit only if the high command asked him to do so. He was reported to have told Sonia Gandhi that he would abide by her decision, making it clear that she should either ask him to step down or check anti-party activities.

In order to stall his detractors' moves, Gamang left for Delhi soon after a Congress(I) Legislature Party (CLP) meeting on November 30, thereby avoiding a situation in which he would have had to face embarrassment in the Assembly. This enabled him to avoid calling the Assembly into session on December 1 as had been scheduled. He met the newly-appointed Governor, M.M. Rajendran, before his trip to Delhi, with a request to him to defer the convening of the session until December 10. The Governor obliged Gamang. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) described the Governor's decision as "undemocratic".

Sonia Gandhi's initial hesitation to remove Gamang was understandable as it was she who had installed him in office. However, she came under increasing pressure from Gamang's detractors who were adamant that he should go. The rebel MLAs threatened to break away if Gamang was allowed to continue.

The first AICC team comprising Scindia and Ravi was sent to Bhubaneswar when 50 of the 84 party MLAs in a House of 147, demanded that the high command remove the Chief Minister. They accused him of being unable to handle the relief and rehabilitation works in the 12 cyclone affected coastal districts. Rebel Congress(I) leaders, all supporters of J.B. Patnaik, had told the AICC(I) leaders that they would not be able to face the Assembly elections, due in March 2000, under the leadership of Gamang and PCC(I) president Hemanand Biswal.



EASTERN PRESS AGENCY

Giridhar Gamang.

On November 21, dissident MLAs, including 11 Ministers, made it clear to AICC(I) leaders Pranab Mukherjee, Scindia, Ravi and Mukul Wasnik, when they were in Bhubaneswar during a PCC(I) executive meeting, that if Gamang and Hemanand Biswal were not replaced immediately, they would elect a new Congress(I) Legislature Party (CLP) leader before the Assembly session.

Gamang was on a sticky wicket because the majority of Congress(I) Working Committee (CWC) were opposed to him, although Sonia Gandhi resisted the pressure. AICC sources said that her first priority was "damage control" and preventing the rebels from splitting the CLP. But pro-changers in Delhi and Bhubaneswar were elated, pointing to inadequate support for Gamang in the CLP. The

brief for Scindia and Ravi was to interact with the MLAs and report back to the central leadership.

The crisis intensified after Scindia, during his second visit to Bhubaneswar on November 30, said that the central leadership would "respond to the sentiments of the majority at the CLP meeting". Scindia said that Delhi still had faith in Gamang, whom he called a "straightforward" man, but would accept the legislators' demand.

Gamang's opponents, with the backing of Patnaik and Basant Biswal, threatened to oust him at the CLP meeting if Sonia Gandhi did not remove him. They called Gamang "inept" and "incapable" of running the government. Gamang suffered a blow when Biswal, who engineered Patnaik's ouster in February, pledged support to the former Chief Minister. Sonia Gandhi's move to send Scindia and Ravi to the State capital came hours after Gamang met her and pleaded with her to make up her mind on the leadership issue.

A FRESH crisis soon took shape in the State unit. Bickerings started over who would succeed Gamang. J.B. Patnaik and Basant Biswal, who had joined forces for the oust-Gamang campaign, parted ways, each projecting himself as a candidate for the post. The issue thus boiled down to a contest between pro-Biswal and pro-Patnaik supporters. Nearly 40 MLAs were reported to have faxed a letter to Sonia Gandhi requesting her not to replace Gamang; this was done primarily to keep Patnaik out. Biswal's supporters are of the view that Gamang should continue in the post if Biswal could not be made Chief Minister. Moreover, opposition to Patnaik was mounting in Delhi with K.P. Singh Deo, MP, and K.C. Lenka, former Minister, ranged against him. With no consensus emerging, the high command had difficulty identifying a successor who would be acceptable to all the factions.

Meanwhile, an AICC(I) panel comprising Ghulam Nabi Azad and Ravi has projected a grim scenario for the party in the coming Assembly polls. The A.K. Antony panel, which was constituted to go into the reasons for the party's debacle in Lok Sabha elections, was also reported to have indicted the Gamang regime for poor performance. It was clear that the party would not be able to ignore the fact that with the Assembly elections round the corner, any change in leadership could be detrimental to its electoral prospects *vis-a-vis* the BJP-BJD alliance. ■

Succour for Orissa

International agencies, non-governmental organisations and the State Government grapple with the task of rebuilding the cyclone affected areas of Orissa.

SUHRID SANKAR CHATTOPADHYAY
in Bhubaneswar

MORE than a month after a super-cyclonic storm ripped through the 12 coastal districts of Orissa, the State Government is faced with the task of rehabilitation, reconstruction and employment generation in the affected region. The October 29 cyclone destroyed more than 30 lakh houses and devastated thousands of hectares of agricultural land. The official death roll stood at 9,881, while unofficial estimates put the number at 30,000.

A high-power Task Force was set up on November 10 with Defence Minister George Fernandes as its chairman, and Secretaries from the Ministries of Agriculture, Finance, Power, Water Supply and Telecommunications as members. Apart from monitoring relief operations, the Task Force will prepare a comprehensive action plan, which will include short-term and long-term measures for rehabilitation and reconstruction. It will recommend the mode of implementation of the plan and ways to finance it, and suggest measures for ensuring preparedness in future in the cyclone-prone areas.

Jagannath Mohapatro, the Mayor-in-council of Bhubaneswar, told *Frontline* that 193 slums in the municipal corporation area and on its outskirts had been destroyed and about 50,000 families had been rendered homeless. Infrastructural damage in the municipal area itself is estimated at Rs.100.5 crores. Mohapatro said that at least Rs.5,000 would be required to rebuild each dwelling unit. He said that with the onset of winter there was an urgent need for 6,000 rolls of polythene sheets to provide shelter.

A serious fallout of the calamity is unemployment. Mohapatro fears that job-seekers from the affected rural areas were bound to migrate to the cities in search of means of livelihood.

C.J. Venugopal, vice-chairman of the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA), told *Frontline* that Rs.11 crores would be generated for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the areas under the BDA's jurisdiction. A slum-improvement project to provide shelters that can withstand cyclones would be implemented in a phased manner. Moreover, as most of the slums are unauthorised, the BDA is looking for areas where a large number of people can be resettled.

The total cost of reconstruction and rehabilitation has not yet been fully assessed; it is expected to be an astounding figure, though. Biju Janata Dal leader Bijoy Mohapatra, who is the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of the State Assembly, said that at least Rs.10,000 crores would be needed to put the affected areas back on the path of development.

A scheme has been devised to provide low-cost houses with financial assistance from the Orissa Rural Housing and Development Corporation Ltd (ORHDC), taking recourse to funds from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) under a credit-linked system. The loan amount per unit will be Rs.30,000, at 11 per cent interest. The loan will be recovered in 15 years with an initial three-year moratorium on repayment. The programme will be monitored by the Housing and Urban Development Department, and the respective district authorities will coordinate its implementation.

Moloy Chatterjee, the regional chief of HUDCO, told *Frontline*: "HUDCO has extended an assistance of Rs.487.5 crores for the construction of 1,35,000 houses. In addition, its grant-in-aid assistance for building centres and model villages amount to Rs.215 crores."

The State Cabinet, at a meeting on November 29, decided to seek a loan of Rs.900 crores from the Centre in order to undertake house construction. It was planned to disburse Rs.300 crores through the District Collectors and another Rs.300 crores through the

ORHDC. The remaining amount would be distributed as loans to government employees whose houses have been damaged. The Cabinet also decided to increase the quantum of the State Contingency Fund from Rs.60 crores to Rs.150 crores.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as HelpAge India, National Youth Service Action and Social Development Research Institute, are engaged in the rehabilitation of 5,000 families in Puri, Jagatsinghpur and Cuttack districts and in Dhenkanal. HelpAge India plans to spend Rs.2.5 crores towards rehabilitation and restoration of facilities. Industrialist Abhey Oswal has floated a trust to help rehabilitate victims. At a press conference in Bhubaneswar, he said that the Aruna-Abhey Oswal Trust had been formed with a corpus of Rs.40 crores, which would be utilised by March 2000. The Trust would generate Rs.200 crores in the next five years. He said that banks would also be approached to extend loans to the affected people.

CARE International plans to spend Rs.120 crores under a three-year rehabilitation and economic restoration programme in 11 blocks of four districts. The president of CARE International, Harold Walker, said at a press conference that Rs.40 crores would be spent on relief operations and Rs.60 crores on rehabilitation and construction of cyclone-proof houses.

The Chennai-based RYA-Cosmo is involved in the rehabilitation of 300 families in Jagatsinghpur district. Puri district, which has been adopted by the Delhi State Government, has already spent Rs.5.5 crores for rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Maharashtra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee is planning to construct special cyclone aid centres in Paradeep.

A United Nations-led relief and rehabilitation programme is on in full swing. The deputy resident representative of the U.N. Development Programme, Niels Maagaard, told *Frontline*: "The U.N. family is fully committed to the rehabilitation and economic restructuring of Orissa for the next one year. We have about 50 non-governmental organisations working with us. We want to establish offices in the affected districts for better coordination of relief activities. Our representatives in the districts will ensure equal distribution of relief materials and assess the needs of the people." The U.N. has set up a network in the affected villages and towns and is monitoring programmes of health education, childcare, and nutrition. The priority now, says Maagaard, is to provide housing and shelter and employment. "Food for work is the best solution and we want to encourage that," he said. The U.N.'s goal was not just to take Orissa back where it was, but to help it go beyond that point. "This is the perfect opportunity to rebuild the whole State and make it better than it ever was," said Maagaard.

IN Ersama block, one of the worst affected areas of Jagatsinghpur district, 11,000 families have no dwellings. Additional Special Relief Commissioner S.K. Jha told *Frontline* that all arrangements had been made to supply food, polythene sheets and blankets. "Till date we have handled 1,500 tonnes of relief arranged by the government," he said. Some parts of Ersama block which were inaccessible till mid-November, have been reached by road and by boats. Jha said that according to reports from sarpanchs, 8,019 people were either missing or presumed dead. Over 7,900 bodies had been disposed of. But on an average 30 to 40 bodies were being recovered every day.

Extensive damage has been caused to agricultural lands. Agricultural experts feel that it would take two years to remove the salinity and sand deposits from the fields. In Ersama, where some fields are still water-logged, embankments are being cut in order to let the saline water out. After the water is cleared, the fields would be flushed with fresh water diverted from canals. The damage caused to the irrigation system is estimated at Rs.350 crores.

Seeds of crop varieties are being sold to enable farmers to resume cultivation. In Jagatsinghpur district, the Agriculture Department is engaged in the task. Yet, farmers will find it difficult to restart agricultural operations as draught animals are in short supply. (The loss of livestock is estimated at 4.5. lakhs.) Although the government has made arrangements to procure cattle from elsewhere in Orissa as also other States, in Ersama it is exploring the possibility of putting to work tractors from servicing centres. With the loss of cattle, the siness has also suffered a major loss.

Employment generation through food for work programmes is a high priority. Jha said that labour-intensive projects are being formulated. In Jagatsinghpur district, 12 road-building projects, expected to take care of the needs of about 800 families, have been drawn up. But many people are not prepared to take up the jobs. "They are offering us a paltry sum of Rs.40 a day," complained one resident of Jagatsinghpur who was waiting for relief. ■

■ THE STATES

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Srinagar

WHEN the sun goes down each evening, life throughout Kashmir retreats behind locked doors. After a gap of several years, an undeclared dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed in dozens of troubled rural areas in the State. In Srinagar itself, after sunset no civilian movement is allowed past the Badami Bagh Cantonment, located on the National Highway to Anantnag and on to Jammu. Checking of traffic along highways and cordon-and-search operations in the countryside have once again become common. And the tourists who had begun to holiday on the Dal Lake in the summer have all left.

In the aftermath of the Kargil War, the other war in Kashmir has been joined again in earnest. But the outcome of this war could well be shaped off the battlefield. The form and content of New Delhi's engagement with the All Parties Hurriyet Conference (APHC), and its management of Jammu and Kashmir's deep financial crisis (see separate story), could prove to have more long-term significance than the battles between Indian security personnel and insurgents that break out almost every evening.

Rumours of covert official contacts with the APHC began shortly after the organisation's top leadership was jailed in October. The National Conference (N.C.) leadership allowed the APHC to conduct a vigorous anti-election campaign, expecting that low voter-turnouts would sabotage the prospects of former Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's People's Democratic Party (PDP), and other Opposition figures like N.C. rebel Saifuddin Soz and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami. With the elections out of the way, the N.C. promptly despatched top APHC leaders to jail on charges of complicity with terrorist groups and seditious activities. They are now lodged in Jodhpur.

Under other circumstances, the N.C. could have been sitting pretty in the knowledge that it had eliminated all its principal sources of opposition in one ingenious manoeuvre. But a powerful coalition of interests appears to have ensured that the move did not quite work out as planned. In late October, stories

An uncertain game plan

Is the Union Government making overtures to the APHC in a bid to reach an understanding with it on the Kashmir issue? And will this involve merely provincial autonomy or a partition of the State on communal lines?

began to appear in both State and national newspapers that a dialogue on Kashmir sponsored by the Union Government was under way. Such a dialogue, since it would undermine the N.C.'s claim to be the sole legitimate representative of mass opinion in Jammu and Kashmir, was thought to be initiated by forces within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government that were hostile to the N.C.

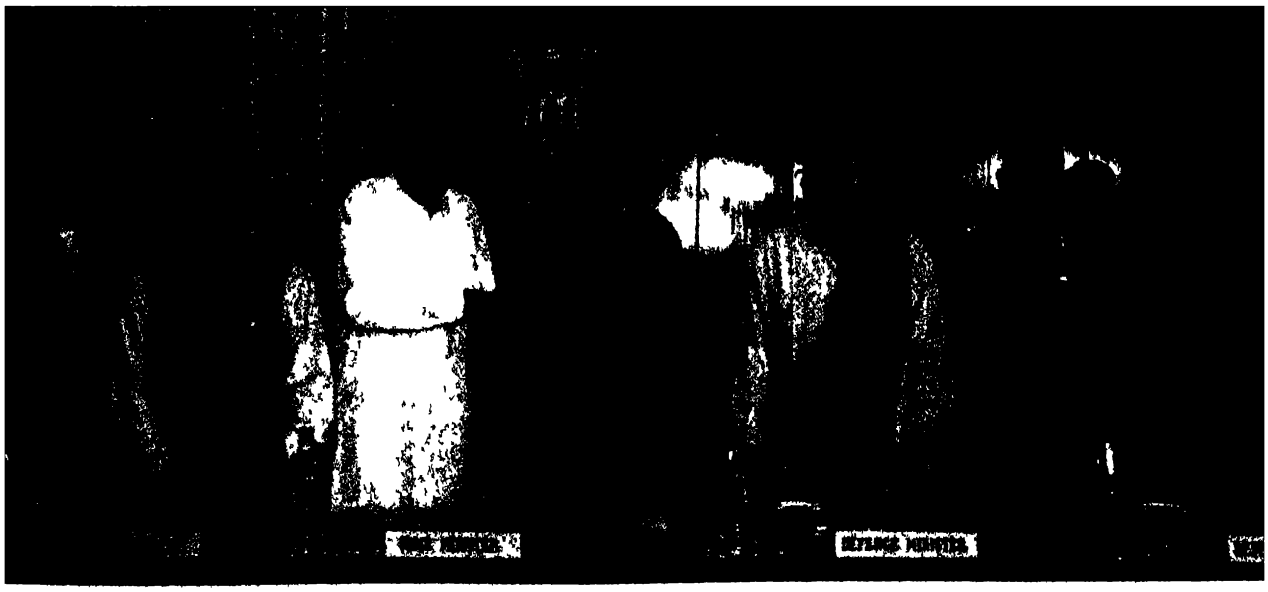
Although the APHC has always formally rejected any possibility of a "dialogue with India", several events rendered credible the prospect of such a dialogue. During a visit to the United States in early October, APHC leader Abdul Ghani Lone had attacked Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Lone's remarks came in the context of proposals from the Washington-based Kashmir Studies Group for the creation of an autonomous region spanning the Kashmir Valley, and the Muslim-majority areas of Rajouri, Poonch and Doda. Many believed that Lone was responding to some kind of quasi-official U.S. proposal for a bilateral dialogue.

With APHC hardliners such as its Jamaat-e-Islami affiliated chairperson Syed Ali Shah Geelani in jail, events in November tended to lend legitimacy to this proposal. In a November 6 interview to *The Indian Express*, Lone ruled out bilateral negotiations, but then made an intriguing statement. India, he said, "had to give up the bullet-for-bullet policy and volunteer for a dialogue with the Kashmiris as they are doing in the north-east". "Only this," he concluded, "will enable us to prevail upon outsiders to keep off Kashmir." A fortnight later, the APHC's acting chairperson and an influential religious leader from Srinagar, Umar Farooq, came out even more explicity, suggesting an India-APHC dialogue with Pakistan "involved at a later stage".

Furore followed in the APHC. At its November 22 General Council meeting in Srinagar, APHC figures committed to securing Jammu and Kashmir's accession to Pakistan accused Umar Farooq of treachery. He, in turn, flatly denied that any talks had begun. Geelani, he said, had told him in Jodhpur on October 24 "swearing by the Holy Prophet that nobody from the Government of India had approached him until then". "My remarks need to be understood in the right context," Umar Farooq said. "India and Pakistan talk to each other, and we reject the talks at futile. But at the same time, the talks generate hopes of a settlement." In other words, Umar Farooq was clearly open to the prospect of bilateral discussions as a precursor to involving Pakistan, a stand remarkably similar to that Lone had taken.

New Delhi stood by through most of the drama, perhaps to see where events would lead. It was only on November 26 that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called a meeting to discuss events in Srinagar What Union Home Minister L.K. Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes, Cabinet Secretary Prabhat Kumar, Home Secretary Kamal Pandey, the Intelligence Bureau Director Shyamal Dutta, and Research and Analysis Wing chief A.S. Dulat discussed with him has not been made public. No Jammu and Kashmir Government officials were invited to the meeting, suggesting that informal contacts with the APHC could well have been discussed. Although Advani denies that any contact with the APHC has taken place, several observers believe that some kind of informal intelligence community contact could well have occurred.

Whether an official dialogue with the APHC has already started or is only being considered, its initiation would serve several interests. For one, officials in New Delhi, as well as a spectrum of politicians, make no secret of their belief that Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's three-year



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah with Home Minister L.K. Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes and senior officials at a meeting on internal Security at North Block in New Delhi in November.

Cyberspace ravings

PRAVEEN SWAMI

THE Lashkar-e-Taiba's *jihad* is not being fought just in Jammu and Kashmir; the battle is also being waged in cyberspace. The message of hate of the ultra right-wing organisation, and that of its parent religious body, the Markaz Dawa wal'Irshad, is now just a few mouse clicks away – at www.dawacenter.com. With everything from theological articles to audio downloads of leaders' speeches, the Web site provides insights into the Lashkar's tactical objectives, and also the basis of its bloody ideology of hate.

Among the most important documents available on the site is Markaz founder Hafiz Muhammad Sayeed's speech to the group's congregation near Lahore on November 3. There, Sayeed clarified the Lashkar's viewpoint that "the *jihad* is not about Kashmir only". "About 15 years ago", the Markaz leader concluded, "people might have found it ridiculous if someone had told them about the disintegration of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic). Today, I announce the break-up of India, insha-Allah. We will not rest until the whole (of) India is dissolved into Pakistan."

Sayeed promises a new war which will "encompass all of India including Junagarh, Mavadar (and) Hyderabad". The choice of the three has obvious significance, underlining as it does the distinctly sub-continental character of the Lashkar's Islam. An article on "*Jihad* in the Present Times" informs readers that in "India, if you recite aloud the Azan, the Hindus and Sikhs come to violence". "In India", the article asserts, "the Muslims are being slaughtered just because they profess Islam. Their property is plundered, their women are disgraced and molested and their mosques are razed to the ground."

Even if Bal Thackeray's anti-Muslim campaign and the demolition of the Babri Masjid both figure on the Lashkar Web site, the content is not centred exclusively on India. "In China, Russia, Albania and Yugoslavia," another article on *jihad* asserts, "millions of innocent Muslims were put to death." The article also refers to Muslims being butchered in Chechnya and Bosnia. Some of the Markaz less probable targets of hate include Spain, where "the Christians literally and practically wiped out the whole Muslim population". Here and elsewhere, "it is our duty to restore Muslim rule to this land of ours".

Several key tenets, in the Markaz view, make this duty binding on all Muslims. *Jihad*, an article asserts, is incumbent until the persecution of Muslims ends, and "the way of life prescribed by Allah dominates and overwhelms the whole of the world". "Fighting is also obligatory," it continues, "until the disbelieving powers and states are subdued and they pay *Jizya* (capitation tax) with willing submission". The recovery of property once ruled by Muslims, avenging historical atrocities against Muslims, and the defence of Muslims who are under attack are all projects which demand the participation of all believers.

Curiously, the United States, which had been for long a prime villain in Islamic chauvinist narratives, figures little on dawacenter.com. Sayeed's speech to the annual congregation mentions the country and President Bill Clinton just three times in the course of three pages of single-spaced text. One reference is to the U.S. failure to apply the same standards it used in East Timor to Kashmir, while the other two condemn that country's denunciation of the *jihad* as terrorism. If the Web site is anything to go by, the U.S. has little to fear from a terrorist organisation that emerged from its own Afghan policy.

Dawacenter.com is frankly dismissive of democracy. Discussing the military coup in Pakistan, Sayeed urges Gen. PervezMusharraf to impose martial law, with its basis of legitimacy a "divine constitution that nullifies all other constitutions". "Just like there can be no god but Allah," he asserts, "there can be no constitution other than the one given by (the) Quran. I challenge all the groups and organisations to prove (the) Quran not being the perfect constitution from Allah. Anyone who does so will be eliminated from the fold of Islam." It is easy to see why this authoritarian rhetoric, along with calls to end strikes and agitations, is attractive to some sections of Pakistani society.

Brutality is broadcast as a badge of honour by the Lashkar. One article on its Web site notes that the "Lashkar fighter will usually execute an (imprisoned) Indian soldier by slitting his throat". "However," the article continues, "beheading and disembowelling are also common methods, employed mostly for psychological reason(s). In at least one case, a Lashkar fighter, Abu Haibat, brought the head of an Indian soldier back with him to Pakistan." Such actions are legitimised, since Hindus are, in the Lashkar's world, invariably savages, rapists, or murderers, or all of these put together.

Hate propaganda is used to justify such tactics. "A Gorkha soldier received a message from home that his mother was seriously ill and might pass away," one fairly typical article records, "so he was asked to come soon. He went to his commanding officer and asked for leave, saying that he had to go to eat his mother's flesh. But he was not granted leave. On this, he gave his gun and pouch to Mujahideen and took some money in return and ran off. Brother Salamat Ullah told that they (Gorkhas) do not bury or cremate their dead but eat their flesh."

That the Markaz rhetoric is not just words is evident. Sayeed's call for a war against India, for example, has been mirrored in the arrest of Lashkar operatives from Hyderabad, Bhiwandi and several locations in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. While dozens of Web sites peddle hatred on behalf of demented Hindu, Muslim and Christian sects, what is most disturbing about the Lashkar's cyberspace ravings is that they clearly have some official sanction from Pakistan. The annual congregation was carried out with General Musharraf's express blessings, overturning efforts by deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to stop it.

It is easy to dismiss the Lashkar-e-Taiba's rantings, thin on fact and often founded on lurid fantasy, as beneath contempt: indeed, there is no great distance between its content and pamphlets about Muslims routinely put out by Hindu fundamentalist organisations. But the fact remains that the organisation has grown rapidly in recent years with the patronage of the Pakistan state apparatus, and is now the largest terrorist group in Jammu and Kashmir. What dawacenter.com has done is to make the content of Lashkar struggle available on the Web, and underline the importance of this fascist crusade. ■

A financial crunch

PRAVEEN SWAMI

IF, in metaphorical terms, the road to peace in Jammu and Kashmir is riddled with potholes, an economic crisis has ensured that its highways are not in any better shape in the physical sense. All but the most token development activity, mostly in the form of a few central government schemes, has come to a halt. And if something is not done to solve the problem soon, says Chief Secretary Ashok Jaitley, things will get worse. He said: "After February, we will be unable to repay debts, or give government employees their salaries."

The problem is straightforward. There is this year a gap of some Rs.1,200 crores between revenue and expenditure. Of this, Rs.550 crores is needed for pay hikes prescribed by the Fifth Pay Commission, and another Rs.675 crore is accounted for by losses from electricity supplies. The State has taken an overdraft of Rs.950 crores from the Jammu and Kashmir Bank, on which it is paying interest at rates ranging from 14 per cent to 17 per cent annually.

The State also has several additional liabilities imposed by its special security-related circumstances, which it wants the Union Government to meet. Since 1988, Rs.300 crore has been paid out in salaries to the Kashmir Pandit employees who left their jobs in the Kashmir Valley and are living elsewhere. And another Rs.400 crore has had to be paid to employees of public sector units in the State which closed down amidst the violence.

State Government officials argue that the problem is not one of their making. The overdraft, for example, rose from Rs.80 crores in 1989-1990 to Rs.650 crores in October 1996, when the National Conference came to power. Then, State Government employees were granted salary parity with their Central counterparts in 1992, when Governor's Rule was in place. "I'm not saying that we haven't contributed to the problem," says Jaitley, "but when New Delhi says this is a crisis of our own creation, it's just not true."

The Chief Secretary points to loss-making public sector units as an example. For ten years, when this government was not in power, people weren't made to pay their bills. Jammu and Kashmir has hiked power tariffs three times in three years, more than any other State in the Union Consumers are reluctant to pay, in part driven by habit, but also because supplies remain unpredictable and voltage is erratic. Supplies cannot be improved until the State can buy more electricity, which it can do only if it receives aid.

UNION Finance Ministry officials, however, insist that the Jammu and Kashmir Government can do more than it has been doing in order to ensure efficiency and end corruption. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, presented in October 1999, is a depressing chronicle of just how endemic financial mismanagement and outright fraud are in the Jammu and Kashmir Government. The State Government did not help its own case by refusing to share, during earlier negotiations, accounts for security-related expenditure, a move which fuelled suspicion in New Delhi.

Incidents such as the recent crash of a State Government helicopter, which will cost some Rs.22 crores to replace, have not helped matters either. It turned out that the helicopter was flying without insurance cover, carrying private visitors to the State on a pleasure trip. Even the pilot's professional credentials have come under question. And Farooq Abdullah's decision to spend some Rs.50 lakhs on improving the facilities of Srinagar Golf Club at a time of financial hardship has not won the Chief Minister many friends.

State Government officials believe that New Delhi will help Srinagar tide over the immediate Rs.1,200 crore-deficit, and claim to have Union Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's support for this. But a short-term bailout will not solve the central problem of poor revenues. Sharp increases in excise levies and taxes have already fuelled widespread protests, and further increases on this front seem improbable. Recommendations for a drastic downsizing of the bureaucracy and public sector units, made by an official committee headed by Madhav Godbole, do not appear politically workable either.

One solution being discussed is for a dramatic increase in Jammu and Kashmir's huge hydroelectric capacity, which would make it possible for the State to sell power. Officials in New Delhi had been reluctant to grant counter-guarantees for four proposed projects, pointing to the somewhat opaque credentials of the State Government's proposed overseas collaborators. Matters appear to be progressing on this front, with proposals having been put out for the projects to be jointly managed by the Jammu and Kashmir Power Development Corporation and the National Hydro Power Corporation. Revenues from such projects, however, are obviously some distance away.

MEANWHILE, Jammu and Kashmir is demanding that its status as a Special Category state, as designated in 1990, be given retrospective effect. In the case of Special Category States, 90 per cent of their Central assistance is treated as grant, and the remaining 10 per cent as loan. Until 1990, Jammu and Kashmir received just 30 per cent of its assistance as a grant. Special Category status was granted to other States in the mid-1970s, and the demand for Jammu and Kashmir to be given the status with retrospective effect was endorsed by the Assembly. It unanimously passed a private member's bill moved by CPI(M) leader Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami.

Whether any assistance will materialise at all, however, is unclear. The Bharatiya Janata Party MP for Udhampur, Chaman Lal Gupta, has been insisting that the National Democratic Alliance Government will not underwrite inefficiency, and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani announced on November 31 that no special package had been framed for the State. Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's Government has been no model of economic competence, but it is also clear that its problems are neither unique to the State nor all of its own making. Should Jammu and Kashmir be made hostage to the BJP's factional compulsions, its consequences are certain to be more serious than those that any number of Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists can impose. ■

reign has undermined the gains made in 1996. There is unanimity here about the poor administration and the corruption, but as an alternative, no viable Opposition is in sight. Starting a dialogue with elements within the APHC would, at least, open the prospect of some secessionist leaders joining mainstream politics. This should enable the NDA Government to meet U.S. pressure by proclaiming that dialogue has been opened with representative leaders of Kashmir.

BUT it is far from clear whether a formal dialogue with the APHC could in fact come into being. Most APHC leaders have historically shown little inclination to seek confrontation with terrorist groups, who are certain to be incensed by any bilateral dialogue. In September, Umar Farooq condemned Hizbul-Mujahideen demands for the termination of all cable television services in Srinagar, suggesting cautiously that educational and news broadcasts were not un-Islamic. The Hizbul-Mujahideen promptly issued press releases virtually asking the religious leader to mind his own business. Subsequently, Umar Farooq failed to condemn the murders of at least four cable network operators in Srinagar city.

More important, it is near certain that major Pakistan-based terrorist organisations such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami would in fact ignore calls by the APHC for an end to violence, an important component of any dialogue. Nor is it clear whether Hindu chauvinists within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the party's rank and file in Jammu, would allow any kind of autonomy negotiations with the APHC to proceed. "There is this enormous optimism among communalists in Kashmir and Pakistan," said academic Balraj Puri, "that the BJP's Hindu credentials would enable it to sell some kind of deal on Kashmir." "In fact," he argued, "the BJP's core Hindu nationalist beliefs and its internal factional disputes make it near impossible for a deal on Kashmir to come about."

Alternative deals appear more probable. The State government's plans to partition Jammu and Kashmir into a series of provinces along communal lines, Puri suggested, could dovetail with its demands for greater State autonomy. "You might see," Puri said, "the Union Government granting autonomy to the Kashmir valley, Rajouri, Poonch, Doda and Kargil in return for a greater integration into the Union of the predominantly non-Muslim areas of Jammu, Leh and Udhampur. Such a deal could be packaged as meeting the separate aspirations of religious communities throughout the State." Such an autonomy deal would not only meet U.S. demands for progress in the Kashmir Valley, it would also allow the BJP to keep Hindu hardliners quiet.

The proposition is not as bizarre as it seems. Politics in Jammu and Kashmir is built around three forces, each legitimising the existence of the other. Should a partition of the State come through, the BJP would secure its ranks in Jammu, the N.C. could proclaim victory for its core Kashmiri Muslim constituency, and the APHC could continue with its anti-India platform undisturbed. Leh has seen massive anti-autonomy protests through late November, and BJP Member of Parliament Chaman Lal Gupta has been letting his Jammu region constituency know that the Union Government will under no circumstances allow the N.C. demands for Statewide autonomy to be put in place. Such protests could propel the case for partition.

THERE is little doubt that the security establishment within the State has recovered from its early post-Kargil reverses. Despite high losses of security force personnel, terrorist groups have also been hit hard by operational reverses and internal fissures. Intelligence officials told *Frontline* that Pakistani insurgents bitterly accused their Kashmiri counterparts of collaboration with security force personnel, at a meeting held at Cheripora village near Chattergul in Anantnag on the night of November 10. One relative of local Hizbul-Mujahideen military adviser Nadeem Osmani was subsequently executed on charges of being an informer.

But the new political processes set in play inside or outside Jammu and Kashmir have ensured that despite these military gains no one is certain just where events might go from here. Sadly, most politicians appear fixated on this high-level political dialogue, ignoring the fact that ordinary people have lives to live in the meanwhile. "Politicians," said CPI(M) leader Tarigami, "spend their time talking about three-nation formulas and ten-nation formulas. Meanwhile, people do not have access to clean drinking water, and their children aren't getting an education." If the Union Government is in fact serious about Jammu and Kashmir, it might to do well to address the problems of its people as well. ■

■ THE STATES

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE spectre of killings has returned to haunt south Bihar, where extremist groups are engaged in a war for supremacy. In one of the worst carnages in Palamau district, 12 members of a family were killed in Loto village, 42 km from Daltongunj, the district headquarters. The assailants belonged to the outlawed Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the victims were sympathisers of another underground ultra-Left organisation, the People's War. The People's War was formed early this year through the merger of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity and the People's War Group (PWG).

It was around midnight, when about 100 MCC activists surrounded the house of Abdul Gafoor, 60, a prosperous farmer, After sealing all escape routes, they attacked members of the family: they slit the throats of Gafoor, his wife, one of their sons, two daughters-in-law and seven grandchildren aged between three and seven.

It was 24 hours later that the police came to know of the incident. Loto, located in the Chhotonagpur foothills, is surrounded by dense forests. The police said that since Gafoor's house was on the outskirts of the village, nobody had come to know about the operation immediately after it. The news reached the nearest police station of Chattarpur, 15 km from Loto, after a local social worker, Kameshwar Baitha, and 25 others visited the thana the following day.

Director-General of Police K.A. Jacob, who visited the spot along with Chief Minister Rabri Devi and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president Laloo Prasad Yadav on November 20, said that the Loto massacre was probably the worst episode in the conflict between the two organisations. The Chief Minister ordered a probe into the killings and announced an ex-gratia of Rs.12 lakhs to the two surviving sons of Gafoor, who were in Mumbai at the time of the incident.

The authorities believe that the murder of an MCC activist in a nearby village sparked the incident. The area around Loto is a People's War stronghold, and the MCC is trying to get a foothold there. Informed sources said that Gafoor had sheltered People's War activists during the Lok Sabha elections,

Another carnage in Bihar

In the continuing war for supremacy in south Bihar between ultra-Left organisations, 12 members of a family are killed in Loto village of Palamau district.

when the battle between the two organisations had intensified

The Bihar unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party blamed the State Government for the massacre. Party leader Sushil Kumar Modi, the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, demanded the resignation of Rabri Devi. The Loto incident, he alleged, had proved that the minorities were not safe under her rule.

MEANWHILE, Jehanabad district lived up to its reputation for rivalry between naxalite groups. Three activists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation were gunned down by People's War members on November 22 at Ramdeo Chowk in Karauna police station limits. The victims were landless labourers belonging to a backward caste.

Informed sources said that revenge was the motive behind the killing. Kunal, district secretary of the CPI(ML) Liberation, told *Frontline* that the victims were 'active members' of his organisation. He said that the People's War was trying to terrorise CPI(ML) Liberation supporters. He alleged that the People's War was serving the interests of the RJD. "There appears to be a calculated attempt to terrorise voters who supported us in the last elections," he said.

Even before the elections, violence was a regular occurrence in Jehnabad district and some adjoining blocks of Patna district. At least 15 people were killed in Masaudi block of Patna district between July and August as these ultra-Left organisations fought an open war. With the Assembly elections just three months away, these organisations are preparing for a fresh show of strength. The police have arrested some MCC activists, however, the extremists continue to run a parallel administration in remote areas. The MCC has announced a "hit list", and the Jehnabad unit of the People's War has responded to this with one of its own. The People's War list includes the names of 18 MCC activists who have 'strayed from the revolutionary path". The People's War has vowed to "eliminate them. In contrast to the MCC's style, the People's War has resorted only to selective killings so far.

PALAMAU is the most disturbed region in Bihar. There are two approach routes to Daltonganj from the Grand Trunk Road: one from Sherghati via Imamganj and Lesliegunj and the other from Aurangabad via Chattarpur. The road from Shergghati cuts through areas liberated by the MCC and is kept in a state of disrepair in order to keep the police off. Incredibly beautiful though one of the poorest districts in the State, Palamau is dotted with granite hills, green valleys, streams and forests. Devoid of irrigation (the North Koel and the Koel Karo projects have been in limbo for years), the people survive on subsistence cultivation. The southern forests are populated by tribal people, who gather honey and practise slash and-burn cultivation. Starvation deaths are recorded every year here.

Mass poverty in Palamau and the neighbouring Chatra district forms the basis of MCC-led extremism in the region. Widely believed to have been initially funded by Laloo Prasad Yadav in order to counter the CPI(ML) Liberation, the MCC set up underground bases in south Bihar.

The story of the CPI(M-L) goes back to 1967. Until then no Dalit or a member of any backward community was allowed by upper-caste landlords to vote. In the 1967 elections, a young social activist of Bhojpur, Jagadish Master, took Dalit voters to a polling booth at Ekwari. He was brutally beaten by upper-caste Bhumihars. Jagadish left the village, only to return as a leader of the CPI(M-L). For the next 20 years, the CPI(M-L) built up cadres among the landless workers and marginal farmers among Dalits and selectively liquidated prominent Bhumihars and Rajputs. The CPI(ML) Liberation, which believes in Charu Mazumdar's theory of class struggle, rejected the path of underground operation and 'individual killing' in 1994. Since then it has been organising militant mass movements of landless agricultural workers in rural Bihar. The late Vinod Mishra was one of its founders.

In course of time the MCC became more active in south Bihar. It is now a force to reckon with in Gaya, Aurangabad, Chatra and eastern Palamau. Called the Party in the liberated zones, it organises people's courts, collects taxes from wealthy villagers and levies fees on mining and kendu (bidi) leaf contractors. The MCC has four adversaries – the CPI(M-L) Liberation, the police, the wealthy peasants and now the People's War. Landlords have fled the region.



IN their fight for supremacy in rural Bihar, the MCC, the CPI(M-L) Liberation and the People's War have often fought bloody battles among themselves. In September 1998, the CPI(M-L) clashed with the MCC in Aamkudar, a village on the border between Chatra and Palamau districts. Eleven CPI(M-L) Liberation activists were killed and several others wounded.

Not all these battles are fought for ideology. In Aamkudar, it is reported that the MCC was 'gifted' 30 bighas (10 acres or four hectares) of land by a landlord in order to exterminate CPI(M-L) activists who encroached on his landholding. Since 1997, the MCC has targeted the police fre-

quently in order to seize arms and ammunition. The first attack on the police occurred in May 1997 on the Kandi picket in Garhwa district to the west of Palamau. In the past one year, three ambushes have taken place in the Palamau region – at Thakurai Dabra (near Lesliegunj), at Nawa Jaipur and at the Humbu picket

An uneasy calm prevails in several villages of Palamau and Garhwa districts, which are caught in the crossfire of extremists rivalry. The MCC beat up some time ago some residents of Akabasa village for having entertained members of the People's War. The People's War would have meted out similar treatment to the villagers had they refused them food and water. Either way they are in a no-win situation. "If we attend the meeting of one party, the other will punish us. We are penalised even for not attending a meeting," a peasant told a police team that visited Loto.

Palamau Superintendent of Police N.K. Azad told *Frontline* that the extremists' battle with the landlords was almost over. "Not only the rich, even Dalits and members of the oppressed communities in Palamau and Garhwa find themselves caught in the tussle between the two groups. Both the groups want to establish their dominance over the region, which is of strategic importance. The forests that connect this area to Madhya Pradesh are used for the supply of ammunition," he said. Azad pointed out that these groups collected from the region large sums of money by way of "taxes" on a variety of businesses.

Local Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Shailendra said: "More Communists died in the MCC-People's War-CPI(M-L) Liberation conflicts than in the fight with landlords." He claimed that more than 40 people had been killed since January.

Members of the People's War, however, insist that their conflict with the MCC is "not just about territorial domination or levy". They allege that a good number of activists of the landlords' private army, the Sunlight Sena, which is locked in a battle with the People's War, have joined the MCC after landlords were humbled by the naxalite group. MCC leaders, however, refuted these charges. Informed sources said that the animosity between the two groups had increased after the MCC backed an upper-caste Rajput landlord of Punki in the 1995 Assembly elections. ■

Merry-go-round Ministries

In Goa, Francisco Sardinha leads a breakaway group from the Congress(I) and clambers to power with the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

RAVI SHARMA

POLITICS in Goa, one of India's "youngest" States, is characterised by a remarkable degree of instability. Since elections to the 40-member Assembly were first held in 1989, the State has had 10 governments. Over these years, newer and stranger political formations have evolved successively in the State; more often than not, allegiances have been determined not by political or ideological considerations but by rank opportunism. On occasion, even leaders whose politics is motivated by undiluted self-interest (and nothing else) find it prudent to camouflage their political ambitions. However, the forces that brought down last fortnight the five-month-old Congress(I) government headed by Luizhinho Faleiro felt no such need: they stated categorically that their actions were motivated solely by the desire for "ministerial posts".

The Faleiro Government, which was elected to power in June, was reduced to a minority when 11 of the 26 Congress(I) MLAs broke away from the party on November 19. Following this dramatic development, the Governor, Lt.-Gen (Retd) J.F.R. Jacob, asked Faleiro to secure a vote of confidence from the Assembly by November 24. Faced with the prospect of defeat, Faleiro resigned on November 24.

Within hours, an alternative government was in place. It was formed by the Goa Democratic Alliance, a coalition led by breakaway Congress(I) leader Francisco Sardinha (who was Revenue Minister in the Faleiro Government) and including the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and an independent.

In the last decade, the terms of two Chief Ministers – Pratapsinh Rane and Ravi Naik – together accounted for six and a half years; others have been in power for periods ranging from 11 months to six days. (Rane and Naik have served as Chief Ministers twice. Dr. Wilfred DeSouza did one better; he has been sworn in thrice.)

Rebellions within the ruling party of the day led by disgruntled leaders have brought down every one of Goa's governments since 1989. In almost all cases the rebel leaders were rewarded either with the chief ministership or with ministerial posts. Most, if not all, of Goa's leaders have switched political loyalties at least once. Among them, Deputy Chief Minister Dayanand Narvekar holds a record of sorts: he began his career with the MGP and later gravitated to the Congress(I). Subsequently he left and rejoined the Congress(I) on numerous occasions, and each of his moves resulted in the unseating of a Chief Minister, Faleiro being the fourth. Subhash Shirodkar and Somnath Zuwarkar have switched loyalties thrice, and Mauvin Godinho twice (all three are Ministers in the new dispensation).

As many as eight governments were made or unmade by defections to and from the Congress(I). Of these, five were Congress(I) governments; three, including the latest, were formed by coalitions led principally by leaders who broke away from the Congress(I) and were supported by other parties.

For the Congress(I), trouble from dissidents cropped up even in its moment of triumph. The party won 21 of the 40 Assembly seats in the June elections. The high command chose Faleiro, who as State Congress(I) president led the party to victory, to head the government. There were at least five other aspirants for the post, including three former Chief Ministers and two senior leaders. Each of them was appropriately rewarded: Rane was elected Speaker and the others were made Ministers.

The high command also insisted – in keeping with a commitment in the election manifesto – that the size of the Ministry be restricted to 15 per cent of the strength of the Assembly. Thus, the Faleiro Ministry had just six members. This was a recipe for instability.

In an attempt to bolster its slender majority, the Congress(I) sought to win over the support of legislators from smaller parties and by offering them positions of power. In July, two legislators of the United Goans Democratic Party (of which Faleiro himself was once a member) defected to the Congress(I), and one of them was made a Minister. In August, a faction of the MGP, headed by Ramakant Khalap, merged with the Congress(I), adding two more to the Congress(I)'s numbers in the Assembly. Khalap was rewarded with the party nomination for the parliamentary elections; Prakash Velip, the other, was accommodated in the Ministry. In early November, Francis D'Souza defected from the NCP to the Congress(I), taking its strength in the Assembly to 26. D'Souza, however, did not spend too much time in the Congress(I): he was one of those who broke away with Sardinha on November 19.



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Governor Lt.-Gen. J.F.R. Jacob administering the oath of office to Francisco Sardinha in Panaji on November 24.

However, sources close to Faleiro said that the Chief Minister had been unable to "work out things on his own terms" with local leaders of the Congress(I) owing to the restrictions imposed by the high command. "Every decision had to be vetted by the high command," these said.

Faleiro told *Frontline* that running a government with just five Ministers was an agonising experience. "It was a tightrope walk, since there were so many aspirants. There were as many as 14 former Ministers in the Congress(I) Legislature Party." He conceded that he had later been allowed to induct five more members in his Ministry, but said that dissidence had set in by then. "Sardinha revolted in July itself, hardly 25 days after we took office. I faced four attempts to oust me."

Faleiro claimed that his government had been pulled down because he had unearthed "the lottery scam of the century", which had entailed a revenue loss of crores of rupees. He alleged that the "lottery mafia" had induced some CLP members to defect.

Faleiro said: "When I took over I discovered that a company had, without taking part in a competitive bid, secured the contract to print and distribute State lottery tickets. The company had assured a minimum return of Rs.60 lakhs and a maximum of Rs.3 crores (including unclaimed winnings) to the State. I cancelled the contract and called for a re-tender. The same firm re-tendered through another front company, only this time the minimum amount assured was much higher. The State had been losing revenue in the business for years. There was tremendous pressure on me not to go in for a re-tender. Many of those who opposed my move are today in power."

Faleiro criticised the breakaway Congress(I) leaders for "going for the crumbs" and for going on "an illegitimate and unethical honeymoon" with the BJP. He accused the BJP of "hatching a conspiracy to destabilise a duly elected Congress(I) Government."

THE Congress(I)'s loss in Goa has translated into a major gain for the BJP, which made its political debut in the State barely five years ago. Taken with the party's victory in the North and South Goa parliamentary seats, the latest developments have rendered State BJP leaders jubilant. Gaining a toehold in Goa, a citadel of the Congress(I), has for long been the BJP's ambition. In July 1998 the BJP came close to sharing power with its alliance partner, the MGP, but its central leadership vetoed the proposal from the State unit; in the end, the BJP supported from outside the government headed by Wilfred DeSouza.

Ahead of the Assembly elections in June, the BJP severed its alliance with the MGP under pressure from the State unit. The Congress(I) gained from this development, and the BJP lost a near-certain chance to come to power. The BJP emerged as the main Opposition party, with 10 members.

According to Manohar Parrikar, BJP leader in the Assembly, the decision to go it alone in the Assembly elections paid off in the parliamentary elections, with the BJP winning both the seats. Parrikar was in favour of the BJP joining the Sardinha Ministry in order to render it stable. After debating the State unit's proposal, the central leadership decided to join the government, which includes leaders against whom BJP legislators themselves had levelled allegations of corruption and nepotism in the recent past.

Three BJP MLAs have been inducted into its Ministry, and more are likely to be accommodated. The promise in the BJP's election manifesto for Goa – that the size of a BJP ministry would be no larger than 20 per cent of the Assembly strength – has already been cast aside.

For the Congress(I), the loss of a State government to a coalition comprising the BJP has been particularly galling. Furthermore, its claim to being the only political entity capable of providing stable governments has taken a beating following the fall of the Faleiro government, which had a majority, however slender.

The Congress(I)'s loss also reflected badly on party president Sonia Gandhi's political skills and ability to deal with intra-party problems in States ruled by the party. Until the very end, she had expressed confidence that the government would survive the vote. In an effort to save the government, two emissaries were sent in quick succession to Panaji. But the inducements they offered – ministerships for all rebels and the promise that Faleiro would be replaced with a candidate acceptable to both sides – evidently did not go far enough for the rebels. The Congress(I), however, was not prepared to accede to Sardinha's demand that he be made Chief Minister.

The Sardinha government won a vote of confidence in the Assembly on November 30 by 25 votes to 14. Even so, the political situation appears to be far from stable. Observers feel that given the rough-and-tumble nature of Goan politics and the fickle nature of the political allegiances in the State, more permutations and even stranger combinations may be in the offing. ■

Madhya Pradesh manoeuvres

In Madhya Pradesh, dissident leader and Deputy Chief Minister Subhash Yadav exposes his own political weakness in attempting to organise a political protest aimed at Chief Minister Digvijay Singh.

V. VENKATESAN
in Bhopal

AT Kalghat in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, where the Narmada originates, the river is placid. For former Deputy Chief Minister Subhash Yadav, who hails from the Nimad region in Khargone district, which is only a few kilometres away, Kalghat appeared to be the right place to stage a protest. Situated on the Agra-Mumbai road, it is a key point between northern India and the country's business capital. On November 22, the Madhya Pradesh unit of Subhash Yadav's Bharat Krishak Samaj organised a four-hour blockade of the road at Kalghat, in order to prove his clout. Subhash Yadav was excluded from the Digvijay Singh government after last year's Assembly elections.



M. LAKSHMANAN

Chief Minister Digvijay Singh.

The protest turned out to be a damp squib, for the administration diverted traffic through other routes. There was no traffic jam at Kalghat, and so the success of the agitation can possibly be measured only in terms of the number of people who came to Kalghat to attend the public meeting. Although the organisers expected around 70,000 farmers to participate, media and police esti-

'Subhash Yadav raises issues, then forgets about them'

Interview with Digvijay Singh.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister **Digvijay Singh**, who on December 1 completed six years as Chief Minister, thus becoming the longest serving Chief Minister of the State, is not unused to factional struggles, having successfully handled intermittent challenges to his leadership from within the Congress(I) during his first term in office. However, on the issue of dissidence he apparently expected from Sonia Gandhi an approach that was different from that of her predecessors, many of whom had at one time or the other supported party rebels. Until the September-October Lok Sabha elections, she had backed Digvijay Singh completely and recognised his contribution to the party's victory in last year's Assembly elections. In an interview to **V. Venkatesan**, the Chief Minister relies to the charges that have been levelled against him, and speaks about the party's performance in the Lok Sabha election. Excerpts:

▶ *How do you respond to the issues raised by Subhash Yadav?*

Take the issue of soyabean prices. Since the Government of India imported cheaper edible oil, the prices crashed. Consequently, the price of oilseeds also crashed. There has also been a very steep fall in their prices in the international market. I wrote to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in August, saying that soyabean prices would crash because the import duty on soyabean had been reduced. Because of the drop in import duty, edible oil prices crashed, and as a consequence, oilseed prices, particularly the price of soyabean, also crashed. I said, you must restore it. If the Centre increases the excise duty on imported edible oil, the mandi rates of soyabean in the State will increase and the farmers will get better returns. But the Centre did not intervene.

The Centre has announced the support price for yellow soyabean at Rs.845 per quintal and that of black soyabean at Rs.755 per quintal. Last year only 4,000 tonnes of soyabean was procured by paying support price in the State. Earlier, the rates of soyabean in the open market were higher than the support price and the State never procured more than 4,000 tonnes of soyabean on support price.

If we consider the economic viability of soyabean under these circumstances, and the minimum support price announced by the Centre, how can we procure at higher prices? Who will bear the losses? The State government cannot bear the loss, which is estimated at Rs.50 crores.

Because of the erratic monsoon, the quality of soyabean took a beating. Hence, we urged the Centre to relax the grade specification norms in order to enable us to buy soyabean of a lower quality too. Despite this, we have purchased more than 50,000 tonnes. Maharashtra and Rajasthan have purchased less than this.

The second issue Subhash Yadav has raised is power supply to rural areas. It is not possible. When he was Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Cooperation, he was a party to the decision that there will be power cuts because of various constraints. He knows it is not

mates placed the strength of the crowd between 8,000 and 15,000. Not surprisingly, Subhash Yadav's critics in the Congress(I) were pleased that the protest had exposed his limited base in the State.

SUBHASH YADAV, a follower of former Chief Minister Arjun Singh, was the latter's choice for the post of Chief Minister in 1993 when the Congress(I) won the Assembly elections. Digvijay Singh, however, outmanoeuvred Arjun Singh and became Chief Minister. Subhash Yadav was made Deputy Chief Minister. After the Assembly elections last year, Digvijay Singh kept him out of the Cabinet for a variety of reasons.

During his tenure as Deputy Chief Minister, Subhash Yadav was a source of embarrassment to Digvijay Singh. An Other Backward Classes (OBC) leader, he was egged on by leaders from the State such as Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath and Madhavrao Scindia to organise dissent against Digvijay Singh. Despite being the second-in-command, he criticised Digvijay Singh's policies and decisions on several issues. Besides demanding the



A.M. FAROOQUI

Former Deputy Chief Minister Subhash Yadav.

imposition of total prohibition, he urged a ban on peoples movements, such as the one led by the Adivasi Mukthi Sangathan, for the welfare of the tribal people in the Nimad region. He said the Sangathan was a naxalite organisation. Meanwhile, several allegations of corruption in the cooperative sector, which was under Subhash Yadav, were made. Digvijay Singh dropped him from his Council of Ministers. He kept open the issue of re-inducting Subhash Yadav in his Ministry but made it clear that he was aware of the fact that Subhash Yadav was raising issues of concern to farmers only to embarrass him, especially after the party's poor showing in the Lok Sabha elections.

Digvijay Singh came under attack from within the Congress(I) for the rout in the Lok Sabha elections after a victory in the Assembly elections. Party stalwarts such as Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath, Vidya Charan Shukla and Shyama Charan Shukla and party spokesperson Ajit Jogi are seeking to pin the blame on Digvijay Singh. (The A.K. Antony Committee, which reviewed the party's performance in the Lok Sabha elections, visited Bhopal to interact with the legislators.)

While Digvijay Singh has attributed the party's poor performance to the "Atal Behari Vajpayee factor", Subhash Yadav has placed the blame on Digvijay Singh's "anti-farmer policies". Subhash Yadav,

possible.

He wants paddy to be purchased immediately. Efforts have already started in this direction. He wants the mandi tax to be raised from 50 paise to one rupee. When I took the decision to reduce the tax, it was under the premise that the lower the tax, the more honest the system. When I reduced the tax, I categorically said that if there was a fall in revenue, I would raise it again. So, now, we are reviewing the decision and we will raise the tax again.

Then, he wants the professional tax to go. He was a party to the decision on levying professional tax in Madhya Pradesh. We are getting a revenue of Rs.110 crores from this. How can we let it go? We are not taxing poor people. There is exemption for those with an annual income of up to Rs.40,000. Farmers are not being taxed.

▶ *Why are you not ready to discuss these issues with Subhash Yadav?*

In fact, I did discuss these issues. I called a meeting on November 15. He came. I sat down with him. All my officers and Ministers were there. I said these are the problems with regard to soyabean. He said, 'but your intentions are not good!' (Laughs) How can I answer this?

▶ *How do you react to his claim that he has the support of senior leaders?*

Well, no leader has openly said that he supports him. People say that they are doing it surreptitiously. But I don't think so.

▶ *Subhash Yadav says that a change of leadership is not part of his agenda now.*

I thank him very much. All these issues are open for discussion. We called him to discuss the issues at the PCC (Pradesh Congress Committee) executive. He refused to come. He lacks consistency. He raised the issue of spurious fertilizers and pesticides when he was Agriculture Minister. He blacklisted some firms, but didn't do anything about it afterwards. Then he took up the issue of illegal allotment of plots in a housing society. He did not pursue that issue either.

Then he raised the issue of prohibition. I made him the chairman of the Cabinet sub-committee enforcing prohibition. For three years, he did not submit a report. He identifies problems and issues, and then forgets about them. During the last five years, he has been consistently raising issues. But he does not take them to the logical end. My friendship with him is far more deeper than these mundane issues. In our relationship over the past several decades, many such issues have cropped up. But we became friends again.

▶ *You have attributed the Congress(I)'s debacle in the Lok Sabha elections to the "Atal wave". But you take credit for an increase in the total number of votes polled by the Congress(I). Is there a contradiction in these positions? Could you convince the Antony committee about this?*

In Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, our vote share has gone down. In Uttar Pradesh, it has gone up, because it couldn't go lower than the level at which it was in 1998. So, in all the States where the Congress(I) was in power, the party's vote share went down – except in Madhya Pradesh.

▶ *When you talk about the "Atal factor", is there an admission that the "Sonia factor" did not work?*

People talk about negative points. It was because of Sonia Gandhi that our vote share went up. We could, however, not bring down the BJP's vote share.

▶ *Because Sonia was no match for Atal Behari Vajpayee?*

You may say that. But I do not say that. On the contrary, because of Sonia our vote share has gone up in the entire country. But we got fewer seats because of the vagaries of our electoral system. ■



A M FARUQUI

***Shiksha karmis* – teachers appointed under the Education Guarantee Scheme of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission in Madhya Pradesh - went on a protest demonstration in Bhopal on November 25 demanding government jobs.**

who described the "Vajpayee factor as a figment of Digvijay Singh s imagination asked "How is it that the Atal factor did not work in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and in the 11 constituencies in Madhya Pradesh where the Congress(I) won?

At a farmers' rally he led in Ujjain recently, Subhash Yadav claimed that he had the backing of senior Congress(I) leaders such as Scindia, Kamal Nath and Arjun Singh However, at a press conference in New Delhi, Scindia spoke against Subhash Yadav s public outbursts against Digvijay Singh and said that he should have first raised the issues at party forums

Other leaders are, however, believed to have asked Subhash Yadav to go ahead on the plea that a party member cannot be barred from giving public expression to farmers' grievances This emboldened him to disregard Pradesh Congress Committee president Radhakrishna Malaviya's plea to defer the Kalghat agitation and instead discuss the issue in the Legislature Party

Among the issues raised by Subhash Yadav is the neglect of farmers' interests by the State and Central governments He alleged that a drastic reduction in the support price of soyabean had badly affected procurement He also raised the issues of limited power supply to farmers, the increase in the sales tax on fertilizers, pesticides and farm equipment just before the Lok Sabha elections, and an over Rs 57-crore revenue loss incurred by the State because of a reduction in the mandi (market) tax from 1 per cent to half a per cent allegedly meant to benefit traders He is also critical of the Centre s decision to import wheat in huge quantities, which he says will harm the interests of farmers

Digvijay Singh may have earned a reprieve by blaming the party's reverses in the Lok Sabha elections on Vajpayee's popularity. The real test of his own popularity will be the approaching elections to civic bodies in 60 districts.

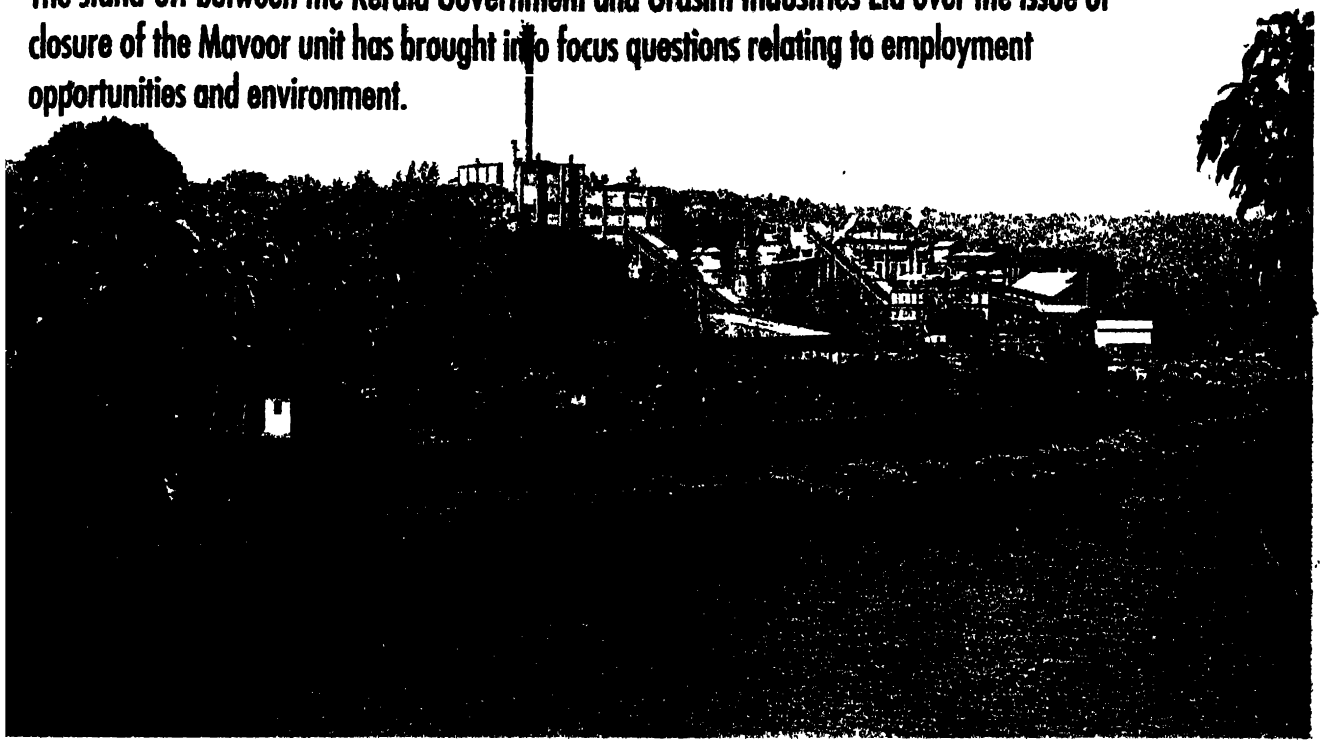
Interestingly, party president Sonia Gandhi has made no effort to dissuade Subhash Yadav from going public on these issues Subhash Yadav was willing to drop his "chakka jam" agitation if Sonia Gandhi requested him to do so However, it appears that by keeping silent she is backing his anti-Digvijay Singh utterances and actions This has caused dismay within the party She asked the PCC(I) to arrange a meeting between the Chief Minister and Subhash Yadav to sort out the issues raised by the latter However, the message that she is willing to tolerate indiscipline within the party had already gone home Will she allow this kind of dissent against her own leadership of the party? asked a Digvijay Singh loyalist

Observers, however, rule out any immediate threat to Digvijay Singh s leadership Subhash Yadav, who owes his stature to Digvijay Singh, has only negligible support among the MLAs There were only five ruling party MLAs at Kalghat on November 22, apart from the Member of Parliament from Khargone, Tarachand Patel The PCC(I) is in favour of taking disciplinary action against Subhash Yadav, but such action is unlikely to come through since senior leaders, including Digvijay Singh, have said that raising farmers' issues in public does not constitute indiscipline Subhash Yadav maintains that he cannot be accused of indiscipline "I am only trying to strengthen the party, not weaken it," he claims

Digvijay Singh may have earned a reprieve by blaming the party's reverses in the Lok Sabha elections on Vajpayee's popularity The real test of his own popularity will be the approaching elections to civic bodies in 60 districts. The Digvijay Singh camp is, however, confident that the ruling party will do well in these elections. ■

A stand-off in Mavoor

The stand-off between the Kerala Government and Grasim Industries Ltd over the issue of closure of the Mavoor unit has brought into focus questions relating to employment opportunities and environment.



The Grasim factory on the banks of the Chaliyar.

R. KRISHNAKUMAR
in Mavoor

THE biggest private sector industrial unit in Kerala, Grasim Industries Ltd, has had many claims to fame during the four decades of its existence. The factory, owned by the Aditya Birla group, manufactures rayon-grade wood pulp and viscose staple fibre (VSF).

At the time of its establishment in 1957 at Mavoor village on the banks of the Chaliyar river in Kozhikode district, the company, then named Gwalior Rayons Silk Marketing Company Ltd., was considered a boon to the industrially backward State with a high level of unemployment. Successive governments in the State actively encouraged the company by providing it water and power at heavily subsidised rates and access to forests to get the raw materials it needed – bamboo and eucalyptus – at abysmally low prices.

The Mavoor unit was the first in the world to manufacture rayon-grade pulp from bamboo. It was also the first to use heterogeneous species of pulpable wood, including eucalyptus and certain wild plants in the manufacture of rayon-grade pulp. In 1968, the second unit of Grasim Industries was established to manufacture VSF. Grasim Industries had poineered the manufacture of this cellulose fibre in the country using entirely indigenous resources, knowhow and equipment. (VSF, like cotton and polyester fibre, is one of the raw materials used to make yarn. VSF is blended with polyester and cotton in the manufacture of fabrics.) Today, Grasim, Mavoor, along with its sister units elsewhere in the country and abroad, has made Grasim Industries Ltd the world leader in VSF production.

WITH a steady rise in profits, the Mavoor units soon became the source of hope for the families of their nearly 3,000 employees.

Small businesses sprang up in and around Mavoor, depending mostly on the patronage of Grasim and its employees. The village, 21 km from Kozhikode, grew into a small town.

But the price the people in the neighbourhood, and Kerala society in general, has had to pay for this development was heavy. The residents of nine densely populated (average population density is 1,200 a sq km) panchayats along the Chaliyar river, mainly Mavoor, Vazhakkad, Peruvayal, Vazhayoor and Olavanna, were affected by severe air, water and solid waste pollution. Studies by various agencies have found in them a high incidence of serious health problems, including cancer, respiratory diseases, skin infection and vision impairment. The pollution caused by the Grasim units may be a major contributary factor for this, according to these studies.

According to the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), the factory consumes 51,650 cubic metres of water every day (more than the daily consumption of Kozhikode, one of the three largest cities



Effluents being discharged into the river at Chunkappally.

in Kerala) and lets out 40,000 cubic metres of effluents into the Chaliyar. The effluents include acids, suspended solids, phenolic compounds, sulphides, oil and grease, heavy metals including mercury and zinc, ammoniacal nitrogen and organo-chlorine compounds. As a result the once-pristine Chaliyar became virtually a river of death.

The pollution caused by the emission of toxic gases (including sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, carbon disulphide, carbon monoxide, chlorine and traces of several others) has been made worse by the short stacks of the factory located as it is in a valley. All through its existence, Grasim Industries has ignored many of the norms set by the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) on the disposal of liquid, gaseous and solid waste.

The latest of the studies conducted by the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment – the first ever Green Rating Project to assess the Indian pulp and paper industry's environmental performance – has put Grasim Industries at the bottom of the heap; it is ranked 25th among 28 such units and faulted for its poor utilisation of raw materials, high consumption of water and chemicals, continued reliance on natural forests (with no effort to move towards farm/social forestry), violation of State PCB norms regarding effluent treatment, poor pollution control equipment, failure to recycle and reuse raw materials, poor technology, lack of an environmental policy and poor relations with the local community.

A comparison of the environmental performance of Grasim Industries with that of the three factories that received the best rating in the study, is revealing. While Andhra Pradesh Paper Mills Ltd, Rajamundhry, rated second by the centre, uses 1.95 tonnes of fibre to produce one tonne of paper, Grasim utilises 3.44 tonnes. While Ballarpur Industries Ltd, Ballarpur (Maharashtra), rated third, needs only 190 tonnes of water to produce one tonne of paper, Grasim requires 300 tonnes of water. While J.K. Paper Mills, ranked first, uses only 0.25 tonne of chemicals, Grasim uses 0.48 tonne to produce a tonne of paper. Similarly, while Grasim discharges 302.92 tonnes of waste water and chemicals for every tonne of paper produced, J.K. Paper Mills discharges less than half of this quantity – 139.2 tonnes.

The Grasim units' environmental performance appears even more alarming when seen in the light of the fact that even the top-ranking company has been given a total score of only 42.75 per cent by the Green Rating Project (Grasim's score is 20.65 per cent). This indicates the general state of the paper and pulp industry in terms of pollution.

In the absence of definitive studies, data on the use of bamboo and eucalyptus by the Grasim units and the subsidy they obtain for these forest produce broadly indicate the extent of the plunder of the State's forest wealth by Grasim industries. Environmentalists aver that this problem is as alarming as the pollution caused. The KSSP and the Chaliyar Samara Samiti, which has been demanding the closure of the units and the prosecution of Grasim Industries, allege that the factory is one of the principal culprits in the extensive deforestation in the Western Ghats. The State Government supplies two lakh tonnes of bamboo reeds, eucalyptus and other timber to the company at rates that are far lower than the market price or the price that the traditional users of the produce pay. Chaliyar Samara Samiti activists told *Frontline* that while the company paid Rs. 426 a tonne for bamboo, a tribal artisan in Wayanad, who made a living out of bamboo, had to pay between Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 5,000 per tonne. Hundreds of families of tribal and other artisans have thus been deprived of these raw materials, and thus their livelihood.

According to the KSSP, even by conservative estimates, the company is supplied free of cost water worth Rs.12.5 crores a year (calculated at the rate at which the Kerala Water Authority supplies water to ordinary consumers). As for electricity, the company pays the Government Rs.1.40 a unit, while the cost of generation is Rs.2 a unit.

The subsidies and concessions notwithstanding, Grasim Industries is accused of having all along attempted to evade its responsibility in the matter of the pollution it causes. The goodwill that the company earned initially owing to promise of employment it held out, turned into resentment.

The company meanwhile protected its own water sources from pollution by constructing a bund at Elamaram and locating the effluent discharge outlet downstream. In 1978, in one of the most significant phases of the local people's struggle against Grasim Industries, hundreds of people joined hands to demolish the bund. When the struggle became intense in Vazhakkad, one of the worst-affected villages, the company entered into an agreement with the Government to facilitate the discharge of effluents at Chunkappally, 7 km further downstream. Although it helped contain the Vazhakkad agitation, the company's failure to keep its promise of treating effluents properly paved the way for the agitation to spread to new areas – the vil-

'Mavoor unit has become unviable'

Interview with Grasim Industries president.

R.N. Saboo, president, Grasim Industries, who heads the Mavoor unit of the company, says that the failure of the Kerala Government to honour its commitment on supply of raw materials has made production at Mavoor unviable. Excerpts from an interview he gave to R. Krishnakumar in early November.

▶ *Why did Grasim seek permission for closure? There is a view that it is a ploy to wrest more concessions.*

The Government of Kerala has failed to meet its commitment of supplying the right quantity and quality of raw materials. The factory was reopened in 1988 on the basis of the commitment to provide two lakh tonnes of raw materials. It (the Government) failed to honour this commitment and the company was forced to procure raw materials from private sources and from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. All this, especially the use of heterogeneous wood, affected the quality of pulp and increased the manufacturing cost substantially.

With liberalisation, quality has become a very important factor in the market. Imported pulp of a higher quality is available at a cheaper price and there are few takers for the pulp of inferior and inconsistent quality from Mavoor. Pulp of poor quality also affects quality down the line – the quality of the fibre produced from it, especially by Grasim's plant at Nagda which had been using substantial quantities of pulp produced at Mavoor. Also (it affects) the quality of yarn and fabrics. Fibre is one of the major businesses of Grasim Industries, and we cannot continue to produce low-quality stuff from low-quality pulp and keep accumulating stocks.

Moreover, a major change has taken place in the world textile sector. The demand for VSF (viscose staple fibre) has come down because of the availability of polyester staple fibre (PSF), which is cheaper than VSF. PSF, priced at Rs. 107 a kg in 1995, now costs only Rs. 40. This has resulted in a shift in favour of PSF in the making of polyester viscose blended yarn. (If earlier the ratio was 35/65, it is now 80/20 in favour of PSF.) In some other applications, the use of 100 per cent VSF has been stopped. All this has made VSF production at Mavoor unviable.

We require two lakh tonnes of raw materials in the form of eucalyptus wood alone – since bamboo has an inherent silica content, which affects the quality of pulp – from the Government at rates at which rayon-grade pulp can be produced economically. It is clear that the Government cannot provide raw materials of agreed quantity and quality. It is futile to enter into unrealistic agreements.

▶ *What prevents Grasim from finding raw materials of the required quality from other sources?*

The high cost of transport. The use of heterogeneous wood increases input consumption. It further affects quality and raises the cost of manufacture to uneconomical levels. Moreover, there are restrictions on the movement of wood in neighbouring States. Our efforts to become self-sufficient by buying 12,000 hectares of private forest land in Nilambur were discouraged when the Government went back on its commitment to us and nationalised private forests in Kerala (in 1971). Requests for land to raise captive (eucalyptus) plantations have been ignored.

▶ *There is this larger issue of pollution, based on which there is a definite demand for the closure of the Mavoor unit. Is Grasim not trying to run away from its responsibility? What about its responsibility towards its own employees?*

We have spent crores of rupees on pollution control and have been meeting the parameters prescribed by the State PCB (pollution control board) except in the case of the colour of the effluents. We have brought down pollution substantially. We cannot go on answering allegations raised by every other organisation. We have done everything possible to bring pollution down to acceptable levels, which has been acknowledged by the State PCB. Moreover, the kind of pollution also changes with the change in raw materials supplied.

We are running a business, not a charity. It is our policy that each unit should be a profit centre. Mavoor cannot drain the resources of another unit of the company.

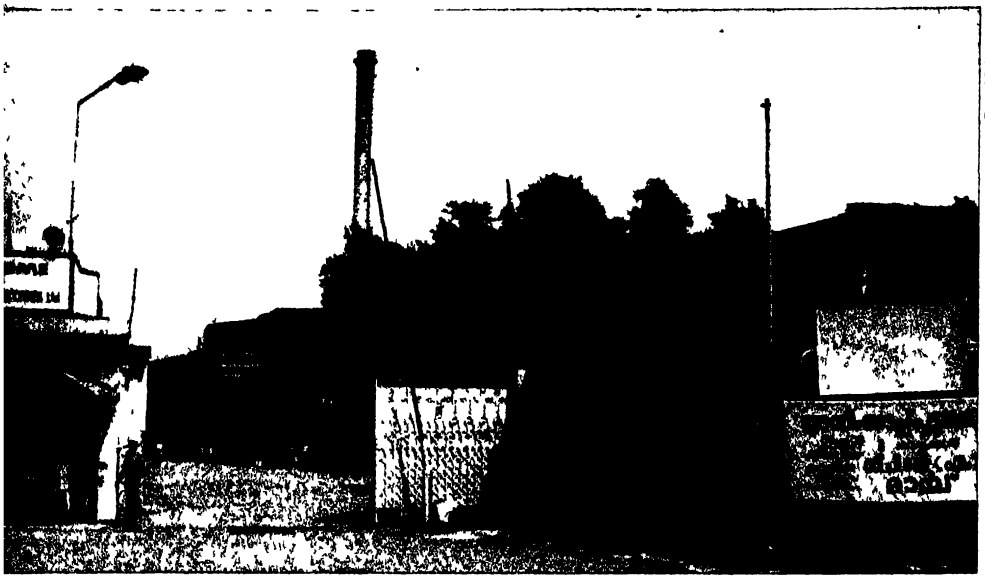
▶ *The Government denied your request for closure.*

The company will explore all possible options. We can appeal for a review of the decision. There is also a provision to ask for a tribunal to decide on our appeal. If we don't get a favourable decision, we can also approach the court. ■

lages further downstream. The problem was aggravated by leaks in the pipes that carried effluents to the river. The company continued to ignore the directives from the State PCB and also courts, including the Kerala High Court, to ensure adherence to pollution control norms. A series of petitions seeking the closure of the Grasim units and the prosecution of the Company's management are pending before various courts.

On August 23, Grasim Industries (which had already declared an extended lay-off for "annual maintenance") approached the Government seeking permission to close both its pulp and fibre divisions. This move, which means loss of livelihood for the families of its over 3,000 employees, put the workforce, the Government and, to a certain extent, the local population on the defensive.

In a State where the rate of unemployment is high and industrial investment low and slow in coming, Grasim had placed itself in a comfortable bargaining position *vis-a-vis* the Government. It had ruthlessly demonstrated its power as a major employer on several occasions. In 1985, when public pressure against pollution by Grasim was at its peak, the management closed the factory for nearly three years citing "labour trouble" as the reason. It was a time when the price of paper pulp had come down in the international market and import of pulp had become a cheaper option for the Grasim conglomerate, which had a strong presence in the textile market in India and abroad. The



RAMESH KURUP

At the factory entrance, a plea against closure.

group manufactured a chain of products from wood pulp to apparel. The hardships of the employees and their families (many workers were driven to penury and even suicide) forced the Government to its knees. It was prepared for any compromise with the management to get the factory reopened. An agreement between the State Government and Grasim, signed in 1988, was nothing but a surrender by the former. The management succeeded in wresting more concessions on the supply of raw materials, while the Government could not impose any restriction or obtain any assurance on pollution control.

OVER the years, Grasim did make some efforts to control pollution, but the problems persisted. The depletion of Kerala's forest wealth continued and protests by the affected people intensified. The Grasim problem came to be seen increasingly as a problem of rehabilitation of 3,000 employees. Pressure was certain to mount on the company to behave, control pollution and modernise production technology – in short, to invest more in Mavoor with this end in view.

Grasim had, however, been comfortably placed to resist any such pressure. The most important factor was that the Mavoor unit was only one of the six VSF units of Grasim Industries, the flagship company of the Rs. 20,000-crore Aditya Birla group. The group is the world's largest producer of VSF with an aggregate capacity of more than 300,000 tonnes spread over three countries. With the establishment of a modern rayon grading technology plant (using hybrid eucalyptus) in Karnataka in 1972, it became the largest producer of rayon-grade wood pulp in India (aggregate capacity 130,000 tonnes). In 1998, the group acquired a joint venture pulp mill (with Tembec Inc. Canada) in Canada, whose entire production of 110,000 tonnes is used for the captive consumption of its various VSF units in India, Thailand and Indonesia. Clearly, in Grasim's scheme of things, the Mavoor plant, which has all along survived on the Government's benevolence and inability to enforce pollution control norms, has fallen in importance and, in the context of the demands for more investment, become more a liability.

It is in this context that the notice issued by the company for the closure of its pulp and fibre units and the reasons stated for it (see interview) become significant. The company's main arguments in favour of closure are: the required quantity and quality of raw materials can no longer be obtained in Kerala; the Government has reneged on its commitments on the supply of raw materials; the use of heterogeneous wood affects the quality of pulp produced; the poor quality of pulp has brought down its price and also the quality of downstream products such as fibre. All this has to be seen in the light of globalisation that has opened the door for quality pulp and fibre at lower prices in the market, making the Mavoor unit unviable.

As November 30, the date on which the company sought to close down, drew closer, the stage appeared set for a long battle between Grasim Industries and the State Government, which has refused permission to the company to close down. Labour and Rehabilitation Secretary C. N. Ananda Bose told *Frontline* that the Government refused to permit the company to close down after considering its request strictly on merit. "The company's argument that its units have become unviable is merely stating the inevitable," said Ananda Bose. "It is not in the VSF/pulp sector alone that the impact of liberalisation, especially of cheaper imports, is being felt," he said and added that the company had to reorient its policies to meet the challenges of liberalisation.

Ananda Bose said that the alleged failure of the Government to honour its commitment on the supply of raw materials could not be a convincing reason for closure. Significantly, he said, under the agreement between the Government and Grasim the company was free to procure raw materials from the open market and that the Government would make good any loss that may accrue to the factory in the process. The company had failed to lift even the raw materials already allotted. In fact, raw materials needed for one year had been made available, although Grasim said that the stock on hand was enough for only three months, he said.

Organisations including the KSSP have pointed out that Grasim Industries has cumulatively obtained subsidies and other benefits to the tune of Rs. 500 crores in the past one decade alone (and that these added up to a much larger figure in the two earlier decades). According to them, a company, which started production with a capital investment of Rs.10 crores, now has assets worth Rs.1,000 crores, built out of the profits made from Mavoor alone. They point out that Grasim has a moral and legal duty to alleviate the sufferings of the people of Mavoor and surrounding areas. By issuing a notice for closure, Grasim is but trying to shirk its responsibility of modernising its production and pollution control techniques.

With Industries Minister Suseela Gopalan stating that the Government's priority will be to protect the jobs of the employees and with Grasim making its intentions clear by stating that "we are running a business, not a charity", what the company perhaps plans is a repeat of its 1998 blackmail. ■

Militancy unchecked

In the absence of adequate central security forces, extremists step up violence in Tripura to unprecedented levels.

KALYAN CHAUDHURI

THE November 14 massacre of 18 members of a non-tribal community at Panchabati in South Tripura by the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) was another bloody episode in the State's long history of ethnic violence. What made it particularly disturbing was the report that the assailants came from Sylhet in Bangladesh and returned there after the operation.

Nearly 40 ATTF extremists in Army fatigues reached the market in the village unobtrusively in small groups around 6 p.m. Shopkeepers mistook them for Assam Rifles jawans. Soon they cordoned off the market and opened fire with AK-47 rifles. Eighteen persons died on the spot. After one round of firing, the militants staged a mock retreat to the sound of a whistle. But as soon as people ventured out of their shelters, they returned to loot and set fire to shops before leaving the scene. The entire operation lasted 20 minutes.

With insurgent groups such as the ATTF and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) stepping up armed action to drive out non-tribal communities from the tribal-dominated Autonomous District Council area in the hills, the situation has become explosive. In November alone violence claimed the lives of 30 civilians from non-tribal communities. A week after the Panchabati incident, NLFT militants gunned down eight police constables in an ambush in the remote Banduar area in the Udaipur subdivision of South Tripura. This was the first major attack on security forces since the Lok Sabha elections on October 3.

Police sources said that on the morning of November 22, a mini-truck and a jeep carrying armed police personnel headed for the Maharani area with a record of extremist activity from Udaipur, the headquarters of South district, on a long-range patrol. A massive landmine blast damaged the vehicles in the Banduar area. Heavily armed NLFT militants, who waited atop hillocks on both sides of the road, then attacked them with grenades and AK-series rifles.

POLITICAL parties in the State reacted strongly to the Panchabati incident and the attack on the security forces. They tried to outdo one another in organising bandhs. The ruling Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), called a statewide bandh on November 15. The Trinamul Congress followed with a 12-hour bandh the next day. Following the ambush on the police personnel, the CPI(M) called a 12-hour bandh in Udaipur subdivision on November 23. In an effort to steal the CPI(M)'s thunder, Trinamul Congress called a 30-hour bandh in the subdivision from the afternoon of November 22 itself. The Congress(I) organised a 12-hour bandh on November 12 in protest against what it described as the Left Front Government's failure to rescue three schoolchildren who were abducted by militants from Kalyanpur on November 1.



SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

On November 30, Chief Minister Manik Sarkar at an all-party meeting in Agartala convened to discuss the insurgency problem in Tripura.

A four-member parliamentary delegation of Left parties, led by CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee, arrived in Tripura on November 17 to assess the situation in Panchabati following the massacre. The delegation was prevented from reaching the area by local people who protested against the Government's failure to protect their lives. The delegates, who were attacked, left the area in damaged vehicles, under heavy police escort. A large police contingent had cordoned off the area, but nearly 500 people, including members of the victims' families, broke through the barricade and shouted slogans. They pelted the VIP entourage with stones. Earlier, delegations of Opposition parties were forced to go back after residents staged violent demonstrations.

The Left Front Government has repeatedly sought from the Centre additional security forces. It links the spurt in militant activities to the pullout from the State of three Army battalions during the Kargil War.

Undeterred by the people's opposition to their visit, the parliamentary delegation of the Left endorsed Chief Minister Manik Sarkar's demand for additional security forces. In messages faxed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Union Home Minister L.K. Advani, it said at least four additional companies of paramilitary forces were needed to bring the law and order situation under control.

The delegation comprised, apart from Somnath Chatterjee, Amar Roy Pradhan of the Forward Bloc, Ajoy Chakravarty of the Communist Party of India and Sanat Mandal of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. They said that more Border Security Force (BSF) battalions were also required, to seal the "porous" border with Bangladesh. Somnath Chatterjee said: "Had additional forces been deployed in Tripura earlier, the massacre at Panchabati could

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have been prevented."

Informed sources in the CPI(M) said that the four parliamentarians were upset over some heckling they encountered at Panchabati and reprimanded the State CPI(M) leadership for failing to prevent the incident. A CPI(M) press release said the people of Panchabati had been instigated by vested interests to oppose the team's visit. It said the heckling of the four Left Front leaders was tantamount to "strengthening the hands of terrorists."

The Left Front delegates said that the behaviour of the local people was a "natural reaction" to a tragic event. "We respect the sentiments of the people and share their grief," Somnath Chatterjee said. He criticised the BJP-led government at the Centre for its failure to "properly assess the situation in Tripura". He said that all together 76 people had been killed, 88 abducted and 47 injured by militant organisations in the State over the past three months.

The Congress(I), the Tripura Upjati Juba Samiti (TUJS), the BJP and the Trinamul Congress demanded that the CPI(M)-led Left Front Government be dismissed and President's Rule imposed in the State. The demand was first raised by BJP national president Kushabhau Thakre at a press conference in Calcutta shortly after the Panchabati incident. "We are against the removal of any elected government but the law and order situation in Tripura has gone from bad to worse and warrants the Centre's intervention," Thakre said, adding that the Left Front Government was unable to tackle the extremists.

In a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister, the State wing of the Congress(I) said: "We are aware that imposing President's Rule in Tripura is quite difficult after the Supreme Court judgment in the S.R. Bommai case in 1994. But the Constitution empowers the Centre to intervene effectively in the State's affairs without invoking Article 356." The demands placed before the Prime Minister by the Congress(I) are: the removal of Governor Siddheswar Prasad, Central intervention in the State, a directive to the State government to form an independent command under the Army's leadership to counter insurgency, the extension of the Disturbed Area Regulation to cover the entire State, and amendment of the Constitution to bring Tripura under Article 371.

The CPI(M)'s central leadership came down heavily on Thakre for seeking the imposition of President's Rule. The Central Committee stated: "It was on the basis of the Centre's proposal that the State Government decided to bring Tripura's 27 police stations in the hill areas under the Disturbed Area Regulation in February 1997 to enable the Army to carry out counter-insurgency operations in the hills. But the Centre has withdrawn even the last battalion of the Army from the State during the Kargil conflict. Now the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) troops, with no special training in counter-insurgency operations, are drawn into action against well-equipped underground extremists carrying sophisticated weapons. Tripura is the only State in the northeastern region where there is no Army to combat insurgents."

The Chief Minister told *Frontline* that his government had on a number of occasions placed before the Union Home Ministry maps showing locations of camps of extremists from northeastern India within Bangladesh territory so that diplomatic pressure could be exerted on Dhaka to close them down. "Nothing tangible has so far been done by the Centre," he alleged.

The Chief Minister said that there were 29 camps of the outlawed ATTF, the NLFT and the Manipur People's Liberation Army (MPLA) in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill and Sylhet regions. Tripura, he said, required at least 18 battalions of the BSF to guard its 856-km border with Bangladesh, but it had only one battalion. The Centre was being persuaded to deploy additional BSF battalions to strengthen the security posts at least along the border with the Sylhet and Chittagong hill regions, Manik Sarkar said. "The Centre is silent over the State's demand for additional forces."

On returning from Tripura, Somnath Chatterjee said his party would persuade other Opposition parties to initiate a "joint move on the Tripura issue" in the Lok Sabha to bring pressure on the Centre to help the State government counter insurgency. He said that Tripura's security problem would be raised in the House, but "before that we shall initiate a dialogue with other Opposition leaders for a consensus on Tripura's problem of insurgency, like the understanding we reached earlier on Kashmir." He said that underground extremists had stepped up killings and abductions "alarmingly" in the State, giving rise to a trend of "ethnic polarisation" which had ominous implications.

A paradox in Maharashtra

Affluence and extreme levels of poverty co-exist in Maharashtra, thanks to an obsession with industrialisation and the neglect of the agricultural sector. The State needs to evolve broad policy initiatives in order to address the problem.

BHALCHANDRA MUNGEKAR

FOR historical reasons, Maharashtra has emerged as India's most industrialised State. Its capital, Mumbai, is rightly considered the financial and commercial capital of the country. Naturally, other States strive to imitate the development model of Maharashtra. Thus it is that hundreds of thousands of people from the rest of the country arrive in Mumbai hoping to have access to some means of livelihood.

In this background, there ought to be a general perception that poverty is less pervasive in Maharashtra than in other States. In reality, however, that is not the case. The coexistence in the State of affluence and disproportionate poverty is particularly distressing.

In 1997, the per capita income (PCI) of Maharashtra at current prices was as high as Rs.17,666, second only to Punjab's Rs.18,223. It was four and a half times that of Bihar, more than two and a half times that of Orissa, twice that of Kerala, and nearly one and a half times that of Gujarat and Karnataka. But what about poverty? According to an expert (Lakdawala) committee, 38 per cent of the population of the State was below poverty line (BPL) in 1993-94. On the other hand, the extent of rural poverty in Gujarat and Karnataka was 22 and 30 per cent respectively, and rural poverty in Kerala was less than that in Maharashtra by 12 percentage points. Significantly, the extent of rural poverty even in a State like Orissa was nine percentage points less than that in Maharashtra. At the same time, the extent of rural poverty in Maharasthra was on a par with that in the country as a whole (in fact, it was one percentage point higher) despite the State's PCI being one and a half times higher than the national average.

Maharashtra cannot derive consolation even from Bihar, because though the extent of rural poverty is higher by 20 percentage points in the case of the latter, its PCI was barely 22 per cent of that of Maharashtra.

The reality with respect to urban poverty was not radically different either. Urban poverty in Maharashtra was higher than in Gujarat and Kerala (by seven and 10 percentage points, respectively), while the State has the dubious distinction of being ranked on a par with Bihar. Even the all-India level of urban poverty was three percentage points lower than Maharashtra's.

Again, in terms of Human Development Index (HDI), Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat, Orissa and Bihar rank second, fourth, seventh, eighth and 12th respectively, while Maharashtra ranks 14th. The female literacy rate in Kerala is 74 per cent compared to Maharashtra's abysmally low 34 per cent.

THESE facts lead one to three broad conclusions. First, in terms of economic growth (PCI), Maharashtra is very advanced and ranks next only to Punjab. Second, both rural poverty and urban poverty are comparatively more pervasive in Maharashtra and are disproportionate to the State's profile of economic prosperity. Third, economic growth is only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the alleviation of poverty.

It is now imperative to explain the paradox of the coexistence of *affluence* and *poverty* in Maharashtra. First, owing to its obsession with industrialisation, Maharashtra neglected its agricultural sector. Although the agricultural sector accounts for only one-fifth of the State Domestic Product (SDP), it provides sustenance to between 75 and 80 per cent of the population. In 1981-82, the extent of irrigated area was barely 12 per cent, and that increased to 15 per cent in 1993-94 – that is, by three percentage points in nearly one and a half decades. On the other hand, corresponding figures for Bihar and Orissa were thrice and twice respectively that of Maharashtra. Even Gujarat and Karnataka were way ahead of the State in this regard; so is the country as a whole.

Maharashtra is thus deficit in terms of foodgrain production. Sugarcane and cotton are the two main cash crops of the State. In the case of sugarcane production, the State ranks second, behind Uttar Pradesh. It has successfully built up a cooperative sugar economy, mainly in the western Maharashtra region. In the case of cotton, the State has been uniquely employing the Monopoly Cotton Procurement Scheme. What is disappointing, however, is that the increase in the production of both sugarcane and cotton has been achieved *not* through any increase in productivity (yield per hectare) but by progressively enhancing the area under cultivation.

Punjab's productivity in the case of cotton is about two and a half times more than that of Maharashtra. The situation in Maharashtra in respect of sugarcane is more alarming. For instance, during the decade 1981-91, sugarcane productivity in the State declined by 1.5 per cent per annum. What is further shocking is the fact that sugarcane on barely 2.5 to 3 per cent of the land under the crop grabs nearly 60 per cent of the total irrigation water. This is socially offending inasmuch as 80 to 85 per cent of the marginal, small and dry land medium farmers in the State are denied irrigation water even for a single crop. For them, farming has become a distress activity.

OF late, industrialisation has slowed down in the State. In 1980-81, the industrial (secondary) sector accounted for 35 per cent of the SDP, and this declined to 34 per cent in 1995-96. Industrial production grew at an annual rate of about 9 per cent during the decade 1981-91, while during the next six years it decelerated to 6 per cent per annum. As a result, during 1993-1997, Maharashtra's share in the country's industrial production remained stagnant, between 16 and 17 per cent. The same

was true of the State's share in the country's aggregate factory employment, which was around 14 per cent and which in all probability may have declined further. There has been a large-scale industrial sickness, which is growing. For instance, the number of sick large units increased from 146 in 1985 to 312 in 1990, while that of small sick units from 8,500 to 20,000.

Industrial sickness must have further increased in the past eight years, worsening the problem of unemployment.

Deteriorating industrial relations and the faulty handling of industrial relations by the State Government are among the main reasons for the industrial deceleration. The State Government handled the 1982 textile mill strike with ineptitude and callousness. Even today, the Government is dilly-dallying with the millowners' demand to sell the mills' surplus land. On the other hand, the employment scene in the State is worsening. For instance, at the end of December 1998 there were 41 lakh names on the employment exchange registers: 25 per cent of these persons had not passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination, 52 per cent had SSC as their qualifications and the remaining 23 per cent were with higher education. Although immediately after coming to power the Shiv Sena-BJP Government promised to create of 27 lakh jobs, it virtually did nothing in this regard.

In 1973, Maharashtra introduced the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) with a view to giving the guarantee of employment to all unskilled persons in the rural areas within a radius of 5 kilometres. In 1977, the State enacted the relevant legislation and made the EGS statutory. The EGS won appreciation not only in India but in the entire developing world as a unique and novel scheme. During the last 25 years or so, there have been a number of studies evaluating the EGS from all possible angles. What, however, has emerged from these studies is that notwithstanding its limitations the EGS proved to be a major source of livelihood for lakhs of unskilled rural people, both men and women, particularly from the poverty-sticken Marathwada region and part of the Vidarbha region.

During the last few years, however, the EGS has been marginalised. For instance, in 1989-90 the Government spent about Rs. 288 crores on the EGS, but in 1991-92 the expenditure fell by about Rs. 100 crores to Rs. 194 crores. During the same period, expenditure on wages fell from Rs. 153 crores to Rs. 108 crores. In 1986-87, employment of about 19 crore person-days was created. In 1991-92, the figure declined to barely 6.5 crores. Although employment increased to about 9.7 crores in 1995-96, it was still half of its volume in 1986-87. Thus wide-scale rural poverty in Maharashtra may partly be attributed to the decline of the EGS.

NOR is the State serious about improving the Public Distribution System (PDS). It is obvious that being a deficit State its rural people depend very much on the PDS. It is, therefore, imperative that the State implements the PDS with commitment and sincerity. But this is far from the reality. The gap between the Central Government's allotment of grains (rice and wheat) and the State's purchases is a clear testimony to this. For example, in 1990 the Centre allotted 17.35 lakh tonnes of grains, while the State (fair price shops) lifted 16.58 lakh tonnes. In 1994, however, out of the Central allotment of 18.18 lakh tonnes, barely 8.13 lakh tonnes was lifted (The position improved somewhat between 1994 and 1998). Secondly, nearly 30 per cent of the PDS grain is offered to the city of Mumbai alone, while the rest of the State has to be content with the remaining 70 per cent. Lastly, unlike other States, Maharashtra does not add its own subsidy on PDS grain to that given by the Central Government, as a result of which PDS prices in Maharashtra have been higher than those in Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. This is despite the State Government's attempt to hold PDS prices for five years.

THE social sectors in the State too have been deteriorating. For instance, the number of public/government-aided hospitals and dispensaries declined from 830 and 1,702 in 1992 to 714 and 1,423 in 1997 and the number of primary health centres increased by a mere 23 in a period of five years – from 1,672 to 1,695 . It is therefore not surprising that the number of beds per lakh of population declined from 144 in 1992 to 141 in 1997. Again, 89 per cent of the rural households do not have sanitary facilities.

On the whole, the expenditure on social sectors such as health, education and drinking water and that on the weaker sections such as the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, as also women are grossly inadequate, particularly when compared to the State's level of economic development.

Again, the level of real agricultural wages (RAWs) in the State is far from satisfactory. This has made makes the conditions of agricultural workers deplorable. During 1991-92 and 1995-96 the RAWs in the State actually declined. Persistent demands from agricultural labourers and their organisations for higher wages have been of no avail.

Lastly, the imbalance in regional development has been a formidable problem that the political economy of the State faces. Owing to a series of political agitations in the backward regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha, the State Government formed, a decade ago, the Statutory Development Councils (SDCs) and assigned to them the responsibility of overall economic development of these regions. But owing to several constraints, particularly the gross inadequacy of financial resources, the SDCs have done pretty little, compared to what was expected from them.

AS a way to address the issue of poverty amidst affluence in Maharashtra, one may suggest that the following broad policy initiatives:

(i) Irrigation potential should be developed to the maximum extent, with fair distribution of water among different regions and sections;

(ii) Rural industrialisation and diversification should be given top priority;

(iii) Social sectors such as health, education, provision of drinking water and sanitary facilities, need to be given due attention with emphasis on the development of women and other weaker sections, particularly in the rural areas;

(iv) The EGS should be restructured to make it more viable, with an upward revision of EGS as well as minimum agricultural wages;

(v) The PDS should be properly revamped and sincerely implemented with more attention to the rural poor; and

(vi) The imbalance in regional development should be effectively removed within a reasonable period of time.

If the political leadership of Maharashtra genuinely believes in making economic growth socially relevant, it would be rather obligatory for it to start working immediately on these policies and programmes. But that will require political will of a high order. Do the rulers in Maharashtra have such political will? ■

Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, Professor of Industrial Economics at the University of Mumbai, is a member of the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices.

Down and out in Punjab

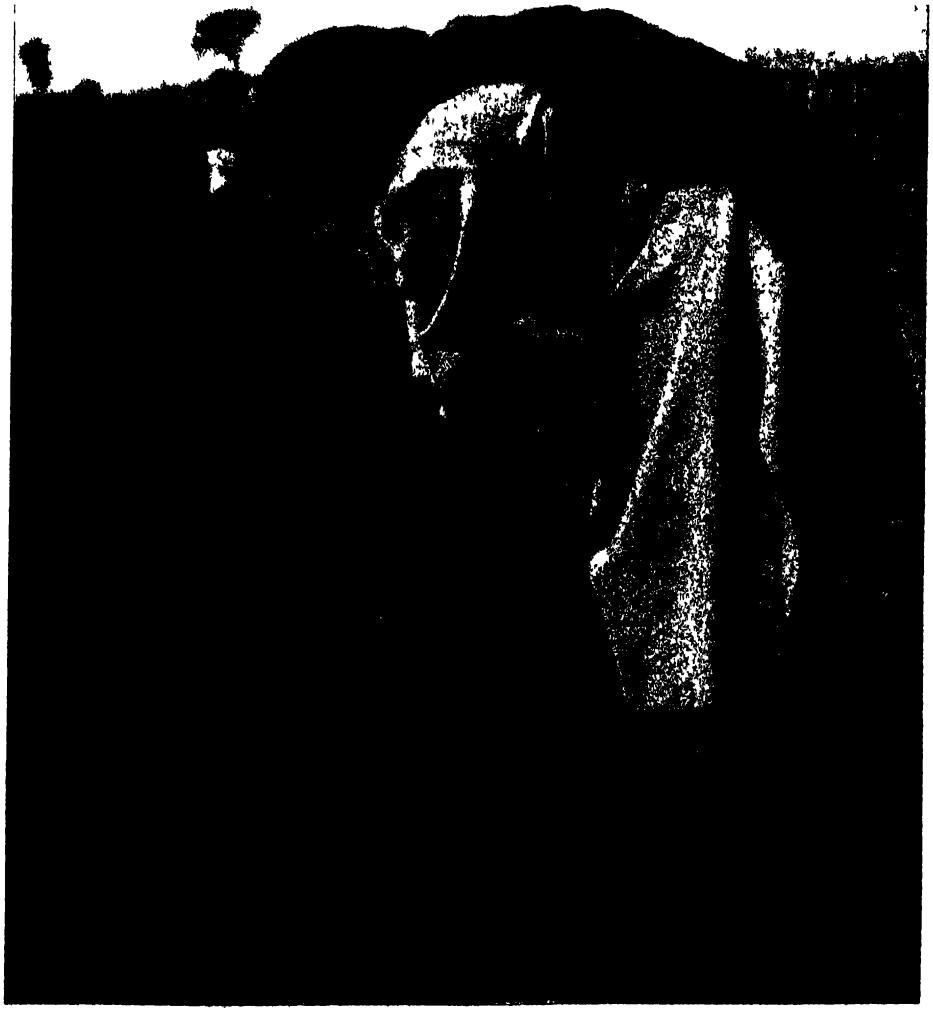
Punjab's Dalits get a raw deal; and this is deepening caste fissures in the State.

PRAVEEN SWAMI
in Ludhiana

SAMEY SINGH desperately needed time off from his job at a brick kiln near Faridkot, southern Punjab. Back home, in Megha Kheri, the family's home village near Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, his son Rahul had fallen seriously ill. But Samey Singh had taken a Rs.5,000 advance from the kiln owners at the start of the season, and they were only willing to let him go if he left behind his wife and daughter. Pali Singh and her daughter Pooja were forced to work without pay and on some days, without food. Both were often beaten, and six-year-old Pooja was threatened with sexual abuse. At sunset, mother and daughter were locked into a six foot by ten foot hovel.

There are supposed to be no slaves in Punjab, one of India's richest States. In a State known for its affluence and egalitarian traditions, its Dalits have for long been believed to be better off than oppressed castes elsewhere. In some senses, they still are. But Samey Singh's story is just one in a chain of brutalities directed at Punjab's Dalits in recent months. At a time of shrinking economic opportunities, caste fissures are deepening in the State.

POOJA would have spent her life as a slave if it had not been for chance. In September, Tarsem Jodhan, general secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)-affiliated Lal Jhanda Punjab Bhatta Mazdoor Union (Red Flag Punjab Brick-kiln Workers' Union) visited western Uttar Pradesh on an election tour. During a meeting in Megha Kheri, held to canvass Chamar



A woman labourer at a brick kiln. The economic problems of Dalits in a State known for its prosperity are sharpening, thanks to the failure of successive State governments to shape rural development policies.

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Samey Singh and his wife Pali in their new home in Ghawwadi village. (Right) Pooja, Samey Singh's six-year-old daughter, who was enslaved and maltreated for six months by her employer, after her release.

caste migrant workers there, Samey Singh came up to Jodhan. His wife had been thrown out of the kiln that month because injuries caused by beatings had left her unable to work. The couple had tried unsuccessfully to get their daughter back. "The kiln owner did not give me my job back," Samey Singh said, "so I didn't have any money. He just wouldn't give Pooja back to us."

Jodhan moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which sent an officer to rescue Pooja Singh. On October 4, six months after she was made a slave, Jodhan found Pooja locked in a cell, terrified, near-starving, and bruised from repeated beatings. "They used to tell me they would get me married," Pooja Singh told *Frontline*, "so that they could put my children to work as slaves too." Amazingly, police officials at Dharamkot, the Faridkot area where Pooja and Pali Singh were held captive, have taken no action. "When I was thrown out of the kiln, I went to the Dharamkot police station, but they threw me out. No one would even let me into the building, let alone register a complaint," Pali Singh said.

Ghawwadi village, an hour's drive from Ludhiana, is the Samey Singh family's new home. Although most workers here say the kiln owner has a good reputation in the area, conditions are subhuman. Workers are paid about Rs.140 for every 1,000 bricks they turn out. If women and children work 16 hours a day along with the men, a family can make some 800 bricks. Each family puts in 12 days at a stretch, and then takes three days off to recover. During the monsoons, most of the estimated 2.5 lakh migrant brick-kiln workers return to their homes in Uttar Pradesh. What they save through the nine months in Punjab has to see them through the monsoon, for there is little work to be had in Muzaffarnagar or elsewhere.

If the wages seem relatively attractive, they do not guarantee basic human rights. Hours spent in the slush, exposed to the evening cold and searing kiln heat, mean that sickness is common. Workers in Ghawaddi told *Frontline* that each family spent upwards of Rs.1,200 a month to treat fevers and diarrhoea. Workers have to use the services of the plethora of quacks operating in rural Punjab, for there are no government-run health facilities nearby. Access to clean drinking water is minimal, and there are no sanitation facilities at all. Most children appear severely malnourished. No families carry ration cards, and they must buy food in the market. Sugar sells at Rs.17 a kg, and flour at Rs.8. No family can afford vegetables or milk.

Perhaps worst of all, the migrant workers are denied even the few opportunities for progress that Dalits have elsewhere. Not a single child in Ghawaddi goes to school. Although a few families have tried to keep at least one son at school in Uttar Pradesh, girls do not get that chance. Work starts at an improbably young age, with three-year-olds scooping out slush for their parents to shape into bricks. Although service terms and working conditions at Punjab's brick kilns violate the Factories Act, Lal Jhanda Bhatta Mazdoor Union officials say that not one single unit has been prosecuted so far. Kiln accidents are common, but families never get the compensation they are legally entitled to.

MIGRANT workers do not have a vote, so the Punjab Government succeeds in pretending that they do not exist. But conditions are not enormously better for Punjab-based Dalits either. Most Dalits at Dhaliyan village belong to the Ramdasiya caste, and have for generations worked on the fields of local landlords. During the Green Revolution, when demand for workers went up and wages rose, most Dalit families managed to procure some basic assets. Every family now has a few buffaloes and decent shelter. But with combine harvesters displacing agricultural labourers, and machines taking over jobs such as plant-

ing potatoes, making a living is becoming more difficult than it has been in decades.

Raj Singh has seen the change. "Ten years ago," he said, "it was easy to find work 25 days a month, and I would be busy right through the harvest and sowing seasons. Now, there is barely work in the fields for three days a month." Wages, too, have dipped. "The landlords offer us Rs.60 a day. If we ask for more, they tell us there are thousands of migrants willing to work for half that amount." As a result, more and more Dalits have been pushed to do casual jobs, such as selling vegetables or scavenging plastic bags to be recycled. Others have ended up in the brick kilns. A decade ago, Ram Dayal, a resident of Burji Hakima, worked as a farmer. "I could buy 10 kg of gur (raw sugar) with a day's wage then," he said. "Now, it takes me two days of work at the kiln to buy the same quantity."

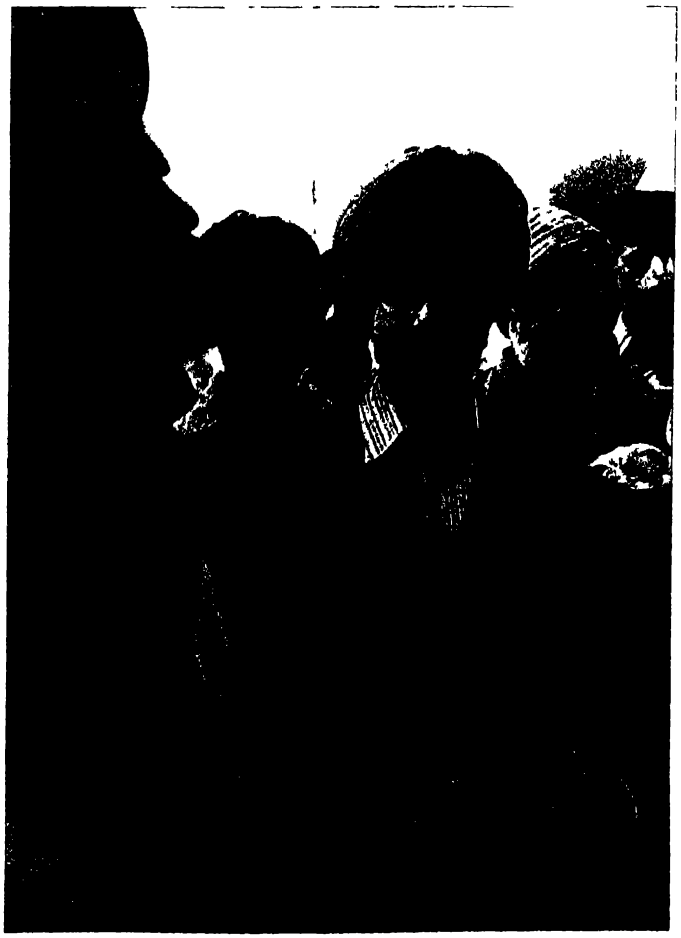
The problem does not lie in combine harvesters, but in the failure of successive governments in the State to shape rural development policies that benefit the poor. The village infrastructure that could have improved the lives of the Dalits has fallen apart. In Dhaliyan, as in many other neighbouring villages, only Dalits send their children to government schools. This strange apartheid has come about because most people who can afford it, send their children to private schools which have better facilities and also teachers who actually show up for work, unlike state-run schools. Dhaliyan does have a ration shop, but despite recent price hikes, only poor-quality sugar and rice are available here, and kerosene never is. By way of contrast, the Punjab Government has the budget to waive electricity charges for big landlords who own tubewells.

IF the economic problems of Dalits have been sharpening in Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance has added to their woes by unleashing the state apparatus against them. On September 17, police and administration officials in Jeevan Nagar, Faridkot, demolished 40 houses built by Dalits on government land. About 175 people, including 50 children, were thrown out with due notice and lost an estimated Rs.15 lakh in the demolition. The Dalits had been allowed to move on to the land in the build-up to the recent Lok Sabha elections, and some had even secured electricity connections. Their failure to return the favour by voting for the SAD-BJP combine, residents say, led to the retaliation.

A similar demolition took place in Sangrur after the Lok Sabha elections. Hansa Singh's family, which lives in Buttar village near Moga, chose to vote for the Communist Party of India(Marxist) candidate, Principal Ajit Singh. Despite the fact that their home on *shamlat* (village) land had been up for six years, Hansa Singh's son Baldev Singh said, a local SAD worker and panchayat member ensured its demolition. Dalit houses were brought down also in another Sangrur village, Lasoolpur. The Faridkot Unit of the Association for Democratic Rights did intervene in the demolition there, but no official action has been taken. Minor village-level demolition generally passes unreported and unnoticed.

When the state does step in, it is generally to crush Dalit protests. Gurketan Singh and Beera Singh were infuriated when the upper caste sarpanch of Burji Kalan village in Bhatinda district decided to lease out a pond, which the entire village used, to a contractor. A fight broke out, and Sarpanch Sukhjit Singh was stabbed. The next day, June 7, mobs burned down the houses of Gurketan Singh and Beera Singh, and threw into a nearby canal whatever belongings they could find. The local unit of the Communist Party of India (CPI) intervened to secure peace, and arranged for both the young men to surrender. Nonetheless, both were alleged to have been tortured in custody. No action was taken against the mob which destroyed the Dalit families' houses.

In January, four members of the village panchayat of Bhungar Khera village in Abohar paraded a handicapped Dalit woman naked through the village. No action was taken by the police, despite local Dalit protests. It was only on July 20 that the four panchayat members were arrested, after the State Home Department was compelled to order an inquiry into the incident. But the State police is prompt in redressing complaints against Dalits. When 65-year old Nand Lal failed to pay back an advance of Rs.6,000 to the owner of the brick kiln where he works, personnel from the Jalaldiwal police post of Raikot police station stepped in. "The police made him put his thumb impression on papers written in English," said his son Balbir Singh, "and said they would beat him if he did not return the money soon."



HARDIP PURI

Tarsem Jodhan, general secretary of the Red Flag Punjab Brick-kiln Workers Union, with Scheduled Caste labourers in Dhaliyan

CHIEF MINISTER Prakash Singh Badal has been putting out a series of curious ideas on how these problems ought to be



solved. At a function in Jalandhar on October 24, he promised to set up "Dalit specific schools" in the State so that Scheduled Caste children could "get quality education to compete for the IAS (Indian Administrative Service), IPS (Indian Police Service) and other services." This proclamation that a *de facto* caste segregation of education would receive official sanction sadly went unchallenged Interestingly, the Ambedkar Academy, set up in Mohali to train Dalit students for the civil services, has not had much success. The number of Dalit students who have made it to the allied services can be counted on one's fingertips; and fingers are not needed to count the number of central services entrants the academy has produced.

Programmes such as the State Government's pet Shagun Scheme pass for Dalit welfare commitments Some Rs.45 crore has been given out since the scheme was put in place after the SAD-BJP came to power, in the form of Rs.5,100-grants to Dalit girls at the time of their marriage Misappropriation

A kiln worker and family outside their makeshift house. Each family puts in 12 days of work at a stretch, and then takes three days off to recover. (Below) Dalit farm workers in Punjab. Low wages in the farm sector are now forcing them to undertake casual labour.



V V KRISHNAN

of funds has been one common complaint Just three Dalit families in Dhaliyan received the handouts, for example, although 20 girls here had got married over the last two years But, more disturbingly, the scheme provides incentives to poor Dalit families to marry their daughters off early rather than keep them in school. Worst of all, the Shagun Scheme provides state subsidies for dowry, and promotes wasteful expenditure.

PUNJAB'S society has had little place for the kinds of violent caste confrontation seen elsewhere in the country. But signs of trouble simmer under the surface. Ten years ago, the State Government provided grants of Rs.60,000 to Mahila Mandals to purchase marquees and cooking utensils. The idea was to allow the Mahila Mandals to generate revenue by renting out these assets for weddings and religious ceremonies. In practice, Dalits found themselves pushed out of the Mahila Mandals in order to ensure that they did not gain access to the utensils. A sur-



HARDIP PURI

Labourers in Dhaliyan. With combine harvesters displacing agricultural labourers, and machines taking over certain jobs, making a living is becoming difficult for the villagers. (Below) Workers in Ghawaddi village. The wages in some brick kilns seem relatively attractive, but they do not guarantee basic human rights to the workers.



HARDIP PURI

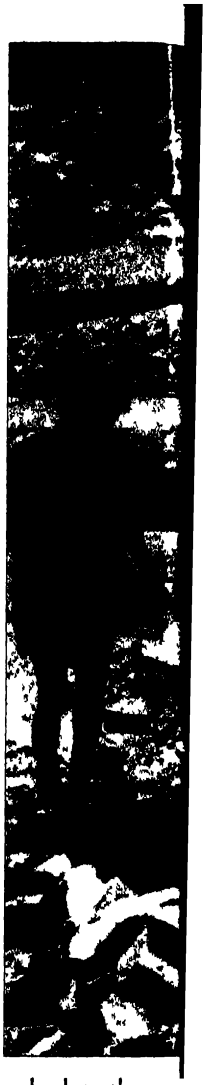
vey carried out by Chandigarh's Institute for Development and Communication (IDC) found, for example, that Dalits made up just 10 per cent of Mahila Mandal members in Jalandhar, and that there was not a single member in Patiala.

The figures do not make pretty reading on other counts either. A study carried out for the IDC by Bhupendra Yadav and A.M. Sharma points to just a few of the stark indexes of deprivation of Dalits in Punjab. Although Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Castes to its population as a whole – at 28.3 per cent – Dalits own just 2.54 per cent of the agricultural land. While the percentage of literates in the State is higher than the national average, its Dalits are less likely to be educated than their counterparts nationwide. School enrolment rates are dismal, and drop-out rates appalling. Amazingly, about 40 per cent of Dalit children in Punjab are likely to be malnourished. Between 1981 and 1991, the percentage of Dalits in Punjab living below the poverty line barely declined, while the numbers of both Dalit and non-Dalit poor actually grew.

Despite their numerical strength, Punjab's traditionally pro-Congress(I) Dalits have had little political power in effect. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the early 1990s appears to have ended. But the SAD-BJP's marked upper-caste biases, and the growing deprivation among Dalits, could soon force a new search for political representation. Recent proposals to remove reservations for Scheduled Castes in the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) provoked bitter debates. A recent Supreme Court order limiting reservations in promotions among government employees sparked vigorous Dalit mobilisation, as well as threats from some employee organisations of upper caste counter-mobilisations.

The four gurdwaras and two temples in Pakhowal village map Punjab's caste terrain. Two gurdwaras are run by upper-caste Sikhs, and two by Dalit communities; both temples, too, are divided on caste lines. It is not as if either temples or gurdwaras would deny entry to members of other castes, but the fact remains they are segregated spaces. If caste tensions have never exploded in Punjab, it was perhaps because prosperity subsumed social tensions. With opportunity narrowing, this peace could soon be questioned. ■

An experiment in empowerment



The path-breaking experiment initiated in Pudukkottai district, Tamil Nadu, to empower women workers by vesting in them the lease rights of quarries suffers a setback owing to official apathy.

MYTHILY SIVARAMAN

QUARRIES in India provide a fertile ground for bonded labour of the worst kind to thrive. In 1990, Sheela Rani Chunkath, the dynamic and gender-sensitive Collector of Pudukkottai district in Tamil Nadu, initiated a path-breaking experiment by giving lease rights of quarries to women workers, vesting the rights with the groups formed under the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas scheme (DWCRA, a subscheme of the Integrated Rural Development Programme). In her own words, it was "a conscious decision, as it was feared that many of the men were addicted to drink and could be pressured into submission to their old masters." The stage for this initiative was set by the Arivoli Movement (National Literacy Mission), which made the most marginalised sections of the district and their learning skills the focus of public attention.

The sudden rise in the status of the DWCRA groups as a result of the direct ownership of mining rights brought about a sea change in the living conditions of the workers. But it also involved many challenges. Writing on this experience in 1993, Sheela Rani Chunkath noted: "Organising about 4,500 quarry workers and transforming them from atomised workers to self-managing groups is not an easy task. It requires the close cooperation of the government, the group members and social activists... much more has to be done to sustain the process by empowering the women and making them capable of managing their quarries. Only unity can help them face the threat from contractors. Mobilising the entire community is essential to isolate the narrow stratum of vested interests."

How can this experiment be evaluated in terms of the functioning of the DWCRA groups in their new role, the changes in the living conditions, the self-perception of the members and the potential of the experiment to be replicated in quarries across the State? Answers to these queries would help in the effort to abolish disguised bondage in quarries all over the country.

THE women workers proved their competence in handling the quarry business (Arivoli volunteers had organised a programme of intensive training for them) and withstood the contractors' tactics of applying pressure and offering allurements. (The contractors initially coerced local lorry operators into stopping operations for quarries managed by DWCRA groups. This boycott was broken by bringing in lorries from outside the district with the help of the Collector.) Gender equations within the family and at the work site underwent radical changes. The women paid wages to men. And, as they never tire of telling others, they did not pay their husbands and sons the entire wages but only pocket money: the rest of the money was spent on the family's requirements. This and the fact that the weekly wages for a man-woman team went up from Rs.150 to Rs.500 resulted in a rise in their nutrition and clothing levels. That wife-beating became rare, as was admitted by the men and the women, is a testimony to the measure of empowerment the women had achieved. The most heartening factor was that children, who used to work with their parents in the scorching sun, dropped their chisels and hammers to pick up books and pencils. Some of them started going to private schools, paying high fees.

While the experiment got off to a remarkable start, the forces of *status quo* did not remain idle. The number of quarries run by DWCRA groups has dwindled to 60 from 150. About 15 of them hold leases currently and 45 can resume work if their leases are renewed, employing about 900 people; no more.

How did this contraction occur?

When the proactive Collector was transferred in the normal course, the contractors spread panic among the workers by spreading the word that their quarries would be lost and that since they would have to go back to the contractors for jobs, it would be wiser to abide by their wishes. Several quarries slipped back into the hands of contractors to operate on benami basis. The uncertainty over the continuation of the lease and the absence of confidence-building measures from the administration eroded the workers' morale. The most demoralising blow was struck in 1994, when the government, in the name of transparency, passed an order cancelling the system of preferential treatment to certain groups and reverting to the auction system. The government's plea was that benami operations were rampant in cooperative societies all over the State. The Quarry Workers Union, led by two women volunteers of the National Literacy Mission, N. Kannamma and Manikkathai, later noted: "This only resulted in promoting illicit mining once again and caused havoc in the lives of the rural women who had successfully broken away from the shackles of the contractors." The union went to court and forced the government



MYTHILY SIVARAMAN

Women quarry workers in Pudukkottai district. Vesting the lease rights with women has helped many rural women to break free from the quarry contractors.

to extend the lease term first to one year and later to five years.

The Tamil Nadu unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), impressed by the potential of the DWCRA initiative to emancipate bonded labour, started working closely with the union and negotiated with the government to ensure a more secure and generous deal for the DWCRA groups. In early 1997, AIDWA presented a memorandum to the Chief Minister, to which a number of women's organisations were signatories, urging him to order immediate and longer-term lease renewals to prevent the control of quarries passing back to the contractors. The Chief Minister responded positively, but the Government Order (G.O.) issued subsequently suffered from a number of lacunae, which reflected the bureaucratic insensitivity to the innovative scheme. The order notified that quarries be given to cooperative societies, whereas the DWCRA groups were registered under the Societies Registration Act. The lease payment was to be based on the average auction rate for other quarries and had to be paid in one go. The unkindest blow was the stipulation that the lease period was for one year. Another provision that worried the union was that the Special Committee formed to vet the applications for lease from the societies included the heads of local bodies, who were unfortunately identified with the contractors' camp in the present dispensation. It was a decidedly pro-contractor, non-worker-friendly G.O.

The union presented a detailed counter to the government, pleading for a reversal of the harsh features of the G.O. In 1998, it moved the court to restrain the government from holding auctions for quarries without first renewing the licences granted to its members. It also sought a lease term of five or more years and representation to DWCRA groups on the special committee. In an interim ruling, the court ordered preferential treatment to DWCRA groups for the grant of leases. Four months after the court award, in August 1999, the government issued another order, conceding several of the union's demands. Although belated, this was a victory of sorts for the union. The lease period was fixed as five years and the lease amount was reduced and allowed to be paid in four instalments. As for representation on the special committee, a nominee of the DWCRA group could be invited. The provisions on default are, however, harsh.

The question that troubles the existing DWCRA groups is whether they will get the lease and, if so, when. More than three months after the notification of the latest G.O., the district administration seems to be in no hurry to invite applications. There also appear to be problems in the availability of quarries and also in interpretion of the G.O. as the DWCRA



MYTHILI SIVARAMAN

scheme is known by a different name after it was merged with other schemes. The scenario for those who fail to get the lease is alarming. A woman worker said: "Our children began attending schools only since 1992. We may have to withdraw them from school if we do not get the lease right away. Education is supposed to be free but we have to spend on uniforms and notebooks. We have been living on our new-found hope of educating them. Our children cannot do stone-crushing now as they are not used to working in the sun. The boys will be hanging around, which is very bad." They fear that this situation could lead to early marriage for girls.

Giving quarry leases to workers helped their family budgets. The measure also augmented the State's income: the quarries that were leased to workers were the ones that were not auctioned, and thus the lease amount was an addition to revenue. It also frustrated the strategy of the contractors, who had ensured that auction for two-thirds of the quarries failed (of the 348 quarries scheduled for auction in 1990, there were bids for only 120) and then illegally mined the quarries.

THE workers face several odds. The temple at Kudumiyanmalai is a protected monument. Objections were raised that the blasting of rocks damaged the temple. A recent court order put an end to quarrying activity there. The workers allege that no demand to stop quarrying was made when the contractors did the mining. Govindamma, a DWCRA group leader of a quarry site at Kudimiyanmalai, could not contain herself: "When the rich contractors blasted the stones, how did the temple remain intact? Does the temple get damaged only when the poor workers quarry? Do the gods exist only for the rich? Are we not God-fearing too? The former contractors are probably spreading this canard in order to stop the legal quarrying there, and start illegal mining later." When this DWCRA group had no work, quarrying went on in a nearby site, a part of which, the group leader claimed, belonged to her group but was now mined by a local bigwig with the government turning a blind eye to that.

Mobilising workers at Kudimiyanmalai in Pudukkottai district. Gender equations at work and home have undergone radical changes following steps to empower women. (Below) Women at work in a quarry.



MYTHILI SIVARAMAN

That the DWCRA scheme empowered a few hundred quarry workers to a great extent cannot be denied. A much greater number would have benefited from it had the local administration carried forward the experiment with the zeal that characterised it when it was started a decade ago. It was not given a reasonable chance to succeed by a state, which has legitimised exploitative relations through all its established procedures.

The experiment cannot, however, wait for another committed Collector to take over. Despite the setbacks, it continues to be a tale of firm commitment on the part of the workers, of hard labour, of tremendous self-confidence and determination. Banking on these assets, trade unions, women's organisations and all sections of society committed to empowering the vulnerable sections of people must mobilise their resources and take up the challenge of wiping out immiseration in the quarries. ■

Mythily Sivaraman is Working President, All India Democratic Women's Association, Tamil Nadu.

The Harry Potter magic

SUSAN RAM

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (1997, pages 224, £4.99, paperback); **Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets** (1998, pages 251, £4.99, paperback); **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** (1999, pages 317, £10.99, hardback); by J.K.Rowling; published by Bloomsbury, London.

IT has had more than a touch of magic about it. The summer of 1999, for the British publishing industry, was to be the season of Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the fictional serial murderer with a proclivity for cannibalism and fine wines, who was brought to international stardom through the novels of his creator, Thomas Harris, and the movie, *The Silence of the Lambs*. Harris, a slow-paced wordsmith who prides himself on the thoroughness of his research, had at last completed a new Lecter saga. Heinemann, his publishers, came up with the title Hannibal and entered into battle mode, preparing a promotional blitzkrieg that would propel the book beyond the status of a mere bestseller: Hannibal was to be the fastest, biggest selling book of all time.

In June, all seemed to be going to plan. In its first week, Hannibal notched up close to 60,000 copies in sales in the British general retail market, entering the record book as the fastest selling hardback fiction title in recent history. Demand throughout the United Kingdom threatened to outstrip supply; customers at one London bookshop queued up for extra copies shipped in by taxi. Random House, the owners of Heinemann, began projecting hardback sales of half a million.

Then, with the whoosh of a broomstick and a shout of 'Quidditch!', there arrived if not nemesis then a rival from entirely unexpected quarters. A small, on the face of it unremarkable rival: a bespectacled, undersized, unkempt boy on the threshold of his thirteenth birthday, distinguished from the run of boys only by the thin, lightning-shaped scar across his forehead. Even his name, Harry Potter, breathed ordinariness. Yet little Harry, or rather his creator Joanne ('J.K.') Rowling, was about to effect a feat of magic totally belied by his youth and apparent meekness. In a manner expected by thousands of children, in Britain and beyond, who were already familiar with his extraordinary gifts, Harry Potter in July took hold of the publishing industry, shook it and turned it upside down. For week after week thereafter, it would be Harry Potter, not the blood-curdling Hannibal Lecter, who would lord it over the bestseller lists.

THE origins of the Harry Potter phenomenon lie with Rowling's decision, in the mid-1990s, to try her hand at writing children's fiction. There is a magical quality to her own story, a rags-to-riches rise out of unemployment and financial insecurity. She found a publisher, and her first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, appeared in 1997 with a print run of just 7,000 copies. Just what happened next is not entirely clear, but it seems that, by word of mouth, from child to child and school to school, the phenomenon began to take shape and grow. The message was simple: against the temptations of television, computer games and the other diversions available to modern children above a certain level of affluence, here was a book that simply had to be read, that children could not put down.

By the appearance of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in 1998, Rowling's publisher, Bloomsbury, was aware of the golden goose it had unwittingly nurtured. So much so that careful planning was set in motion for the launch of the third Harry Potter title in July 1999. A print run of 75,000 hardback copies for the British trade alone was decided and, to justify this level of risk, the eight weeks prior to publication were marshalled into a strategic campaign. Extracts from the book were published in major national newspapers, reviews were arranged to appear in adult book review sections, and Rowling was interviewed in the magazine section of *The Daily Telegraph*. Publication day itself was observed with the ritual normally associated with public examinations: copies of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* arrived at booksellers' doorsteps, wrapped and sealed, on the morning of July 8, but sales were embargoed until 3-45 p.m. – the end of the school day.

Presented thus, Harry Potter's ascendancy looks a little less than innocent, not quite the story of fresh-faced simplicity triumphing over the smug assumptions of publishing house boardrooms. Further doubts are raised when one confronts the actual content of the books. Even Rowling enthusiasts among her adult readers and reviewers concede that her fiction is essentially formulaic, conforming to conventions of plot, character and setting that other writers for children have sought to move beyond. Yet for all the hype, for all the inherent literary limitations, children love Harry Potter, are excited by his feats, cannot wait for his next adventure. In classrooms throughout Britain (now, too, in the United



States, where the phenomenon has taken hold with similar force) teachers report that Harry Potter has the quite supernatural ability to quieten the unruly, engage the disruptive – and get children reading.

DECONSTRUCTING the Harry Potter phenomenon is easily done. To start things off, take a hero who is both male and vulnerable: with his weedy physique, the orphaned Harry is the quintessential target of bullies, whether in the shape of his unspeakable relatives (uncle, aunt and over-indulged cousin Dudley) or in the form of classroom nasties. Children everywhere instinctively identify with the picked-upon – the more so when the 'victim' proves capable of striking back in all manner of resourceful and unpredictable ways. And this Harry achieves through his access to magic. For he is no run-of-the-mill hero. On the contrary, he is perhaps the most astonishing boy who has ever lived: the son of practising wizards, Harry, when just a baby, managed to confound the evil machinations of the darkest of dark forces. What child reader could fail to be gripped?

With utmost confidence and literary sure-footedness, Rowling places her hero in the setting that has proved a mainstay of children's fiction in the Anglo-Saxon tradition: the British public school. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which Harry enters at the age of 11 (and from which he will graduate at 18, thereby guaranteeing a sequence of seven Harry Potter sagas), roots its hocus-pocus and extraordinary goings-on in a familiar framework of prefects, examinations, detentions and competitive sport. Pupils are organised into Houses (named with suitable outlandishness), and there is the well-worn cast of eccentric teachers: the stuttering professor; the strict female teacher with glasses and her hair in a bun; the sinister master darting malevolence with every glance. As generations of writers for children have discovered afresh, the boarding school offers a world in which children, detached from their families, can build new sets of relationships with their peers, but still within a context of adult authority and implicit safety and security.

Rowling's achievement – whether serendipitous or calculated one does not know – lies in combining the boarding school genre of children's fiction with the much more free-ranging, expansive tradition of fantasy and magic. What lifts the Harry Potter books above the status of contemporary Billy Bunter-style larks and wheezes is an engagement with the supernatural that shows imaginative range, narrative skill and the ability to zero in on children's hopes, fears and ways of thinking.

Magic, in the world of Harry Potter as conveyed to his young readers, is fun and also deeply menacing. At one level, it offers and sustains a parallel universe from which non-wizarding adults are excluded, enabling children to unfold their inherent capacities and, where necessary, give insensitive or oppressive adults their come-uppance. Here, there are clear affinities with the children's fiction of Roald Dahl, one of a number of writers whose influence can be discerned in Rowling's work.

But at another level, magic opens a window into a darker world shaped by myths that reach back deep into the history of humankind. In this universe lurk monsters beyond the reach of reason, ready to pursue their prey along limitless nightmare ways. In this universe, too, lie treachery, double-dealing, revelations that stun by their ability to stand old assumptions on their head, the remorselessness and finality of death. In the 20th century, no writer has explored this realm more thoroughly and with more literary effect than J.R.R. Tolkien. Rowling's ventures into it are altogether more modest, but the response to her work underlines its continuing potency. Contemporary children, it seems, crave as much as their forebears did for the terror zone.

Such imperatives may be all too easily forgotten once children cross the threshold of adulthood. This, at least, seems to be the message from South Carolina, where the Board of Education, under pressure from a group of agitated parents, is currently reviewing the use of the Harry Potter books in the state's schools. The suspicion in some Bible Belt quarters is that little Harry Potter is luring his enthralled followers into satanic rites and devil worship; in the view of one horrified mother, the books possess "a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect and sheer evil".

Any of Harry's readers could have told you what happens next. Harry and his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, aided perhaps by Rubeus Hagrid, the avuncular school gamekeeper and by Hedwig, Harry's ever useful and obliging owl, will concoct a spell that brings upon the ludicrous South Carolina parents not mayhem but ridicule. And, around the world, thousands of children will raise a cheer. ■

■ BOOKS

VIJAY PRASHAD

The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo by Noam Chomsky; Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1999; $15.95.

IN 1959, Noam Chomsky made a landmark attack on B. F. Skinner's behaviourism. Skinner argued that human behaviour, like animal behaviour, was fairly predictable and that it could be controlled. Concerned with the absence of human creativity in this model, Chomsky denounced Skinner's science and also the political implications of his work. Finding behaviourism to be scientifically banal, Chomsky argued that it tells "any concentration camp guard that he can do what his instincts tell him to do, but pretend to be a scientist at the same time. So that makes it good, because science is good, or neutral, and so on." Anti-social tendencies, Skinner believed, could be muted by state action, something abhorrent to the anarchist in Chomsky.

Chomsky's sustained critique of U.S. foreign policy for over three decades comes from his belief in human creativity and his suspicion of the behaviourist assumptions of U.S. imperial pronouncements. The U.S. never claims to attack an adversary in the interest of economic gain, but it has, since its founding in the 18th century, justified its interventions in the name of some higher, frequently moral (and pedagogical), power. James Madison justified U.S. power over the Americas with the concept of Manifest Destiny, and now Bill Clinton adopts the posture of human rights as the design for his overseas adventures. To herald the U.S. bombardment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), Clinton quoted President Theodore Roosevelt who said that "unless you're willing to fight for great ideals, those ideals will vanish" (page 91). Roosevelt referred to the fight that thwarted the legitimate ambitions of Filipinos, Cubans and Puerto Ricans – all in the name of justice (what Rudyard Kipling called, without irony, the "white man's burden"). If the precedent for the U.S. intervention in Yugoslavia was from the Spanish-American War (1898), then the dictionary may have to be re-written to define anew words such as 'justice,' 'ideals' and 'human rights'.

If one counters the bad faith of the U.S. trumpet of good intentions, one fre-

Demystifying U.S. foriegn policy

quently meets a Skinnerist submission to malevolence. This is the way things are, one is told, for Evil is a tragic inheritance of human nature. "The obviousness of disaster," the philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote in the late 1940s, "becomes an asset to its apologists – what everyone knows no-one need say – and under cover of silence is allowed to proceed unopposed."



Chomsky's sustained critique of U.S. foreign policy for over three decades comes from his belief in human creativity and his suspicion of the behaviourist assumptions of U.S. imperial pronouncements.

Neo-Skinnerism in the guise of Charles Murray and some persons within the Human Genome Project puzzle over those parts of our chemistry and biology that produce evil actions. The idea of Hitler's evilness exculpates processes within Germany from interrogation and de-Nazification. Much the same attitude is taken today with Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic. These men are seen as the spawn of Evil, ruling autocratically over rogue states. If they are dislodged. through massive violence, then the natural (and neoliberal) goodness of people will be allowed to flourish. The recent biography (*Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant*) by Dusko Doder and Louise Branson paints such a simple-minded portrait of the conflict in the Balkans. The processes that led to the crisis in the Yugoslavia or else in West Asia become irrelevant to this sort of blase cynicism.

The leader is Evil. He is the cause of the problem. To remove him is to solve the problem. In broad strokes, this has been the U.S. position on 'rogue states'. Chomsky's new book, *The New Military Humanism*, savages this simplicity to reveal the bad faith with which the machinery of U.S. domination operates. Like his earlier studies, it takes the U.S. statements at face value and then demolishes their truth claims by reference to a mass of data. U.S. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, for instance, argues that the bombardment of Yugoslavia offers an example of the "saintly glow" of U.S. policy, since the state acted without any special interest for itself beyond its humanitarianism (page 14). "We had to act in the face of Evil: how could we have sat by and watched genocide proceed?" Such sentiments did not emerge during the Rwanda emergency, nor do they come when the US-International Monetary Fund routinely render people economic refugees in far greater numbers than the Kosovo crisis did. International amnesia allowed the Tony Blair-Clinton project to don robes of moral glory, despite the shabbiness of those very garments.

Within the U.S. and in most of western Europe, there is a tussle going on between state-sanctioned xenophobia (mainly through draconian immigration controls) and liberal multiculturalism. Some people want to see states constituted around ethnic purity, whereas others want diversity to be the cultural logic of states. But when it comes to most of the world, the logic of ethnic purity rules the day. The tacit U.S. support for a 'Free Tibet' comes alongside Washington's support for the Croatian ethnocide in Krajina, for the Serb assault on Srebrenica – what U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher called "simplifying matters" (page 32). The Dayton Accord and the Wye Rivers Agreement continue the logic of partition of states on monocultural lines, a sure way to perpetuate conflict. Ethnocide and partition produce refugees. Once chaos is produced, has North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Community or the U.S. come forward as the champion of the ejected people? The 1997 Italian military intervention in Albania was undertaken in order to prevent a flood of Albanian refugees into Italy. The European Union (E.U.) was worried about the exodus of Kosovars into the rest of Europe, but what it failed to see was that the bombardment will certainly lead to intensified migration of Kosovars into Europe, in search of a region that has not been bombed out of modernity. The strong anti-immigration rules in western Europe suggest the lack of humanism in NATO policy.

As the population of refugees increases with each new conflict, one would expect the United Nations to spend more money on the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). However, owing to the budgetary crisis in the U.N. (generated, mainly, by the refusal of the U.S. to pay its dues), the UNHCR eliminated a fifth of its staff in January 1999 (page 37). By the good graces of humankind, the refugees of so many conflicts find the means to survive.

One cannot even offer an approximate figure for the number of the refugees, since the UNHCR recognises the definitional problems involved and the institutional scale at which one would have to work (the UNHCR hired its first professional statistician in 1993 and began its numbers project only in 1994). The UNHCR counts about 11.5 million refugees, a number that cannot be taken seriously if one adds those economic refugees who produce the 'footloose labour' catalogued by Jan Breman and other scholars.

The U.S. slash-and-burn of the U.N. comes as the U.S. puts itself forward as the champion of human rights. If the Rambouillet negotiations are any indication, the U.S. failed grossly on the human rights front. Chomsky, with great pains, goes over the U.S. assassination of the negotiations. Appendix B of the Agreement said that NATO should enjoy "free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated airspace and territorial waters" (page 107). No sovereign state can allow that. The Serbian National Assembly resolution passed on March 23 (the day before the attack) spelt out the language for 'political autonomy' that could have been the basis of discussion, but this was summarily rejected by the

U.S. (page 112). Instead, there came the bombardment, which did not so much as alleviate real problems in Yugoslavia, as it intensified the ejection of Kosovo Albanians (page 21, page 81) and destroyed much of the extant civil society (page 133) The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is now the sole authority in Kosovo, along with NATO, and it has driven other forces into the ground. The Serbs, further, are "unified from heaven – but by the bombs, not by God" (noted Alexsa Djilas, page 133). Furthermore, Chomsky notes the wilful destruction of Yugoslavia's infrastructure, notably Vojvodina, a province far from the conflict that was, until its devastation, a centre of democratic dissent (page 34) The New Humanism of NATO can be explained with the following analogy: "Suppose you see a crime in the streets, and feel that you can't just stand by silently, so you pick up an assault rifle and kill everyone involved: criminal, victim, bystanders" (page 156). This is the Blair-Clinton logic for humanitarian intervention.

Chomsky is not averse to humanitarian intervention: indeed he mentions as two credible examples the Indian assistance in East Pakistan in 1971 and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia to end the Pol Pot terror in 1978 (page 75). The NATO intervention, however, comes not for humanitarian reasons, he argues, but to sustain the credibility of NATO (page 134 and page 145). Arms producers and dealers, construction companies (who will now 'rebuild' Yugoslavia) and NATO itself gain from the conflict (pages 138-139). Chomsky lays out the bad faith of NATO, but he does not offer political and economic explanations of why the U.S. is so eager to expand NATO at this time. There is no discussion, for instance, on U.S. anxiety over the creation of the euro (a challenge to the dollar), or on the attempt by the European Community to manage its defence itself. Without NATO, the U.S. will lose its leverage over Europe, and it will be not be able to exert itself to the edges of the Russian Federation. Chomsky's overall argument is not affected by these omissions, since he offers a clear and reasoned analysis of the rhetoric and action of NATO, much of it along the grain of Skinnerite behaviourism. One hopes for an Indian edition, not just for this book but for most of Chomsky's political oeuvre, in order to understand better the architecture of the new imperium.■

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■ BOOKS

A comprehensive documentation

M.H. ANSARI

The Decline of Arab-Israeli Conflict – Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order by Avraham Sela; State University of New York Press, 1998; pages xv + 423, $74.50.

SO expensive a book on a subject of relatively receding interest is perhaps unlikely to find a wide readership. Nevertheless, the word 'decline' in the title is bound to arouse curiosity and catch the attention of the student of West Asian politics

Avraham Sela teaches international relations at the Hebrew University in Israel. He explores the interplay between inter-Arab politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the inner dynamics of the two as well as the wider dialectic of their mutual interaction on local-regional and global diplomacy. It is, by any reckoning, a serious endeavour (albeit from the other side of the hill) to assess the interplay of these forces on the Arab side. Sela propounds the interesting thesis that the Arab Summit Conference (initiated in 1964), convened to shore up Arab solidarity on the question of Palestine, "in fact legitimised deviation from traditional policies".

What then were these policies? How did they evolve? What were the imperatives inducing deviations? What, finally, is the outcome? The questions assume new relevance in the wake of the Israeli general elections in May 1999, the emergence of Ehud Barak as the leader and the subsequent diplomatic movement suggestive of a rejuvenation of the peace process on all fronts.

The evolution of the Arab state system, or the regional subsystem, is traced by the author to the aftermath of the First World War, the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the colonial arrangements such as the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Pact that followed. A quarter of a century later, the end of the Second World War saw the emergence of the Arab League (1945) as the expression of Arab sentiments for a commonality of purpose and destiny. The origins of the League were suspect in the eyes of some Arab leaders. Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, later to occupy the high office of Arab League Secretary-General (and still later to be Saudi Arabia's Agent General in the infructuous Buraimi Oasis arbitration), felt at that time that the League was Britain's "illegitimate new-born child".

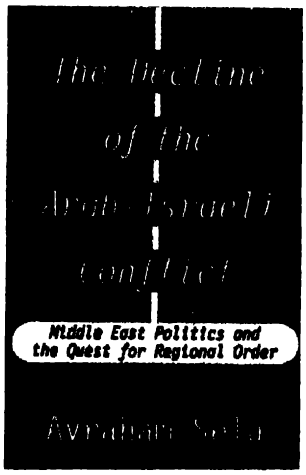
Over the years the imperatives of wider Arab nationalism on the one hand and of Arab state particularism on the other ensured a less-than-harmonious evolution of objectives and conduct; they lent credence to the dictum of Prof. Vatikiotis: "Inter-Arab relations cannot be placed on a spectrum of linear development, moving from hell to paradise, or *vice versa*. Rather their course is partly cyclical, partly jerkily spiral, and always resting occasionally at some 'grey' areas." The bedrock nevertheless was the ethnocentric identity of the Arab people and their adherence to a common culture; in the process the boundaries between the nation and the states were often blurred, as was the distinction between *being* a people and *becoming* one.

The superimposition of 20th century ideologies of Pan-Arabism, anti-imperialism, Arab socialism and Islamism (conservative or resurgent) added complexity through additional variables to what in 1945 was perhaps conceived as a Westphalian order in the Arab lands of West Asia. In the final analysis, therefore, five decades of the Arab state system have evolved around the twin foci of inter-Arab competition for regional hegemony and the Palestinian problem.

The purpose of the first Arab Summit in 1964, and of the next two, was to move away from the inter-Arab struggle for hegemony and resort instead to collective Arab action to deal with the river water problem (and the denial of some water to Israel), the establishment of a joint Arab command and the initiation of action to organise the Palestinians politically. The backdrop to this was the radicalisation of the Arab political scene in the wake of the Revolution in Iraq in 1958, the arousal of Pan-Arab sentiments and the resultant

pressures for Arab unity which led to the short-lived unions of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic (UAR) and of the UAR and Iraq.

The failure of these two ventures resulted in bitter ideological and personal feuds: "The battle of rhetoric assumed an ideological character of mutual delegitimisation, employing the Palestinian cause in the service of the rhetoric of national liberation and western domination" (page 46). In this tussle, revolutionary legitimacy lay in radical positions in domestic and foreign policy; it propelled Gamal Abdel Nasser, leader of the leading Arab power, Egypt, to go beyond the inter-Arab coexistence involved in his policy slogan of unity of ranks and advocate instead an interventionist Unity of Purpose approach which soon landed him in trouble with both the radicals and the conservatives.



The Egyptian intervention in Yemen was one result. The contradictions of this entanglement, and the imperatives of Syrian militancy in the conflict with Israel, pushed Nasser, against his better judgment, into the Six Day War of June 1967. Sela observes that "Nasir's (Nasser's) moves ran counter to the positions he had initiated at every Summit meetings: that war with Israel must be postponed until the Arabs attained strategic superiority" (page 90).

THE psychological dimensions of the Arab defeat in 1967, and the deeper reasons for the underdevelopment of Arab societies, have been analysed at lengths by Arab writers such as Sadeq al-Azm and Abdullah Laroui. On the political plane, and amongst politicians, a healthy dose of hard realism was very evident. The Arab Summit convened at Khartoum in August "marked the beginning of a shift of Arab perceptions of the conflict with Israel from one revolving on Israel's legitimacy to one focussing on territories and boundaries" even if it did not involve, at that stage, "the option of a settlement with Israel even in return for the territories" (page 108).

The acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 242 by Egypt and Jordan in November 1967 signalled the change. This shift was not embraced by all Arabs; the result was a collapse of the fragile consensus that had developed in Khartoum.

Another summit, badly sought by Egypt and Jordan in their quest for funding from the oil states, remained elusive. The Al-Aqsa incident of August 1969 brought forth a trade-off – a Saudi agreement to an Arab Summit in return for an Egyptian one for the Islamic summit; the latter (September 1969) was boycotted by Syria and Iraq on ideological grounds and the former, which met a few months later, in December, also in Rabat, saw the Egyptian demands being rejected.

Sela's assessment of the supposed motives of the principal Arab players seems melodramatic but is based on Malcolm Kerr's authoritative and classic account of inter-Arab differences: "A bizarre coalition of (Algerian President Houari) Boumedienne and (Saudi King) Faisal, with Iraqi backing, was formed against Nasir, demanding that he go to war or forfeit Saudi aid. Boumedienne's sudden animus was apparently the result of Egypt's coordination with Libya and Sudan, with Algeria viewed as liable to upset the power balance in North Africa. Faisal, in a gambit worthy of Machiavelli, was actually to try to prod Nasir into launching war and thereby be rid of him. Failing this he wished to show that Nasir was insincere about the war option, hence any increase in aid was unjustified. Nasir, however, called the Saudi bluff by announcing that he would go to war if the Arab states undertake to provide the specified economic and military aid. Nasir was well aware that the rich Arab rulers would never agree to transfer the huge sums of money he needed and, in a Machiavellian ploy of his own, may have wished to exploit this certain refusal to justify his adherence to the political solution option he was advocating ever since the Six Day War" (pages 121-122).

The impasse in inter-Arab equations notwithstanding, the Arab summit in Rabat took cognizance of the boost to Palestinian nationalism, which had taken shape in the post-1967 period. The tragic initial consequence of this was soon evident; in the summer of 1970, the Jordanian Army (ably advised by a Pakistani military training mission led by Maj-Gen. Zia-ul-Haq) demolished the Palestinian state within a state in the refugee camps of Amman. More chaos in Arab ranks followed. The United States and Israel got involved in protecting the Hashemite kingdom; diplomatic relations were snapped amidst pressures to reconcile. Financial aid to Jordan was suspended by Kuwait and Libya; a Palestinian, appointed by King Hussein as his Prime Minister, defected; finally, a reconciliation of sorts took place between Hussein and Yasser Arafat at a summit convened in Cairo on September 24, 1970. It was Nasser's final act as an Arab leader; he died the next day. His death signalled the end of the Pan-Arab era and of the collective Arab policy-making.

The new leaders in Egypt (Anwar Sadat) and Syria (Hafez al Assad) were representative of this change. The two shared a new approach to inter-Arab politics – "departure from a compulsive Pan Arabism in favour of pragmatic cooperation" (page 140). The shuttle diplomacy in January 1971 by U.N. envoy Gunnar Jarring in pursuit of Resolution 242, and later in the year of U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers in search of an interim settlement, failed to produce any results whatsoever and virtually led to a complex, seemingly inexplicable, manoeuvre by Sadat. In May 1971, the Egyptian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed; in July 1972 Soviet combat personnel and military advisers were expelled from Egypt. The main significance of the latter move, says Sela, "lay in removing an obstacle to an independent Egyptian decision to go to war" (page 137). This decision to go to war was implemented on October 6 and "was a strategic surprise to Israel". It was preceded by some military coordination with Syria and more substantive political understanding with Saudi Arabia pursuant to which "by the end of August 1973 Faisal informed Sadat that he would be willing to use oil as a weapon in the campaign against Israel provided a war was of sufficient duration for the West to experience the full impact of the oil shortage" (page 143).

Equally surprised was the U.S. administration; Henry Kissinger was to write later in his *Years of Upheaval* about the unimaginable boldness of Sadat's strategy and of its success in transforming the psychological basis of Arab-Israeli negotiations: "Our definition of rationality did not take seriously the notion of starting an unwinnable war to restore self-

respect." Mohammed Heikal, writing many years later, portrayed the Arab perspective: "Above all the Yom Kippur War was the event which relieved Zionists of their self-confidence and Arabs of their humiliation." An Arab leader of modest profile (aptly described by Fouad Ajami as being "free of the chains that tie heroes to their great deed") thus brought the Arab side back into play. What followed is depicted by Sela as "Sadat's serpentine diplomacy" in which he sought to balance his pursuit of Egyptian national interests with the requirement of an Arab consensus.

THE Arab summit in Rabat in October 1974 (and before that in Algeria in November 1973) developed common positions on the conflict with Israel, on the wider diplomatic postures of the Arabs, and on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) being "the sole representative of the Palestinian people". Even in the absence of Libya and Iraq, differences of perception existed and were papered over. The result was inevitable: "But almost immediately the conciliatory atmosphere gave way to inter-Arab bickering, which side-tracked the Arabs and reduced the pressure on Israel to surrender more of the occupied territories. The foundation of the accord reached at Rabat was endangered because Sadat – with American encouragement – was determined to pursue Egypt's own interests first in disregard to his Arab partners' anxieties and needs, escalating his conflicts with Syria over the peace-making strategy" (page 163).

The Egyptian approach resulted in the Geneva Conference of 1974 ("a historical turning point in the Arab-Israel conflict, highlighted by the President of Egypt's and Jordan's willingness to convene officially with Israel in the same room"), and the signing of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement on January 18, 1974. The U.S. expectation that this would result in the immediate lifting of the oil embargo was belied by a Saudi insistence on progress on the negotiations with Syria. As recorded by Kissinger, "the Arab mini-summit (of February 1974) came up with the face-saving formula that I should take an exploratory trip through the area in February to pave the way for a Syrian disengagement. This was easy to agree to. A month later the oil embargo was lifted." Sela argues that the Syria-Egypt rift after the Sinai II agreement (described elsewhere by George W. Ball as a vast real estate deal in which the U.S. bought a slice of Sinai desert from Israel for a huge financial and political consideration and then paid Egypt for accepting it) polarised inter-Arab politics and "nourished the eruption of the Lebanese civil war" because President Assad of Syria needed "to forge a new regional strategy"; he did this by fostering closer relations with Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinians "corresponding to the historic notion of 'Greater Syria'" (pages 175-176).

In regard to the events in Lebanon, Arab sources argue that the incident of April 13, 1975 which sparked the Lebanese civil war, was an Israeli plot; even if so, it remains undeniable that the Lebanon of the mid-1970s was an explosive mix in social and political terms, ready to go off at the slightest provocation. Over 50,000 lives were consumed in the conflict that followed. A number of outside actors got involved. Syria argued that it had a right to intervene to safeguard its national security, and the genuineness of this concern appears to have been conceded in a wider circle of states: "The Syrian invasion of Lebanon was preceded by a tacit understanding with Israel, mediated by the United States, on a 'Red Line' delineating their respective spheres of military presence on Lebanese soil. The 'Red Line' understanding was to enhance Assad's regional position and pave his way back to the peace process" (pages 180-181).

The Syrian confrontation with the PLO in Lebanon led to a new inter-Arab alignment and much bickering. An Egyptian-Saudi mediation eventually lent legitimacy to the intervention by the creation of an Arab Deterrence Force (ADF) and then to an Arab Summit in Cairo (and to the resumption of the Egyptian-Saudi-Syrian coalition) in October 1976 in which the new *status quo* was sanctified along with a political commitment to the PLO and financial pledges to the states involved in the confrontation. The stage was thus set for a substantive move by the PLO; this came in the 13th session of the Palestinian National Council in March 1977.

The Arab consensus was not to last. Israel perceived a threat in the idea of a comprehensive settlement being advocated by Arabs within the framework of the proposed Geneva Conference and with the participation of the PLO. This idea was endorsed in the U.S.-Soviet communique of October 1, 1977. In order to counter it, Israel took the initiative for direct diplomatic contacts with Egypt; the mechanism was a secret meeting in Morocco between Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and an emissary of Anwar Sadat.

The two versions of this conclave differ in their contents; the outcome nevertheless was a bold initiative by the Egyptian leader to go to Jerusalem for direct talks with Begin. The event, which took place on November 20, 1977, shocked the Arab world and the world beyond.

What is more important was the fact that this Egyptian move induced Israel to spell out its own ideas on peace: "Israel sought to reach a separate settlement with Egypt that would remove the threat of an Arab world coalition against it and preserve its grip on the rest of the Arab Territories, mainly the West Bank and Gaza Strip; apart from being willing to withdraw from most of Sinai and most of the Golan Heights, Israel put forward a plan for Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, leaving the issue of sovereignty over these areas undecided. The autonomy idea represented an essential shift in Israel's concept concerning the future of the Palestinian occupied territories" (page 198). This bilateral approach, on Israeli terms, left the U.S. President with little option but to support it. The Camp David Accord was the logical outcome.

After the initial outrage, notes Sela, the absence of uniformity in Arab reactions to the event was evident. Support for Sadat was voiced by Morocco, Sudan, Somalia, Oman and Tunisia; denunciation came from Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the PLO; a third group – consisting of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf emirates responded with cautious reserve. This three way divide made an exercise in summitry difficult. After much effort and following an Iraqi initiative, a summit did convene in Baghdad in November 1978. It established an Arab Fund of $3.5 billion a year for 10 years for the states involved in the confrontation, the PLO and the Palestinians in the occupied areas and threatened to impose sanctions on Egypt if it signed a formal peace treaty with Israel. Meanwhile, in a significant step, the summit described peace, "a just peace", with Israel as the Arab objective in the conflict.

The Arab consensus itself did not last. "Less than two years after the Baghdad summit, Iraq touched off a war with Iran

and, in the name of Arab interests, split the Arab world and isolated Syria on the Israel front" (page 217). This was preceded by other momentous events in the region: the Revolution in Iran (February 1979), the ascendancy of Saddam Hussein (July 1979), the Iraqi-Syrian rift, and the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca (November 1979). The atmosphere was thus far from congenial for the Arab summit in Tunis, which started work on November 20, 1979. Its focus was on minimising controversies; the boycott of Egypt was continued but sanctions were deferred. Also deferred was a proposal to consider sanctions against the U.S. Financial aid to Lebanon and to the states involved, was continued.

Another summit, in November 1980 in Amman, was boycotted by Syria, Lebanon, Algeria and the PLO and this highlighted the divisive impact of the Iran-Iraq war on inter-Arab politics. (The war itself was aptly characterised by Hafez al Assad as "the wrong war against the wrong enemy".) This internalising of the collective Arab effort continued during the Lebanese civil war which was to follow and in which Israel's political and military involvement on the side of Lebanese Christians increased considerably.

THE Syrian historian Constantin Zurayq once remarked that "the failure to understand catastrophes is even deadlier to a people than the catastrophes themselves". The validity of this statement would have been evident to any observer of the Arab condition in the early 1980s. The war with Iran on the eastern front, the ostracisation of Egypt, the plight of Lebanon in the wake of the Israeli invasion of June 1982, and the marginalisation of the Palestinian resistance testified to it.

The 12th, 13th and 14th Arab summits of 1980 (Amman), 1981 and 1982 (both in Fez) dealt primarily with inter-Arab problems rather than the core issue of conflict with Israel. An exception to this was the bold effort made by Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia in August 1981 to present a set of "guiding principles" for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. "The Saudi plan was meant to provide an alternative framework to the Camp David Accords, which would gain Arab and international legitimacy through adoption by an Arab Summit Conference and the U.N. respectively.... The initiative was in line with the Saudi doctrine of national security – based on regional stability and tacit alliance with the U.S. – and Saudi national interest in reducing contradictions between their Arab obligations and links with Washington" (page 274). After initial hesitation, "(President) Reagan himself praised it as offering recognition of Israel's right of existence as a nation. The Fahd Plan also won the unreserved support of the EEC's (European Economic Community) Council of Ministers – it had much in common with the Venice Declaration of June 1981 – whose chairman, British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, visited Riyadh to discuss it with the Saudi rulers" (page 275).

On the other hand, the intensity of the Arab reaction to the plan could be gauged from the fact that the Fez Arab Summit of 1981 adjourned without discussing it and another summit 10 months later, in September 1982, endorsed an altered version but not before an in-depth discussion of previously unacceptable suggestions like the 1965 Bourgiba proposals (to accept the 1947 U.N. resolution on partition) and Reagan's peace initiative in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon:

"Still, the Fez Plan constituted a historical precedent in the Arab collective attitude in the conflict with Israel. For the first time, an Arab summit conference resolution on the conflict with Israel not only avoided the use of war terminology, or intransigent rhetoric, it was also non-transitional, departing from the strategy of phases.... Indeed the Arab peace plan was aimed mainly at the U.S. administration, reflecting growing awareness of Israel's strategic preponderance in its conflict with Arabs. More than any other single factor it was the shortfall in oil prices – combined with the burdening economy of the Gulf War – that diminished the Arabs' bargaining position in the international arena and eroded the oil monarchies' willingness to place their national resources at the service of the confrontation actors" (page 284).

Simultaneously, other elements in the equation were sorting themselves out. A dialogue was initiated between Jordan's King Hussein and Arafat. The war in Lebanon, while focussing attention on the Palestinian problem, also led to the dispersal of the latter from their bases in Lebanon. In February 1985, Arafat and King Hussein signed the Amman Accord calling for peace talks under the auspices of an international conference and with the inclusion of the Palestinians in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. None of this was to the liking of Syria. The Moroccans at this stage sought to square the circle by calling a summit in Casablanca (August 1985) to reconcile the Amman Accord with the Fez Plan; in the final analysis both were endorsed.

Other obstacles to progress nevertheless remained, principally the prerequisites the U.S. prescribed for opening a dialogue with the PLO, Israel's reservations about the nature of the proposed international conference, and the reluctance of the U.S. to involve the Soviet Union in the peace process in a meaningful sense. An emergency Arab summit in Amman in November 1987 ended Egypt's diplomatic isolation. A year later Arafat conceded ground on the question of negotiations with Israel. More important, the start of the Intifada (December 1987) brought a qualitative change in the ground situation: "The uprisings' most important message which became increasingly shared by Israeli society as well as by American decision makers was that the long *status quo* of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the denial of Palestinian national rights, was no longer a viable option. Yet despite the sustained uprising, the parties' cognizance continued to lag behind reality being captive to long-held perceptions" (page 307).

It is Sela's contention that the official responses of the Arab governments to the Intifada "were slow and indecisive"; public sympathy nevertheless was considerable and reflected itself in the financial aid from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates. Once it became clear that the Intifada was a sustained and organised conflagration, the U.S. administration activated itself and produced a plan with "its focus on Palestinian self-rule rather than self-determination" (page 306) with a view to salvaging the Jordanian option. It failed to get off the ground. The Algiers summit (the Intifada summit) of June 1988 reaffirmed its support for establishing a Palestinian state under the PLO's leadership. Seven weeks later Jordan severed its legal and administrative ties with the West Bank and thus furthered the process of the formation of a new state.

The next two summits (in Casablanca and Baghdad) over the next two years saw the return of Egypt to the Arab League and the development of new tensions in Arab ranks leading to new inter-Arab alignment and the formation of regional blocs (the Arab Maghreb Union and the Arab Cooperation Council): "They were indicative of the fading concept of pan-Arab unity" (page 317).

The final push in this direction came with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 1, 1990. An emergency summit 10 days after the invasion failed to find an Arab solution to the Kuwait crisis and had to condemn Iraq. "By rejecting the idea of an 'Arab solution', referring to international norms and rules and actively following them, the Summit made a step towards internalising those norms and further incorporating Arab states into the world order" (page 328). This was reflected in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) secretary-general Abdullah Bishara's remark in February 1991 on the need for a "new Arab order based on legality, mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs, and the primary role of the economy to create mutual interests." The Kuwait crisis also put an end to the Arab summitry of 26 years.

New forms were developed in its wake to further the Arab quest for a settlement of the dispute with Israel – Madrid, Oslo, and their aftermath. Sela's conclusion is that a new regional order, based on strategic and economic considerations rather than ethno-national identity, is setting in and "represents a clear shift from Pan-Arab regional system, giving way to the state as an independent actor in regional and international politics"; this, he argues, would result in the "routinisation of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours" (page 350). Fears of hegemony would nevertheless persist in Arab minds, and so would trails of affinity firmly rooted in cultural bonds.

The book is a model of thorough research and careful documentation. A useful appendix summarises the issues discussed and the decisions taken in the 20 summit conferences between 1964 and 1990. Another appendix indicates the level of the participating Arab states in each of these summits. The author set out to fill a gap in the existing literature on the history of regional Arab politics; the book achieves this goal in good measure. Its comprehensiveness would have been enhanced had more details been given of the domestic debate in Israel on negotiations with the Arabs, and the imperatives for it. Perhaps someone in the Arab world would overcome the familiar inhibitions about current history, supplement Mohammad Heikal's effort in his *Secret Channels*, bring forth a comparable Arab survey of these events and, as Ibn Khaldun might have said, "lift the veil". ■

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BOOKS

The bomb as teacher

A. G. NOORANI

Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy since 1945; edited by John Lewis Gaddis, Philip H. Gordon, Ernest R. May and Jonathan Rosenberg; Oxford University Press; pages 398, Rs.1,075.
South Asia on a Nuclear Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik; Oxford University Press; pages 354, Rs.595.

IT is true that the nuclear powers were armed to the teeth when India tested a nuclear bomb on May 11, 1998. It is equally true, however, that India decided to take the plunge precisely when a powerful tide of international public opinion had turned against nuclear weaponry. Who would have thought that a day would come when Paul H. Nitze would write: "I see no compelling reason why the United States should not unilaterally get rid of its nuclear weapons. To maintain them is costly and adds nothing to America's security. I can think of no circumstances under which it would be wise for the United States to use nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for their prior use against it" (*International Herald Tribune*; October 29, 1999).

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government inherited a recessed nuclear deterrence in India known to the wide world. None of the reasons it cited in justification of Pokhran-II made sense. Eric Arnett of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) did not find India's plea of the China factor convincing ("Nuclear questions and issues" by the writer; *Frontline*, February 26, 1999).

Two committed and informed activists against the bomb, Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, hold that it was part of India's drive to "ruthlessly pursue its global ambitions to become a Great Power." The spread of the Sangh Parivar's influence lent the drive a saffron hue. The decision was not taken in the national interest but to buttress a shaky coalition at the Centre. Lt. Gen. Eric A. Vaz has said that the armed forces were not consulted before this fateful move (*The Times of India*; October 25, 1999).

The draft Indian Nuclear Doctrine, prepared by the Nuclear Doctrine Group of the National Security Advisory Board of the National Security Council and released to the press on August 7, 1999, confirms the view that what the advocates of the bomb aspire to is status in the name of security. Their "triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets" goes far beyond "minimum nuclear deterrence." It is open-ended, wasteful and spells a ruinous nuclear arms race in the region. Aspirants to great power status care little to learn from the experience of the nuclear powers in their ardour to emulate the tragic example they set.

But the bomb is a great teacher, as the volume of essays edited by distinguished historians demonstrates. It is a study of what ten Cold War statesmen thought about nuclear weapons and how these weapons, in turn, shaped their thinking. The essays deal with Truman and Stalin and their respective successors, Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khruschev. Ike's powerful Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and the leaders of allies of the two superpowers – Churchill, de Gaulle, Adenauer and Mao Zedong – are not overlooked.

The fall 1988 issue of *International Security* published (pages 55-79) Prof. John Mueller's seminal article, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons." It concluded that "nuclear weapons neither crucially define a fundamental stability nor threaten severely to disturb it." They did not help to drive the Soviet Union out of Iran in 1946, as Truman believed; nor impelled China to negotiate a peace accord in Korea in 1953, as Ike believed.

John Mueller wrote: "Much the same could be said about other instances in which there was a real or implied threat that nuclear weapons might be brought into play; the Taiwan Straits crises of 1954-55 and 1958, the Berlin blockade of 1948-49, the Soviet-Chinese confrontation of 1969, the Six-day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Cold War disagreements over Lebanon in 1958, Berlin in 1958 and 1961 and offensive weapons in Cuba in 1962. All were

resolved, or allowed to dissipate, at rather low rungs on the escalatory ladder. While the horror of a possible nuclear war was doubtless clear to the participants, it is certainly not apparent that they would have been much more casual about escalation if the worst they had to visualise was a repetition of the World War II.

"Of course, nuclear weapons add new elements to international politics: new pieces for the players to move around the board (missiles in and out of Cuba, for example), new terrors to contemplate. But in counter to the remark attributed to Albert Einstein that nuclear weapons have changed everything except our way of thinking, it might be suggested that nuclear weapons have changed little except our way of talking, gesturing, and spending money."

The thesis was fully developed in his book *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (1989).

These essays aim to promote debate about Mueller's thesis. His propositions are not, and cannot be, tested in any remotely scientific way. "There are logical grounds for questioning whether historical evidence can ever be used to test propositions about statecraft," writes Prof. Ernest R. May, the eminent historian of diplomacy. "As the reader will see, all the statesmen treated in this book displayed ambivalence with regard to nuclear weapons and nuclear war. At one time or another, each spoke or wrote of nuclear weapons as weapons that might actually be used and yet, at some other time, spoke of nuclear war as impossible or unthinkable."

The essence of nuclear deterrence, May points out, is to establish some degree of credibility for an inherently incredible threat. The essay on Truman shows how his education progressed. "Civilisation cannot survive an atomic war. Nothing would be left but a world reduced to rubble," he said on May 11, 1946. After initial vacillation he insisted firmly on keeping nuclear weapons under civilian control. On September 16, 1948, the National Security Council (NSC) adopted NSC 30, laying down the basic policy. Decision on use of nuclear weapons was left to the President. But the conditions in which they would be used were not defined.

It was Truman who decided to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to develop the hydrogen bomb. But he was resolutely opposed to extending the Korean war. Till the last he never defined clearly "the conditions, no matter how extreme, under which he thought that it would become necessary for the United States to use nuclear weapons." More likely than not, the omission was due to his belief that they were simply unusable.

DULLES strongly disapproved, on moral grounds, the atomic bombing of Japan and warned at the time of the dangerous precedent it set. North Korea's attack on the South in June 1950 removed his reservations. By 1953, both Eisenhower and Dulles talked about the possibility of use of nuclear weapons to shorten the war. "Setting atomic weapons apart from all other weapons" was wrong. The "false distinction" must be erased. At an NSC meeting in December 1953 Dulles "advocated the actual use of atomic weapons" against China if it resumed hostilities. In late 1954 he said that a "general war would threaten the destruction of Western civilisation;" yet, he made a sharp distinction between the tactical and strategic use of nuclear weapons. Dulles thus became a "nuclear schizophrenic". He dreaded the consequences of use but urged its use now and then.

During Eisenhower's presidency, nuclear strategy and foreign policy were truly integrated at a high policy level. Seven of the 13 nuclear crises occurred when he was President – end to the Korean war, 1953; the Indo-China crisis, 1954; Quemoy and Matsu, 1954-55; Lebanon, 1958; the second Quemoy and Matsu crisis, 1958; and Berlin, 1958-59. The other six were Berlin, 1948; Suez, 1956; Berlin, 1961; the Arab-Israeli war of 1973; and the Carter Doctrine (1980).

Abba Eban records that on at least three occasions in 1964 and 1967, U.S. military chiefs sent memos to President Lyndon B. Johnson and Defence Secretary Robert McNamara urging them to consider use of the nuclear option in North Vietnam and in southern China. "These memos by the military leaders in the United States are an antidote to the facile assurance that there was never any danger of nuclear explosions during the Cold war" (*Diplomacy for the Next Century*; 1998; page 107).

From 1953-55, Ike regarded nuclear weapons as "the pre-eminent component of American national security policy". The rapidly expanding H-Bomb potential and the recurring crises induced second thoughts. During the first phase, there is compelling evidence that Eisenhower "was not bluffing".

The year 1956 marked a turning point in his thinking, and in Khruschev's too. In a letter to a friend on April 4, 1956, Ike wrote: "We are rapidly getting to the point that no war can be won. War implies a contest; when you get to the point that contest is no longer involved and the outlook comes close to destruction of the enemy and suicide for ourselves – an outlook that neither side can ignore – then arguments as to the exact amount of available strength as compared to somebody else's are no longer the vital issues.... But I repeat that (arms) usefulness becomes concentrated more and more in their characteristics as deterrents than in instruments with which to obtain victory over opponents as in 1945."

To quote a pithy expression he used later, "Destruction is not a good police force." Sobriety marked his response and that of Dulles to Khruschev's moves on Berlin in 1958-59.

JOHN F. KENNEDY inherited this awareness and it marked his adroit and responsible handling of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Nikita Khruschev began as one who, along with Molotov, attacked Stalin's successor Georgi Malenkov for asserting, on March 12, 1954, that "considering the modern means of warfare would mean the end of world civilization". Malenkov retreated to hold that they would lead only to "the collapse of the whole capitalist system". Later, Khruschev told Egyptian journalist Mohammed Heikal that he became convinced that "we could never possibly use these weapons and when I realised that I was able to sleep again".

But what of the master of them all, Stalin? He "created in just three years a gigantic new complex capable of competing with the United States". He knew that "until the 1950s the United States had no capacity for an atomic blitzkrieg".

The Russian historian Vladislav M. Zubok, who has delved in the archives diligently, writes: "Some of the National Intelligence Estimate, prepared by the CIA, reached Stalin's desk, and in the fall of 1951 at least several NIEs dealt with the consequences of a U.S. air strike against the USSR. It is important to understand: America plan-ned to drop atomic bombs on the Soviet Union to defend Western Europe. But Stalin saw those plans as a threat to destroy him in a surprise attack, just as Hitler had sought to do." Intelligence of the debate in the U.S. leadership on the use of nuclear weapons reached the Kremlin and influenced Stalin's successors to douse the fires

of the war in Korea.

Zubok holds that "America's atomic monopoly did not play a substantial role in deterring Stalin in the first phase of the Cold War. He knew that the U.S. atomic arsenal was not sufficient to destroy the Soviet Union. Stalin was determined to defend his spheres of influence and to dispel any sign of possible Soviet weakness in the face of America's atomic sabre-rattling. At the same time, he was firmly convinced – along with most of his ministers and scientists – that only a similar force could deter the United States from using its atomic weapons again. And he was also concerned that, if the Americans learned about the Soviet crash programme, they might attempt to destroy it."

Winston Churchill was another zealous convert who moved from initial advocacy of use of the bomb, before the Soviet Union acquired it, to fervent pleadings for parleys at the summit for a rapprochement. But he, like de Gaulle, was as ardent in the acquisition of a national nuclear deterrent. "We've got to have the bloody Union Jack flying on top of it."

Mao began by declaring in 1946 that "the atomic bomb is a paper tiger which the U.S. reactionaries use to scare people." He was too nationalistic to accept Khruschev's offer of a nuclear umbrella and opted instead for a "paper tiger" manufactured in China.

THE historian of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis, sums up the appraisals. During the Cuban missile crisis the U.S. had a 17-1 advantage over the Soviet Union in strategic weapons. It compromised, nonetheless. "One can read the evidence, as Mueller does, to suggest that nuclear weapons were irrelevant to the outcome of the crisis. An alternative reading, though, is that they were supremely relevant; that they had so changed the nature of warfare that even a 17-1 advantage in military capability could not ensure victory; that balances of military forces themselves had become irrelevant; that when the capacity existed to get *only a few nuclear weapons through*, deterrence would have been achieved. Mao and de Gaulle appear to have understood this instinctively: it was enough to have just a few. What Kennedy discovered – and this may well have been the most significant implication of the thermonuclear revolution – was how little good it did to have many. The evidence is compelling, then, that the thermonuclear revolution really did make a difference" (emphasis as in original, throughout).



Gaddis is against nuclear proliferation, though:

"There is clearly a point of diminishing rationality, even when it comes to the unconventional logic of nuclear deterrence; we would be most unwise to assume that because that logic crossed the cultural barriers that separated the Americans, the Russians, the Europeans, and the Chinese during the Cold War, it can cross all such barriers.

"But there is another consideration as well, the significance of which we are only now beginning to appreciate. It is that the world was extraordinarily lucky during the Cold War. There were no accidental detonations of nuclear weapons....

"We conclude, then, that nuclear weapons did play the determining role in making great-power war obsolete, at least during the Cold War. And it seems reasonable to assume that as long as the great powers continue to possess nuclear weapons – even if in far smaller numbers than in the past – that deterrent effect will continue. That it will do so for all times and in all places, though, seems a very shaky proposition. What we have here, then, is the presumption of a confirmed contingent generalisation. That is about as far as we would want to go."

John Mueller, fairly enough, is given an opportunity to respond, in an Epilogue, to criticisms of his thesis and he does so with verve. "I readily acknowledge that nuclear weapons helped leaders change their views about the utility of force at least as it pertained to major war and therefore, to that degree, I agree that nuclear weapons had a stabilising effect. I maintain, however, that, while this change may have been *notable*, it was not *consequential*: the Cold War figures examined in this book would deem a World War III prosecuted *without* nuclear weapons to be an excruciatingly bad idea, while they would deem a World War III carried out with them to be an unbelievably excruciatingly bad idea."

IF civility marks this debate, acerbity and exaggeration animate the Bidwai-Vanaik volume, not to forget some sloppiness in providing references. Sample this on the false pleas in defence of Pokhran-II: "Wild imagination, flights of fancy, semi-literacy in strategic affairs, pure prejudice, misinformation, inaccuracies, half-truths, and outright lies were blended in varying proportions to churn out this smorgasbord of apologia to suit different hawkish tasks and cater to various notions of national 'pride' and hubris."

Surely, if L. K. Advani and George Fernandes "demanded that Proud New Nuclear India must 'recapture' the part of Kashmir that Pakistan illegally annexed," the source for the quote should have been provided.

This is a pity. For, bar its excesses, theirs is essentially a plea for nuclear sanity. Even nuclear doves and staunch critics of Pokhran-II turn hawkish once the Pakistan factor is brought in. No praise can be too high for the courage and integrity with which Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik acknowledge Pakistan's genuine security concerns and India's persistent refusal to reckon with them.

"... we need only ask what the Indian reaction would be if China were to announce that it was supplying two complete nuclear reactors to Pakistan, its most advanced fighter aircraft, and the signing of a 10-year military supply commitment to be known as a 'Strategic Accord'? It is hardly difficult to imagine what the reaction would be; there would be an uproar in India. Yet this is exactly what the Russians have committed themselves to doing with India."

Such objectivity and candour are rare. Vajpayee may not have "teased, chided, insulted, threatened Sharif in the last week of May" 1998 by staging Pokhran-II, but he assuredly drove it to stage a comparable folly in Chagai and blazed the trail for a ruinous nuclear arms race in South Asia. Not many realise that. The authors' fury reflects their awareness of what lies in store for us in the future. Unlike the Washington-Moscow and Moscow-Beijing nuclear contests, New Delhi and Islamabad subsist "on a short fuse"; far shorter than most realise. ■

Rethinking development

C.T. KURIEN

OVER the years I have become a regular reader of the World Bank's annual publication, the World Development Report (WDR). I find it a very useful compilation with a text on a carefully selected theme, made lively with charts, graphs and boxed items of an anecdotal nature, an extensive bibliography and selected global statistics. The latest WDR is no exception. The 22nd in the annual series, it is, in fact, more impressive than usual. The theme "Entering the 21st Century" is most appropriate and the text runs to 175 pages; the bibliography has over 800 items; and the statistical Appendix has selected indicators on the main sub-themes dealt with.

A brief statement of the thrust of WDR 1999/2000 and the issues selected for treatment will be useful before I turn to a couple of comments. The Overview and the Introduction put forward the idea that as nations and peoples enter the 21st century they will be confronted with the twin forces of globalisation and localisation. Of the two, much has already been written about globalisation, the economic and financial linking up of national economies which opens up new possibilities, but also presents new types of problems. In its present form, globalisation is a phenomenon of the past two decades. Localisation is relatively new and hence not as familiar a phenomenon as globalisation. WDR 1999/2000 describes localisation in several places as reflecting the growing desire of people for a greater say in their government, manifesting itself in the assertion of regional identities. Thus, globalisation is a supranational economic phenomenon with political overtones while localisation is a subnational political phenomenon with economic implications. Since both are being viewed from the perspective of nation-states, they may also be designated as an external opening up and an internal opening up (as I have stated elsewhere). As we enter the 21st century, development will have to be reconceptualised in this new context. This is the thrust of the document. It is elaborated in Chapter 1 where the need to increase international trade, investment and migration, and to protect the global environment are emphasised as far as globalisation is concerned, and in relation to localisation the role of subnational units of governance is brought out with special reference to the economics and the governance of cities.

Chapter 2 deals with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its role in the 21st century. Chapter 3 is an account and evaluation of the global financial system. Chapter 4 discusses the global environmental issue. From aspects of globalisation in these chapters, Chapter 5 moves on to localisation, especially an evaluation of governance in a multi-tier system. Chapters 6 and 7 are about urbanisation. This is a new theme that the WDR is entering into. The concluding chapter has some case studies pertaining to the themes taken up in the earlier chapters.

FOR a more substantive treatment of these themes, I shall work backwards, beginning with urbanisation, to be followed by localisation and then moving on to the central theme of rethinking development in the context of the globalisation-localisation dynamic. In a way urbanisation is a concrete manifestation of that dynamic. In 1975, just over a third of the world's population lived in areas classified as urban. At the beginning of the 21st century, it will be as high as one half and by 2025 it may well become two-third, this rapid change affecting developing countries far more than the rest. Some 1.5 billion more people becoming urbanites in the countries of Asia and Africa will be a major challenge, physical and socio-political, in the years ahead.

Urbanisation is a typical instance of the interface between globalisation and localisation. The trade, investment and growth impulses that globalisation brings are the stimulants for the kind of galloping urbanisation that developing countries are likely to experience in the 21st century, which will bring in its wake a wide range of problems. Infrastructural inadequacy – housing, water and sanitation, transport, education and health – will be the chief among them. There are no global or even national solutions for them. Solutions have to be found at the local level; but apart from local insights, national and supranational insights and even resources will be required to deal with them. National governments, international agencies, local organisations of citizens can all be mobilised to diagnose and solve such problems. The crucial issue is the pattern of governance at the local level.

In my perception, the two chapters on urbanisation are the main contributions of WDR 1999/2000. The chapter on localisation that flags some of the issues discussed in these chapters is insightful, but suffers from an ambience of vagueness. This is not surprising. Chapter 5 on localisation deals with all forms of "subnational" governments which include (as shown in Table 5.1 of the Chapter) States (or provinces) in large federal entities such as the United States, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation (where the subnational units are republics); the lower units within them (such as municipalities and panchayats in India); smaller national entities such as the U.K. where the sub-units, the counties, have their own distinctive features. With such diversity, what can be said about localisation in general?

It would appear that the World Bank and its WDR are just waking up to some facts of life. The world, fortunately or unfortunately, is not a single, simple, homogeneous entity as it may often appear from 1818 H. Street, N.W., Washington D.C., U.S., the headquarters of the World Bank. Those who work there and those associated with the preparation of WDRs in the past may have proceeded on the assumption that from the "heights" of the headquarters it is possible to have a "global" view of the ground realities. They may have assumed also that on that basis it would be possible to prescribe standard, packaged universal remedies, such as marketisation and privatisation, and their derivative called structural adjustment programme, for problems anywhere and everywhere in the world. The fact that a Fund next door had the same perception may have given them greater assurance to campaign aggressively for their viewpoint. But what if that aerial view was from too far a height that obliterated all ground realities? Indeed, what if what was thought to be a bird's eye view was only a worm's eye view?

BE that as it may, WDR 1999/2000 has indications that the World Bank and its experts are willing to be a little less dogmatic about development as they look towards the 21st century. These can be found throughout the document, but more particularly in the treatment of development in the introductory chapter. It is seen in the statement that "the principal goal of development policy is to create sustainable improvements in the quality of life for all people" (page 13). Gone is the insistence that development is primarily economic growth and that it can be measured in terms of per capita income. The emphasis on quality of life and its sustainability and the statement of the fact that it is for all people, is a major departure (whose significance would have been striking if "all" were to be given in italics). There is the frank and documented admission that growth does not necessarily percolate down – the evidence being that the ratio of per capita income between the richest and poorest countries increased sixfold between 1870 and 1985. It is conceded that while investment is crucial for growth, cross-country comparisons suggest that some low-investment countries grew rapidly and a number of high-investment countries had low growth rates. And, there is the stark statement: "Governments play a vital role in development, but there is no simple set of rules that tells them what to do" (page 13). These candid statements move on to the following conclusion, equally frank and open: "Understanding the process of development requires acknowledging both its complexity and the context in which it operates" (page 30).

The Report takes a positive step in suggesting that the alternative approach to development may be what the Bank has turned to recently, and what has been designated "Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)" whose main features are spelt out as follows: "The country, not assistance agencies, should own its development strategy, determining the goals, timing, and sequencing of its development programmes."

Governments need to build partnerships with the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), assistance agencies, and organisations of civil society to define development needs and implement programmes.

A long-term, collective vision of needs and solutions should be articulated that will draw sustained national support. Structural and social concerns should be treated equally contemporaneously with macroeconomic and financial concerns (Box 4 on page 21).

It is stated that CDF is meant to be a compass, not a blueprint, and that the way the principles are put into practice will vary from country to country, depending on economic and social needs and the priorities of the stakeholders involved. If these statements are taken seriously, they point to a major departure in the approach to development, at least of the official international agencies, conforming to the position taken by some other official international agencies – the United Nations Development Programme, for instance, in its annual Human Development Report. It is also in conformity with the views on development advocated for several decades by development economists, including the present writer – although for the World Bank, CDF is "only at the pilot stage".

In view of my own involvement with a CDF-like approach to development, I may indicate why the World Bank is not likely to succeed in actualising the new vision of which it has now some glimpses. The reasons are twofold, which I shall refer to as methodological and ideological.

ON the methodological front the problem is the relationship between the concrete and the abstract. Developmental problems are concrete (millions of people not having adequate food, let us say) and the solutions are concrete too (making food available to them). But in order to understand the concrete problem and decide on its solutions it is necessary to go through some procedure of abstraction – simplification, classification, ordering and the like – procedures needed for the diagnosis of the problem. In dealing with the problem of development, the World Bank has proceeded on the assumption that there is an *a priori* knowledge of what it is (level of per capita income) and that comparisons of the developed and the developing would show what its causal correlates are (investments, trade, fiscal policies, incentives and so on). But once it is conceded that the goals and the processes of development are to be defined by those directly involved, this procedure simply breaks down. Further, in the concrete the correlates do not exist in isolation. They are inter-related and interact in ways that cannot be easily anticipated. This is what makes development inherently complex. The World Bank, whose analysis of problems is derived from what is in common for individual cases, can only have a generalised understanding of the problem which is not adequate to deal with a specific concrete case. In fairness it must be admitted that the Bank now makes fairly thorough-going case studies like the five given in Chapter 8. It is interesting to note that in the analysis of the past in each case, the World Bank is able to discover the general principles it has enunciated, but when it comes to directions for the future it cannot say what the appropriate course of action should be. A physician with the knowledge of human physiology and medicines alone may not be able to diagnose the health problem of a particular patient without thoroughly examining him or her to arrive at a diagnosis and then to suggest the remedy. The situation is similar to a global agency which has some general knowledge about types of problems, but is not familiar with the concrete case it is dealing with. In the circumstances that agency may pass on available information to its constituents, invite them to consider possible alternatives, promise them scholarly assistance if they so desire. But it should not presume to prescribe, for, to prescribe without proper diagnosis is dangerous.

This is a serious problem for the World Bank which must at least pretend that as a global agency with global expertise at its command, it knows everybody's problems and has remedies to suggest. But the Bank has a bigger problem. Its advice is substantially to developing countries. Its ideological position, however, does not allow it to accept the fact that many of the problems of the developing countries can be directly related to the positions and actions of the developed countries and powerful global agencies.

Just one example will do to drive home this point. In the context of the growing influence of global finance, the Bank advises developing countries to be transparent in their financial and banking operations. But is that possible and is that wise if global financial players have no transparency and accountability? Who is to "advise" them? Under whose authority do they function? Are there systemic reasons for the inability to exercise control over them? The World Bank, because of its ideological position, cannot seriously enter into these questions and may not even think it necessary to do so.

Hence, even if the World Bank is finally convinced about a new paradigm of development, it may not be able, in practice, to move out of its old imperatives and procedures. After all, can a leopard change its spots? ■

On separated hands

WILLIAM SAFIRE

I AM not in the least superstitious, but I know enough not to open an umbrella indoors, leave shoes on a table or a hat on a bed, touch somebody with a broom or rock an empty rocking chair. When any of these sure-fire invitations to misfortune occur, I – like anyone who hears a sneeze – say, "Bless you!" The latest medieval research tells us that this phrase – in German, *Gesundheit*, "a state of good health" – keeps the Devil from possessing your soul.

But folklorists know there are more specific expressions that are used to ward off evil in special situations. At a gathering of media biggies, I posed this query to Corinne Boggs Roberts: When you are walking along hand in hand with a friend, and an obstacle like a tree or a lamppost forces you to break your handclasp momentarily, what expression do you use to ward off a quarrel or, worse, permanent separation? Without hesitation, Cokie, as she is known to intimates, replied, "*Bread and butter*."

Peter Bartis, at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, explains, "*Bread and butter* go together, a sign of unity." He finds a citation in the seven-volume Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore: "If two persons are walking and they come to an object (high object) in their path, and one goes on one side and one on the opposite side, they will have a fuss."

A California source shows the expression to be national: "When something goes between two people while walking, and nothing is said afterward, the two will quarrel."

Thousands of bytes of e-mailed expostulations will be onloaded to my head from folklorists certain that the only expression to be used in that case is *needles and pins*. Hold your ire. According to a 1920s usage cited in the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE), when two people accidentally said the same thing in unison, "one would then say 'needles' and the other 'pins,' then hook little fingers and make a silent wish." (I used to say "Snap!" before hooking pinkies. Today I say, "Great minds think alike," and eschew the digital signals.) "When walkers were separated and did not use this phrase or *bread and butter*," DARE adds, "it was believed they would have a quarrel."

"SEN. John Kerry has an affinity for the vice president's positions," writes Carey Goldberg in *The New York Times*, "and is friends with him."

That locution grates on the ears of a reader. "Since we have never met," he writes, "it follows that I am not *friends with* you." He finds his singular *I* ill fits the plural *friends* and prefers to put that as the all-plural "we are not friends" or the all-singular "you are not a friend of mine."

'Friend of' refers to an established relationship. 'Friends with' gives the connotation of 'friendly toward,' referring to the attitude rather than the firm relationship.... 'I'm friends with her' is not incorrect. 'We're friends' or 'she's a friend of mine' is unassailable in any company.

I checked with the usagist Jacques Barzun, who is a friend. He is untroubled by the number disagreement of this spreading idiom but finds a shade of difference in meaning: "*Friend of* refers to an established relationship. *Friends with* gives the connotation of 'friendly toward,' referring to the attitude rather than the firm relationship."

There is also the element of abstraction. *Friends with* is an outgrowth of *friendly with*, implying interaction between people. You can be a *friend of* the Constitution or a *friend to* man, but you cannot be *friends with* either abstraction.

"I'm *friends with* her," in my book, is not incorrect, but is informal. "We're friends" or "she's a *friend of* mine" is unassailable in any company.

IN a reminiscence of the late Judith Campbell Exner, a put-upon paramour of President Kennedy, I wrote that "responsible newspapers subsequently revealed that (Sam) Giancana, the woman's Chicago lover, was also the Mafia don who took a contract from the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro."

A careful reader questions my use of the verb *reveal*. Wouldn't a better choice have been *disclose* or *divulge*? The root of *reveal* is the Latin *velum*, "veil"; to *reveal* is to strip away the veil. The early use of *revelation* had to do with the unfolding of divine will or the making-known by some supernatural agency. That meaning still clings to the central sense of the word today; to *reveal* is to allow a vision of what is beyond the range of ordinary human reason or sight.

Disclose is its workaday synonym; no heavenly choir is singing in the background. The root meaning is "to unclose," which means "to open"; the most common sense is "to make known what was previously unpublished, deliberately held back or kept secret."

Divulge can be tracked back to the Latin *vulgus*, "mob"; it means "to make known to the multitude," with the whiff of a suggestion that the informant should have kept his information to himself. It implies either a breach of confidence or other impropriety in the communication. (I like Merriam-Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms,, but will not *divulge* my source.)

"When I was a writer (called 'contributing editor') on *Time* magazine," notes another reader, "the managing editor was T.S. Mathews, a brilliant man. He always struck out *revealed* ('The sergeant *revealed* that no gun had been found on the scene') and substituted *disclosed* or just plain *said*. According to Mathews, *revealed* was 'reserved for the five books of Moses and the poetry of William Blake.'"

I'll go with that. Not every full disclosure is a full revelation. ■

Red tape in the time of IT

The idea behind the creation of a Ministry of Information Technology appears to be conceptually flawed: a bureaucratic behemoth may not be the agency best suited to facilitate the growth of this sector.

R. RAMACHANDRAN

SEVENTEEN months after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee gave a call to make India an "Information Technology Superpower" and one of the largest generators and exporters of software in the world within 10 years, the Government created a Ministry of Information Technology (MIT) in October 1999.

However, is the new Ministry, with all its bureaucratic trappings, the agency best suited to provide the much-needed push for IT and facilitate the growth of this sector, as envisaged by a high-power National Task Force on IT and Software Development that was constituted the very day Vajpayee gave the call. The impression has gained ground that the Ministry was created in order to kill two birds with one stone: to handle the pressure from the Indian Administrative Service lobby to overcome stagnanation in its upper rungs, and to pander to post-election forces and exigencies.

The 20-member Task Force was constituted on May 22, 1998. Among its tasks was to recommend, within a month, steps that the government must take to remove bottlenecks in the growth of IT, and to formulate a draft national policy on informatics. The Task Force was chaired by Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Jaswant Singh, and co-chaired by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and former Union Minister for Science and Technology Prof M.G.K. Menon. National Informatics Centre Director-General Dr. N. Seshagiri, the chief architect of the initiative, was its convenor.

On July 4, 1998, the Task Force came out with its first basic document, IT Action Plan I (ITAP-I). This document identified both impediments in and promotional measures for the growth of IT and made 108 recommendations to make India an IT superpower. This was followed by two other documents. The first, ITAP-II, which was submitted on October 26, 1998, focussed on IT hardware. And ITAP-III, released on April 16, 1999, focussed on a long-term national IT policy. The recommendations were notified in the gazette on July 25, 1998. This seemed to signal a governmental commitment to developing the IT sector.

Significantly, these initiatives notwithstanding, a recent report of the United States Department of Commerce's Office of Technology Policy titled "Information Technologies in the Development Strategies of Asia" did not include India among the Asian countries that it studied. The report looked at the Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs) – Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan and Korea – and China. India figured here only in connection with Singapore's participation in the setting up of an IT Park in Bangalore in 1995, which was expanded in 1997 "specifically to take advantage of India's 140,000 low-cost computer programmers". The objective of the report was to assess the evolution of the new global competitive paradigm and to enable the U.S. to formulate its economic and technological policy and strategies for global cooperation and competition accordingly. Although the report's focus was largely on hardware, its approach would suggest that India, notwithstanding its claimed competitive software capability, was not of strategic importance in the U.S. perspective.

The simple reason for this could be that while India does contribute substantially to meeting the U.S' "new big deficit" in software professionals through manpower export, IT policy instruments that are in place in the country leave much to be desired. The Task Force has completed its tasks, but the political momentum that was evident initially seems to have died down. In fact, there has been no political action on ITAP-II and ITAP-III, which were accepted by the government in principle.

THE presidential notification of October 15 on the creation of the Ministry, the allocations of business of the MIT on October 20 and the likelihood of turf battles among the Ministries on which the MIT will have a bearing (evident from the pronouncements by Ministers) have only served to cause confusion and uncertainty.

In effect, the Ministry is nothing but a "renamed" Department of Electronics (DoE) with "an expanded role". The October 15 notification said that the MIT's resposibility would include "promotion of knowledge-based enterprises, ... promotion of the Internet, ... promotion of e-commerce, ... promotion of IT education and IT-based education," the "National Informatics Centre" and the "Electronics and Computer Software Export Promotion Council". The notification is poorly phrased, for the last two are independent institutions, the former under the Planning Commission and the latter under the Commerce Ministry, and not activities like the others, which the Ministry can help promote.

The phrasing of the 'allocations of business', in the notification of October 20, is even worse. It states: "The nomenclature of the Department of Electronics (DoE) stands substituted by the Ministry of Information Technology with immediate effect." The list of items of business of the MIT in the notification retains some items of business of the erstwhile DoE that are meaningless today, given the paradigm changes that have occurred. It incorporates illogical combinations of functions, such as "coordination of requirements relating to electronics processing equipment (computers)", "all matters pertaining to silicon facility", "all matters concerning computer-based information, technology and processing including hardware and software, standardisation of procedures and matters relevant to international bodies such as IFIP, IBI and ICC." In point of fact, the expression "electronics processing equipment" would cover much more than just computers, the phrase "silicon facility" is meaningless, and the last entry makes no sense; in addition, two of the three international bodies mentioned do not exist

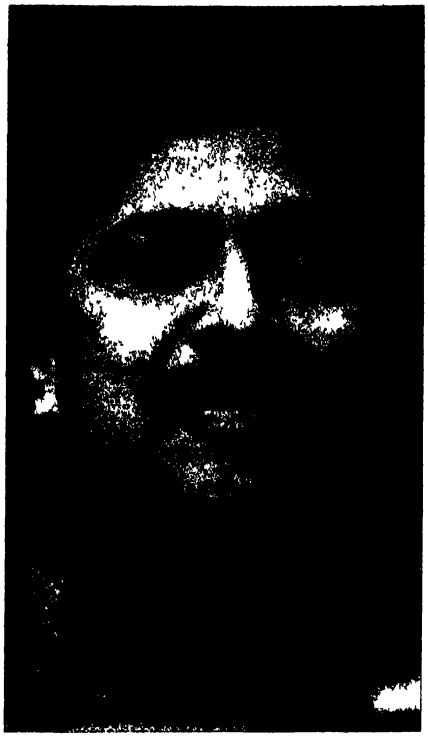
any more.

It is clear that someone who knows little about electronics or IT has done a cut-and-paste job after the first notification of October 15 was issued. The entire exercise is indicative of things to come, complete with the bureaucratic baggage that accompanies the creation of a full-fledged Ministry. On DoE stationery the expression "Department of Electronics" has been replaced by "Ministry of Information Technology", and the DoE Web site is now the MIT Web site. These are only indications that the reorganised structure is at work. The officials and scientists are unclear what their new functions are.

The new Secretary, P.V. Jayakrishnan, IAS, who replaced Ravindra Gupta, is still familiarising himself with the Department's activities. There is uncertainty about what the MIT can or cannot do, particularly in the light of the fact that Communications Minister Ram Vilas Paswan and Commerce Minister Murasoli Maran are unwilling to give up their control over policy matters relating to the Internet (which are currently in the domain of the Department of Telecommunications) and e-commerce and software exports.

It is likely that service bureaucrats will play an active role in the Ministry. The DoE was one of the first scientific departments in which an IAS officer replaced a technical person as its Secretary. Bureaucrats will now be waiting to take up positions in the new Ministry. According to observers, the key position of NIC Director-General may become a casualty. Dr. Seshagiri has thus far kept the NIC away from bureaucratic control and for this reason has not endeared himself to some bureaucratic pressure groups. But he is due to retire in seven months.

Informed sources in the DoE say that Dr. Seshagiri, who has the rank of Special Secretary, may have initially favoured the creation of a Ministry in the hope of becoming its Secretary. In the event, however, the bureaucrats got the better of him. Dr.Seshagiri was apparently slighted at the first meeting held after the erstwhile DoE Secretary Ravindra Gupta, IAS, took over as Secretary in the MIT (consequent on the creation of the Ministry). Every officer present introduced himself or herself: Dr.Seshagiri introduced himself as NIC Director-General and Special Secretary to the Government. To this, one officer is reported to have said that there was now only one Secretary to the Ministry and



SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

Minister for Information Technology Pramod Mahajan.

no Special Secretaries. Indeed, the NIC's status has been reduced to that of an "attached office" of the MIT: Dr. Seshagiri has to report to the Secretary, and administrative matters regarding the NIC are being handled by a Joint Secretary of the MIT. Such dilution of the NIC's autonomy could prove counterproductive to the development of the IT sector, feel observers.

THE appointment of Pramod Mahajan as Minister for Information Technology is seen as a move to assuage the Bharatiya Janata Party leader who had to give up the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. Mahajan heads another high-profile Ministry – Parliamentary Affairs. Indeed, during his first meeting with MIT officials, he is reported to have said that he was still to familiarise himself with the various aspects of IT and so could not immediately clarify the functions of the Ministry. More significantly, he is reported to have said that many important pieces of legislation were to be come up during the winter session of Parliament, and his responsibilities as Parliamentary Affairs Minister would preclude him from devoting time to his new portfolio for a couple of months.

Mahajan's remark in Mumbai subsequently that the MIT would only be a facilitator and not a regulator has been welcomed guardedly by Dr. Seshagiri, because this aspect is in tune with the Task Force recommendations. However, some of Mahajan's other utterances have confused matters. Just what he meant when he said that the MIT is a "no-budget Ministry" and that IT could have been part of other Ministries such as I&B or Communications is not clear. Since the organisational structure – for example, the relationship and role of the NIC (which has more technical staff than the DoE) *vis-a-vis* the rest of the Ministry – is vague and both the Minister and the Secretary are still "familiarising themselves", even routine business, such as licensing or leasing of bandwidth capacity to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), might come to a halt, feel insiders. Will new applicants have to route their applications through the MIT? Similarly, once the proposed "cyber law", which is to be introduced during the winter session, is passed, which will be the implementing agency – the MIT or the Commerce Ministry (since many of the provisions of the the proposed bill relate to e-commerce) or the Communications Ministry (since the law has also to do with data security, encryption and so on)?

Apart from these issues, the fundamental question of whether there is any need for an administrative structure of a full-fledged Ministry has not been answered. Technologies in respect of computers, communication and broadcasting are converging at a rapid pace. With digital technologies being the cornerstone of virtually every conceivable activity, the component of software, namely, processing of digital information, in equipment is increasing and plain hardware is becoming less functional.

With the increasing penetration of computers in every area, the day-to-day functioning of organisations, public or private, has become IT-oriented. Because of this, the interaction of the public with the government too has become IT-based, be it in banking and other financial transactions, public transport or bill payments. E-governance is the buzzword today (*Frontline*, December 10). The need for an administrative body within the government that coordinates the IT-component in all sectors and promotes increased use of IT, which translates into greater efficiency of operations, is being increasingly felt. But is a Ministry the best administrative structure that can achieve this?

INFORMED sources in the industry concede that there is a need for a catalytic agent or an enabling body to promote IT growth, but feel that a Ministry would only add another bureaucratic layer to the already cumbersome process of securing approvals. They claim that the DoE was more a hindrance than a favourable agent for the growth of electronics. If anything, they say, it was restrictive policies that killed the computer hardware industry. They are not entirely convinced by Mahajan's remark that the MIT would not "regulate" the industry; in their view, a bureaucratic hierarchy will imply greater regulation and more paperwork. If IT is to grow, the government should keep out of it, they feel.

In the perspective of people engaged in electronics R&D and industry, the field involves much more than R&D. The mere fact that there is embedded software in every piece of electronic equipment does not make it IT, they say. For example, how can one justify calling High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC), a major field under the DoE that uses power electronic devices called thyristors, constitute IT and come under MIT? Or for that matter, how can the entire field of radar development or strategic electronics or microwave research under SAMEER, an important activity of DoE, be regarded as IT? Or Standards, Testing and Quality Control (STQC) activity of DoE? In fact, there is a whole range of conventional electronics hardware in the country that is under threat of being wiped out in the wake of impending duty reductions consequent on the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) arrived at under the World Trade Organisation regime. The consequence, they fear, would be a marginalisation and eventual closure of these important activities.

SCIENTISTS at the National Centre for Software Technology (NCST), an R&D centre under the DoE (now under the MIT) in Mumbai, feel that some facilitating body that would support IT R&D was certainly necessary, because IT was not considered part of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the DoE had never actively supported R&D in IT. For India to be a dominant player, research and IT education should have been given importance.

The reports of the Task Force too have taken a very narrow vision of IT growth in the country. They have looked at an unrealistic linear model, chiefly from the perspective of growth in earnings from IT services and body shopping, a euphemism for software capability, whereas the ultimate strength in software would come from software packages and application software where there is a dearth of expertise. So, the scientists say, it would be good if some agency – whether it is a Ministry or some other structure – facilitated funding of research and education in IT. But if it is supposed to be a "no-budget Ministry" or a merely renamed structure, it will get nowhere, they say.

The members of the Task Force did not in fact recommend a ministerial structure. The original notification from the Prime Minister's Office that constituted the Task Force said: "The task force will recommend an appropriate empowered institutional mechanism to implement the national informatics policy as a national mission with the participation of the Central and State governments, industry, academic institutions, and the society at large." Accordingly, given the convergence of technologies and information based functionalities, ITAP-III recommended an organisational structure in order to facilitate the coherence in planning and implementation of IT-related activities.

THE organisational structure envisaged by the Task Force included a key adviser on IT in the PMO in order to give proper emphasis and focus to this area and a separate division in the Planning Commission with an IT adviser. At the level of each department and Ministry, it recommended that there be a Chief Informatics Officer with the responsibility to design, develop and implement information processing and retrieval systems. These were to be supported by a High Level Apex Committee on IT comprising national and international IT experts and "enablers" who would assist in the process of defining and implementing the IT vision. "This structure," the Task Force said, "will be insulated from changes at the political level and also will have the credibility and authority to see the process of planning and implementation to its logical conclusion." Clearly, the Task Force did not have a Ministry on its mind.

A senior scientist at the NIC said: "One hopes that this is a temporary phase. You cannot expect entrenched structures to give results. New nucleating centres that emerge have to be separated from these. The Government should have no role besides focussing on convergence and facilitation."

According to the scientists, instead of creating a Ministry, one of three options could have been considered: 1. establishing an empowered development council; 2. establishing a Commission such as the Commissions on electronics, telecommunication or space but without a department; and 3. a notification that IT industry be decontrolled, deregulated and open-ended. He also felt that the DST should be responsible for R&D in IT and that in order to minimise R&D investment in the government sector it should ensure that R&D efforts are not duplicated. "It should only serve to create an R&D platform of national factor advantage, from which industry can take off," he said.

Prof. M.G.K. Menon said that IT was "all-pervasive, and a colonial structure like a Ministry is hardly suited" to facilitate IT growth. "Merely renaming the DoE a Ministry with a few appendages "cannot work and this is not what we recommended," he added. "A suitable enabling structure has to be evolved. Our experience with Commissions suggests that even a Commission may not be the correct structure. We have to look at new forms of structures that bring together the IT component in all sectors, including education, health and agriculture. But the government has shown little interest in our reports after the first one was submitted. The other reports have not seen the light of day."

In the opinion of Dr. Ashok Parthsarathi, who was among the first to bring to the government's attention the need for an IT policy, the Planning Commission "has all the necessary structure and authority to fund, focus and implement IT-related strategies which cut across Ministries and regions." He had advocated a structure for India along the lines of the Chinese model which, he feels, is eminently workable for India.

As it stands, the MIT is quite different from what people at various levels feel is the most appropriate administrative structure; the new Ministry has created a climate of uncertainty in respect of IT growth in the country as the world enters a new millennium which will be knowledge- and information-driven. The creation of the Ministry seems to be conceptually flawed. Under these circumstances, will the dream of India as an IT superpower ever become real? ■

A century of service

The year-long centenary celebrations of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, begin on December 9.

ISHA KRISHNAKUMAR
n Vellore

WHEN on January 1, 1900, Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder converted her modest house in Vellore, in the then Madras Province, into a one-bed clinic, she would have scarcely imagined that it would grow into a 2,000-bed hospital – the Christian Medical College and Hospital, or CMC Vellore. At present the hospital has 55 clinical departments and treats one lakh inpatients and 12 lakh out-patients a year. CMC's year-long centenary celebrations begin on December 9, the day Ida Scudder was born.

One of the first women to be trained t the Cornell Medical School in the Jnited States, Ida returned to Vellore – here her father had spent a lifetime – to rovide medical care to women who, ecause of religious and social taboos, ould not get treated by male doctors. In er zeal to reach medicare to remote vilges and to reluctant patients, Ida cudder set up "roadside clinics", by carring medicines to villages in a bullock art. Thanks to a donation, she built the 40-bed Mary Taber Schell Memorial Hospital (named after the donor) in 1902, which subsequently became CMC.

Realising the medical needs of the women of the area and her own inability to serve all of them, Ida Scudder began training compounders in 1903, and set up a school of nursing in 1909. Her dream of establishing a medical school for women, which trained licentiates, materialised in 1918. The medical school became a medical college in 1942, and it began admitting male students in 1947. To provide medical aid to the rural poor, the Community Health and Development (CHAD) unit, with 80 beds, was started in 1955 and the Rural Unit for Health and Social Affairs (RUHSA), with 40 beds in 1977. A 40-bed low-cost effective care unit was opened for the urban poor in 1983.

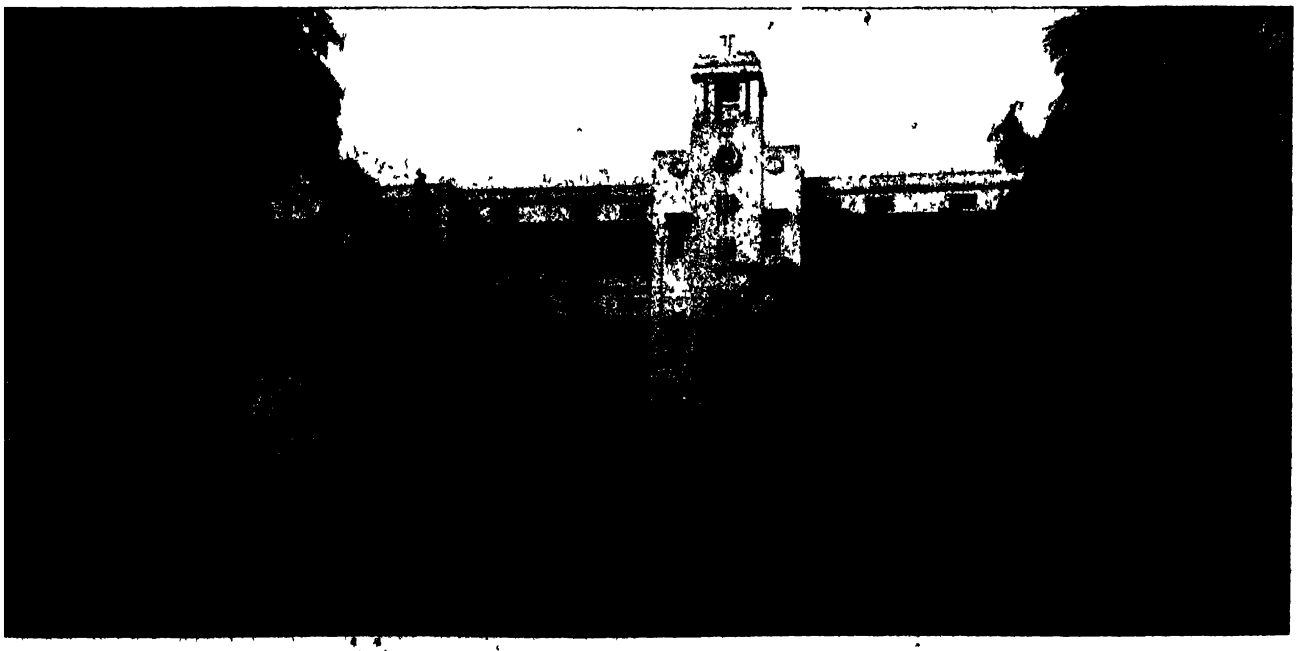
The medical and teaching facilities at CMC grew with the addition of various specialities from time to time, most of them pioneering efforts. Today, CMC offers 90 recognised training programmes in medical, nursing and allied specialisations.

CMC is run by the Vellore Christian Medical College Association, a registered charitable society with the involvement of over 50 Indian Protestant churches and other Christian organisations. It is administered by a governing council consisting of representatives of the Association and of some 30 other organisations based in India and abroad.

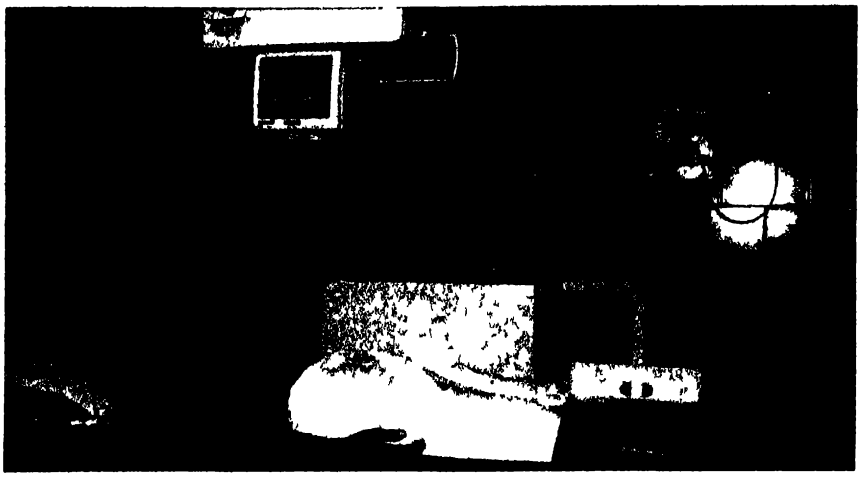
CMC's work is broadly divided into four areas: patient care, teaching, out-reach and research. All faculty members are expected to contribute to each of the four areas. All the 620 doctors, 182 members of the teaching staff, 1,314 nurses and students stay on the four campuses.

Although the pay structure is low in CMC compared to other institutions, the doctors have continued to work. This, according to CMC Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr. George Chandy, is because "they derive tremendous job satisfaction as they can teach, treat, carry on research and participate in out-reach programmes."

In the heart of Vellore town is the 27-



MC Vellore. Excelling in patient care, teaching, outreach and research.



K. PICHUMANI

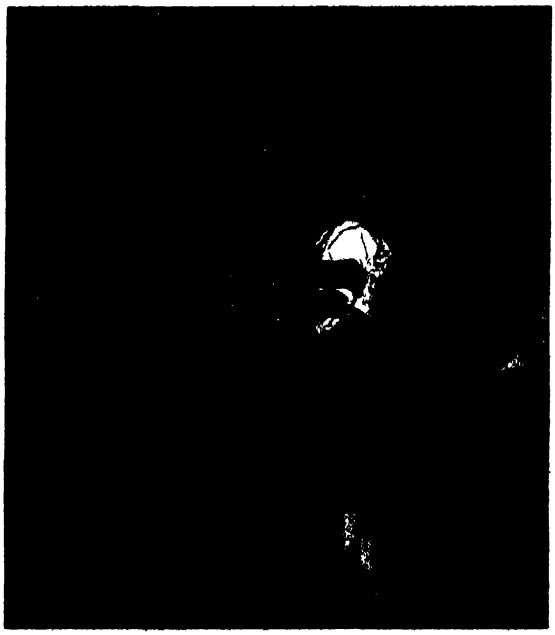
At the magnetic resonance imaging facility.

acre (10.8-hectare) main hospital campus, which also houses the College of Nursing and the residences of some essential clinical staff. Close by is another campus, where Ida Scudder set up her 40-bed hospital; it houses the Schell Eye Hospital and the Ida Scudder ward, which provides free medical treatment for the urban poor. The 106-acre college campus at Bagayam, 7 km from the town, accommodates the hostels of students and the quarters of the staff of the college. It also houses the base hospital for CHAD, the Mental Health Centre and the Rehabilitation Institute. The RUHSA Hospital is at K.V. Kuppam, 30 km from the town. The main hospital has 16 operation theatres where over 45 major surgical operations are performed every day.

CMC has several firsts to its credit: it performed the first successful open-heart surgery in India (1948), the first reconstructive surgery for leprosy patients in the world (1948), the country's first middle-ear microsurgery for deafness (1961), the first kidney transplant in India (1971), the first gastrointestinal endoscopy (1972), the first carotid bifurcation stenting in India (1996), the first transeptal carotid stenting in the world (1996), and the first transjugular mitral valvuloplasty in the world (1996). Its other achievements include the setting up of the first neurological sciences department in South Asia (1948) and the first rehabilitation institute (1966), and the first virology department (1978) in the country.

CMC reaches health care to the poor while keeping abreast of technology. It is one of the best-equipped hospitals in the country. According to the hospital's director Dr. Joyce Ponnaiya, "the hospital acquires only need-based equipment and the facilities available are comparable to those used in any major hospital in the country." About 400 open-heart surgical procedures, 100 kidney transplants, 40 bone marrow transplants and 900 angiocardiograms and cardiac catheterisations are among a variety of diagnoses and treatment performed every year in the hospital.

About 77 per cent of the beds in the main hospital are in the general ward, where treatment is subsidised. About 15 per cent of the patients here are treated free of cost. In 1998, the underwritten medical costs of the poor were Rs.11.8 crores. The recurring costs for 1998-99 were Rs.84.5 crores. In addition, CMC spent a total of Rs.4.64 crores on research activities and scholarships for poor students.



K. PICHUMANI

Handicapped children at Nambikkai Nilayam, which was set up in 1978 to train mentally challenged children and their parents.

The cost of treatment ranges from rates comparable to those charged by corporate hospitals, to practically nothing, depending on the economic status of the patients. However, according to Dr. Chandy, "there is no difference between the treatment given to patients who pay and to those who are not charged a fee."

THE specialised departments of CMC do not operate as profit centres; they cross-subsidise each other. Each department has set high standards for itself.

The Developmental Paediatrics Unit, headed by Dr. M.C. Mathew, focusses on identifying the neuro-developmental needs of children and helping them develop learning skills. It trains doctors and health workers in early childhood development and undertakes research work. It is the only department in any medical college in the country that trains doctors in this area.

The Rehabilitation Department, set up in 1966 by Dr. Mary Verghese, a student of CMC who became a paraplegic after an accident, initially rehabilitated victims with spinal cord injuries. By the early 1970s, it began providing trauma care and treated cases of tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, cerebral palsy and viral infection of the central nervous system (CNS).

It is a comprehensive facility providing physiotherapy and vocational and occupational therapy. The department collaborates in research with experts from the fields of bio-medical engineering and electronics and professionals from institution, such as Indian Institute of Technology's (Chennai) Composite Structures Department. Its workshop, one of the oldest in the country, has designed and developed low-cost aids such as calipers, wheel-chairs and special shoes with locally available materials. Its staff include rehabilitated patients. The unit also runs an out-reach vocational rehabilitation programme in a 100-km radius around the hospital.

Dr. Jacob John of the Virology Department was the first to detect an HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) positive patient in the country – in 1986. The department's activities include conventional cell-culture-based virus identification, antibody tests and antigen detection, molecular diagnostics of eight

viruses and the study of opportunistic viral infections, HIV and hepatitis. Identified as a referral centre for HIV patients, the unit, headed by Dr. G. Sridharan, works in association with the National AIDS Control Organisation.

The Cardiology Department, started in 1955, has done pioneering work. In 1997, it developed a balloon, which costs Rs.16,000 and can be used up to 20 times to correct the narrowing of the mitral valve. (Rheumatic fever narrows the mitral valve, thereby blocking blood flow. Earlier balloons from Japan, each costing Rs.75,000, were used to clear the block. These were not reusable.) CMC has done over 600 procedures using this balloon.

This department was the first in India to treat aneurysms without surgery. The department, under Dr. V. Jacob Jose and Dr. George Joseph, also treats children – even babies – with congenital heart diseases.

The Reproductive Medicine Department, set up in 1995, employs state-of-the-art techniques – blastocyst transfer and assisted hatching and procedures such as in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), gamete intra-fallopian transfer (GIFT) and intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) to treat male and female infertility. CMC does not accept donor sperms or eggs for fertilisation.

Started in 1986 to treat blood disorders, the Haematology Department has carried out 216 bone marrow transplants, including 102 bone marrow transplants in patients with thalassemia (for a genetic disorder in which adequate haemoglobin is not produced), the hightest number in each case in the country. It recently did a transplant on a six-month-old baby with Wiscott-Aldrich Syndrome, an immune deficiency disorder.

The department, headed by Dr. Mammen Chandy, also treats aplastic anaemia (bone marrow failure); haemophilia (a bleeding disorder); and leukaemia. It also performs peripheral stem cell transplants.

CMC was the first college to start a super-speciality training course in blood diseases. Among its major research work is a study on Glanzmann's disease, a bleeding disorder, common among communities with consanguineous marriages.

Apart from routine procedures and treatment, the ENT Department, headed by Dr. Anand Job, does functional endoscopic sinus surgery pertaining to nasal polyps and sinusitis. The department recently acquired a micro debrider, which is used to remove the polyps and bones, with minimum bleeding.

The department treats patients with vertigo and snoring problems, and reconstructs the ear. It was one of the first in the country to remove laryngeal tumours without loss of the voice box.

Set up in 1902, the Department of Surgery, the oldest in the country, was upgraded to a post-graduate training department in 1950. The department, now headed by Dr. Bannerji Jesudason, is one of the best in terms of manpower and technology. It performed a liver transplant recently.

The Department of Urology does 100 renal transplants a year and has started doing nephrectomies laparoscopically.

Started in 1948, the Neurology/Neurosurgery Department was the first such in the country. In 1952, it started performing surgical operations on epileptic patients. The department, headed by Dr. Chandran Gnanamuthu, has pioneered several techniques and is the only facility doing intra-operative brain monitoring in the country.

THE Mental Health Centre was started in the early 1950s. Its unique aspect is that it insists on the members of family staying with the patients on the campus, which has a number of small dwelling units – 20 private and 40 general units and 12 dormitories.

The centre has 90 beds and caters to all age-groups. It has several facilities - child and adult psychiatry units, a learning disability centre, a school for the mentally challenged children and therapy centres for various age groups.

A missionary, after all

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

IN 1889, 16-year-old Ida Sophia Scudder, who had just finished school, set out from Boston in the United States to Vellore to nurse her ailing mother. Her father, a doctor, had been with her mother for more than 10 years. He was engaged in missionary work. Ida had long decided that she would not take up missionary work. She planned to return to the U.S. as soon as her mother recovered.



Ida's resolve broke one night when three men sought her help. Their wives were in labour and the local local mid-wives were unable to help in the "complicated cases". Social and religious taboos prevented them from seeking her father's help. The women died that night, and this affected Ida deeply. She realised how badly the women of Vellore needed a woman doctor.

Ida went back to the U.S. in 1890 to study medicine. She was one of the first women to be admitted to the Cornell Medical School. After her final examinations, she was told by the Dutch Reformed Church to raise $8,000 to set up a clinic for women in Vellore – a job that was easier said than done.

A frustrated Ida had almost given up her plan to set up a clinic in Vellore when a friend suggested that she approach Miss Taber, who lived a few blocks away for help. The next day Ida went to Miss Taber's house where she met Schell, Taber's brother-in-law. Ida explained to Taber the miserable condition of women in India and how badly they needed a hospital.

The next day Schell sent her a note expressing his wish to meet her. When an anxious Ida met him that afternoon, Schell asked her if she was capable of running a clinic all by herself. To this, Ida merely asked him to check her credentials. Schell, who had already done that, handed her a cheque for $10,000 and asked her to name the hospital after Mary Taber Schell, his late wife.

Ida returned to Vellore in 1900, and within two years converted her father's house into the 40-bed Mary Taber Schell Hospital. It now houses the CMC's Eye Hospital.

Until her death in 1960, Ida spent her life for the women and children of Vellore and its surrounding areas. She helped whoever came to CMC seeking medical assistance. ■

The department, under Dr. Pratap Tharayan, also counsels AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) patients. It has been funded by the National AIDS Control Organisation, the AIDS Prevention and Control Project (APAC) based at the Voluntary Health Services Hospital, Chennai, and the Ford Foundation to train counsellors More than 1,000 people have been trained until now It also conducts programmes aimed at commercial sex workers, looks after the children whose parents have succumbed to AIDS, and networks with non-governmental organisations in the country.



CMC offers 90 recognised training programmes in medical, nursing and allied specialisations. It prefers to admit students who are willing to work in rural areas.

The department set up in 1978 the Nambikkai Nilayam (house of trust) to train mentally retarded children and their parents. This is also a residential training centre concentrating on behavioural therapy and coping mechanisms for children and is headed by Dr. Paul R. The centre accommodates up to 60 children and there is usually a waiting time of one year. The unit has also set up a self-help group of parents which works outside the hospital but with its active involvement

Other departments include the Department of Nuclear Medicine, Radiation Oncology, Gastroenterology, Endocrinology, Hepatology and Nephrology.

CHAD was set up as a pioneering hospital-based socio-economic programme. Known for its innovative approach, CHAD bagged the World Health Organisation's (WHO) "Best programme in South Asia" award in 1998 for providing primary and secondary health care to the rural poor.

The focus of CHAD's activities is the villages. CHAD has a base hospital at Bagayam with 80 beds. On an average 50,000 out-patients and 6,000 in-patients are treated there every year. The hospital has a high-risk obstetrics clinic, a nutrition rehabilitation centre, a leprosy care unit, an operation theatre, a laboratory, a pharmacy and a communication and monitoring department.

CHAD does yeoman service through its health teams operating in 68 villages of Kaniyambadi block, covering a population of 100,000. The programme has achieved 100 per cent immunisation in these villages: infant mortality, malnutrition and perinatal mortality have been brought down significantly

CHAD also offers technical support and advice in animal husbandry and agriculture. It runs 26 balwadis, or day-care centres for children under five, and has set up a Community Development Society (CODES) to help women take up income-generating activity. There are also centres such as SHARE (Self-help Association for Rural Education and Employment) which, after being under CODES for several years, are now on their own. SHARE has an annual turnover of Rs.35 lakhs.

The RUHSA programme covers 39 panchayats of the K.V. Kuppam block with a population of 120,000. It concentrates on improving social, economic and educational conditions, and has organised 118 women's self-help groups

CMC's research activity has become integral to its other services. For instance, in 1998, 29 projects were sponsored by the Department of Biotechnology of the Government of India, the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Wellcome Trust and the Community Based Rehabilitation Forum. Fluid research grants from CMC, amounting to Rs.15 lakhs, were sanctioned for 81 new projects; besides, such grants support 144 ongoing projects.

The treatment of over two crore out-patients and 12 lakh in-patients in the last 100 years has generated an enormous quantity of data, which are stored since 1989 in the Computerised Hospital Information Processing System (CHIPS). Now any information – from details about out-patients to laboratory test results and surgical procedures – is readily accessible. Records of in-patients are maintained for 25 years and those of out-patients for five years.

CMC has undertaken a number of epidemiological research projects. It has conducted studies on the patterns of Hepatitis C, HIV and AIDS, gastrointestinal and diarrhoeal disorders, rehabilitation methods, leukaemia and metabolic disorders, and on bone marrow transplants.

An important part of the curriculum of the medical college is community medicine, which entails staying in a village for several weeks each year. After graduation, those students who have gained admission on the basis of sponsorship by chruches, serve for at least two years in hospitals run by the sponsor.

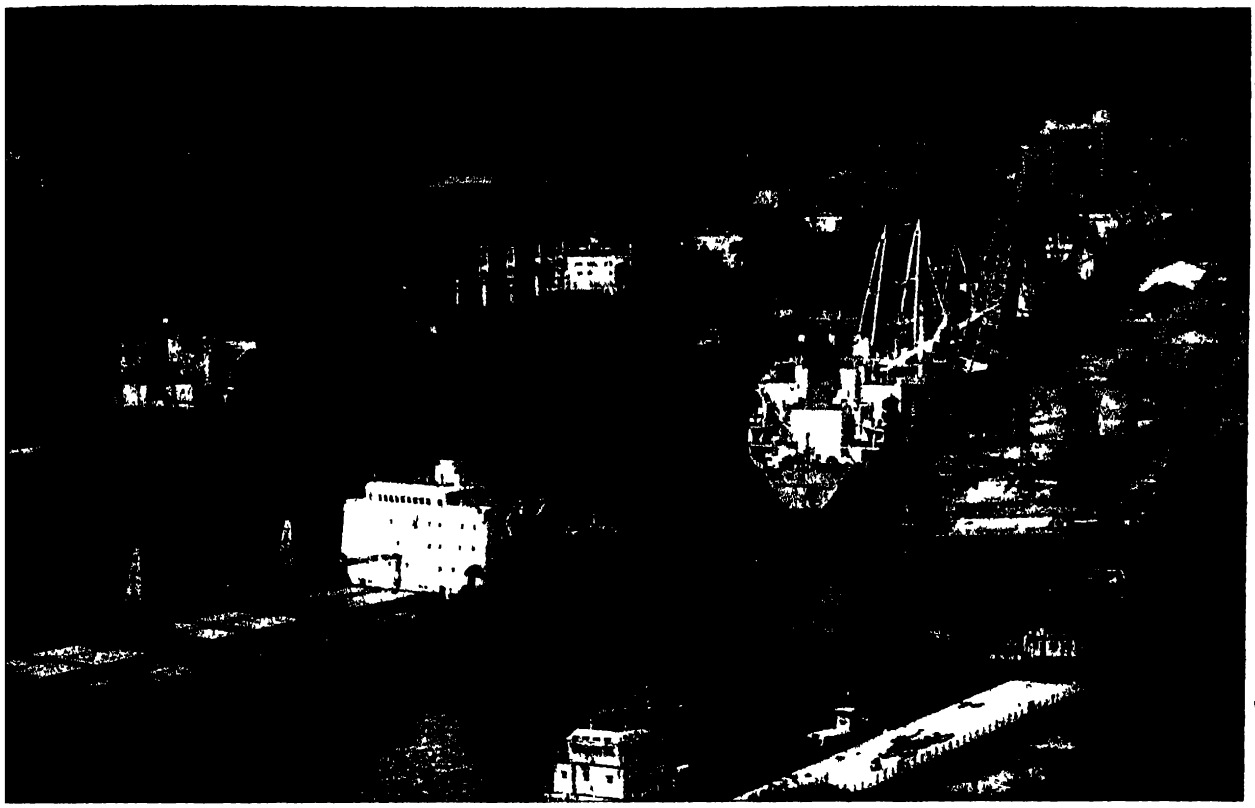
The college, which has an impressive infrastructure, admits 60 students, at least 25 of them women, at the undergraduate level. Churches sponsor 45 students. Preference is given to students who are willing to return to the rural areas, poor students (who comprise 15 of the sponsored ones), and students belonging to the backward classes. The students are required to serve in India at least for four years.

Dr. George Mathew, vice-principal of the college, said: "The fees at CMC is the lowest in the country. We charge Rs.3,000 for a year for the undergraduation course. Scholarships are available for students who cannot afford the fee. The hospital subsidises the college activity."

The college offers 24 post-graduate courses (90 students are admitted every year), 12 superspecialities, and a large number of para-medical training courses such as laboratory technician and nursing coruses.

Dr. George Mathew said that most of the students joined the hospital after completing their graduation. Even students who went elsewhere for advanced training courses returned to CMC.

Ida Scudder died in 1960 at the age of 90, but the spirit with which she set up CMC is not dead. It will continue to serve the community just as well in the new millennium. ■



P V SIVAKUMAR

At the Visakhapatnam Port Trust, emerging as a major trans-shipment and distribution centre.

A preferred destination

Visakhapatnam district emerges as an industrial hub, promising efficient and easy trans-shipment and distribution facilities among other advantages.

B. PRABHAKARA SARMA
in Visakhapatnam

VISAKHAPATNAM for long has been recognised as a preferred city for potential industrial development in Andhra Pradesh. Today more and more private and public sector industries are looking forward to new policy measures from the N. Chandrababu Naidu Government that would help them find their moorings in the port city and its promising hinterland.

The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), has been doing well in many respects but has been in the red owing to the interest burden on loans taken during the project implementation stage. A bail-out package worked out for the VSP now looks certain to be cleared by the Centre. This one-time package will set off losses to the tune of nearly Rs.3,100 crores against the capital base. The waiver may enable the plant to start on a clean slate, avoiding an intervention by the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR).

A capital restructuring plan has been approved for the public sector Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL), the premier ship-building company, which, true to the international trend, is short of orders. HSL is as yet unable to overcome its financial difficulties; the company, which has built 111 vessels since 1948, now relies on ship repair works for its sustenance. The capital restructuring proposal includes writing off government loans, interest and guarantee fee adding up to Rs.470.93 crores, and conversion to equity of government loans of Rs.120.20 crores. The impact of the capital restructuring process would be reflected in the company's books only after HSL receives approval for the exemption of the minimum alternative tax (MAT), Rear Admiral R.N. Bhatia, HSL Chairman, said. The company has been asked to pay Rs.36 crores under MAT.

The industrial growth of Visakhapatnam is reflected in the presence of major public sector undertakings such as the VSP, HSL, Bharat Heavy Plate and Vessels, the Dredging Corporation of India, the zinc-lead smelter of Hindustan Zinc Limited and the Visakh Refinery of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (VPCL). In the private sector the Essar Pelletisation Plant and Coramandel Fertilisers Ltd, are leaders in their respective fields.

The State Government is keen to develop infrastructure, particularly in the port sector. The natural harbour of Visakhapatnam meets the import and export needs of the major players in and around the north coastal Andhra region. The Kakinada port has been handed over

Zinc is everywhere

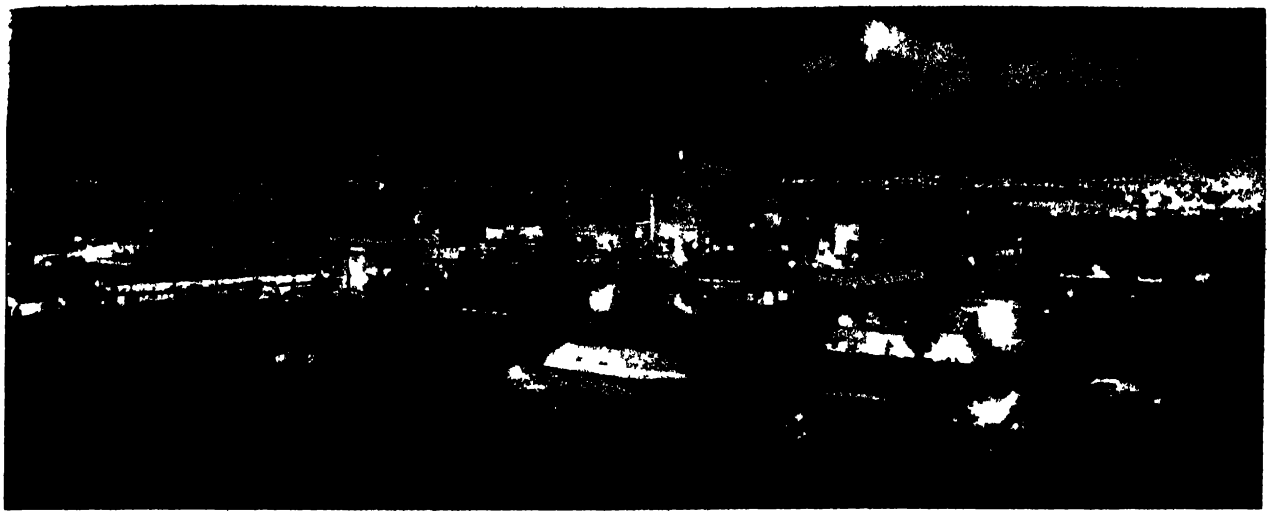


Be it Culture or Agriculture, zinc has a role to play. The strings of musical instruments which produce sound when vibrated, the sound of the anklet, make-up material used by the dancers, all remind us of zinc. The fertilizers with zinc content, help the farmers for higher yield of foods to feed the world. Zinc is also essential for human body, for galvanizing steel, die-castings, alloys, paints & pigments, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals.....

HINDUSTAN ZINC LIMITED

SOMEWHERE, ALWAYS

IMPACT/HZL/89



BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The zinc-lead smelter of Hindustan Zinc Limited. The company has embarked on an ambitious modernisation and expansion plan.

to Cocanada Port Company Private Limited (CPC), a member-company of the International Sea Ports Private Limited

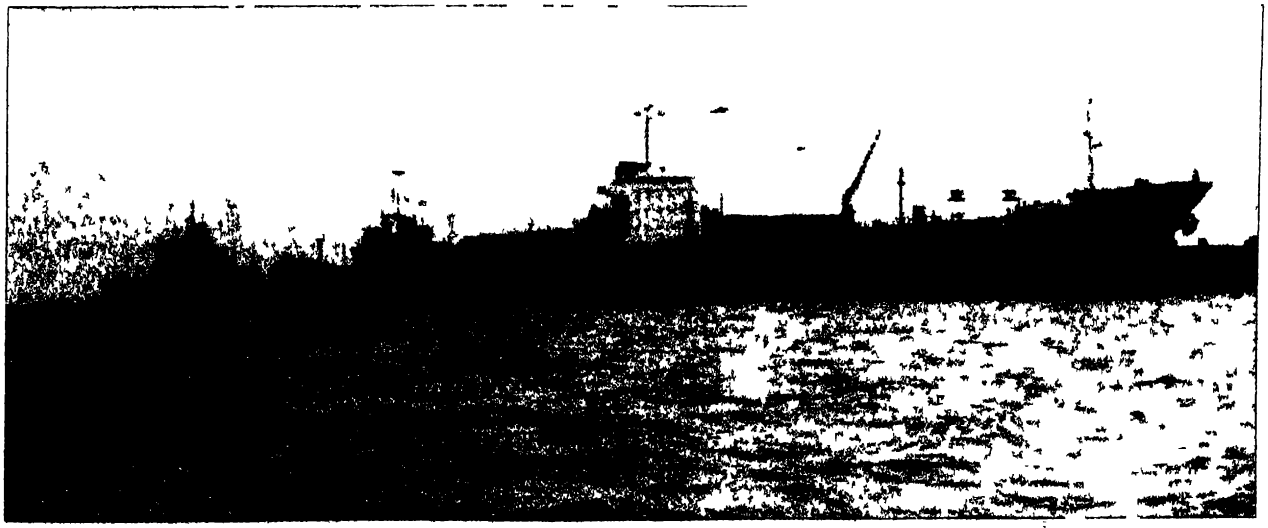
According to Brian L Black, chief executive, in addition to the existing berths, CPC will in the next two decades, develop three berths The Kakinada Deep Water Port (KDWP) has a 120-acre back up area He said that the port has vast potential to handle a variety of cargo This is an advantageous factor for the Godavari region, which is developing industrially The total area of the three-berth deep water port is 2,698 acres, of which 943 acres is the water spread About the immediate plans of the port, he said that dredging operations to a depth of 12 metres are being undertaken The first coal-laden ship is expected to berth in January 2000 after the operations are completed

With the Visakhapatnam-Kakinada industrial corridor taking shape, the port, with the natural advantage of its location on the Coromandel coast, is bound to attract more cargo Five international firms have bid for using this port for container operations On an average 300 containers can be handled here every month

Leaf tobacco, ceramic tiles and seafood are the main export commodities, while coal, liquid ammonia, naphtha and waste paper are the items of import that are expected to be handled on a large scale by the port Barytes from the mines of Khammam district will be a new export commodity the port will handle in the coming months This cargo is at present routed through Visakhapatnam or Chennai ports after transportation by rail Brian L Black said that "the emergence of a deep-water port offers a cost-effective method of reducing the land transit distance "

A further boost to the port sector would be the starting of a port at Gangavaram, in the backyard, so to say, of the steel plant This is expected to be financed by the State and Central governments

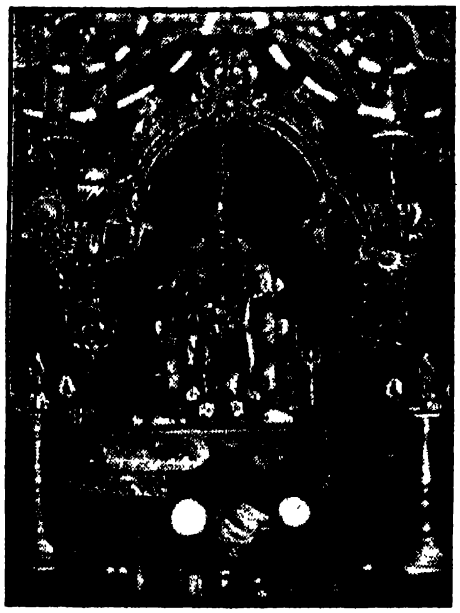
The Visakhapatnam Port Trust (VPT) topped the major ports in the country in cargo handling, earning the distinction of the trade s preferred port" While the privatisation of the proposed four multi-purpose berths has been delayed the expansion programme is progressing briskly on other fronts with three new berths scheduled to be commissioned next year According to S R Rao, VPT chairman, the first multi-purpose berth will be commissioned in March The new berth is likely to be converted into a full-



At the deep water port of Kakinada, under new management, bound to attract more cargo in the coming phase.

SRI VEERA VENKATA SATYANARAYANA SWAMY DEVASTHANAM

ANNAVARAM, EAST GODAVARI DT. ANDHRA PRADESH.



Sri Veera Venkata Satyanarayana Swamy Devasthanam is a very famous shrine located on the hill RATNAGIRI on the banks of river Pampa, Annavaram village East Godavri Dist. Andhra Pradesh. Devasthanam offers the following Saswatha Pujas & Sevas to the Devotees.

1. **SASWATHA KAINKARYAMS**

a. **Saswatha Annadanam Scheme** : Annadanam would be provided to 15 persons on any selected date of the year by the devotee for Rs.1000/-.

b. **Saswatha Free Prasadam Scheme** : Free prasadam would be distributed at the temple on any selected day of the year by the devotee (for Rs.1116.00 - 3 kg prasadam).

c. **Saswatha Kalyanam** on any selected day of the year by the devotee for Rs.10,000/- or Rs.5,000/-.

d. **Swamy Vari Visistta Vratham** on any selected day Rs.1,116/-.

e. **Swamy Vari Spl Saswatha Vratham** on any selected day of the year by the devotee Rs.700/-.

f. **Swamy Vari Saswatha Vratham** on any selected day of the year by the devotee Rs.500/-.

g. **Swamy Vari Saswatha Puja** on any selected day of the year by the devotee Rs.250/-.

h. **Saswatha Nitya Sahasra Namarchana** for Rs.25,000/-.

SEVAS

Silver Palinde Seva for Rs.750/- (every monday).

Silver Chariot (ratham) for Rs.1,116/- (on ekadasi & poornima day)

Advance reservation for above sevas accepted. Mail your remittance by DD on any nationalised bank with the Name, Gothram, Date of performance to the under signed.

COTTAGE DONATION SCHEME :

Philanthropic devotee donors are invited for donations under this scheme. Site for construction of independent cottages and rooms in choultries available. The donors will be alloted accommodation immediately for 45 days in a calender year.

1. Centenary Cottage	-	Rs. 1,00,000/-.	2. Satya Niketan Choultry	-	Rs. 55,000/-.
3. Satya Deva Guest House	-	Rs. 46,200/-.	4.Sri Sitarama Choultry	-	Rs. 21,500/-.

NITYA ANNADANAM SCHEME

Contribution for Saswatha Annadanam Pathakam are solicited from devotees.

This scheme started from 1-1-89 and till now pooled an amount of Rs.3.50 crores. The interest from the same is used for providing Annadanam to 2500 needy devotees. To increase the Annadanam to the number of devotees to 5000, Devasthanam invites donations for this scheme.

The Devotees can contribute under the following categories.

★ **MAHARAJA POSHAKULU**	Rs. 1,00,00/- & above donations.
★ **RAJA POSHAKULU**	Rs. 50,000/- "
★ **POSHAKULU**	Rs. 10,000/- "
★ **DATHALU**	Rs. 2,000/- "
	Rs. 1,000/- "

For a contribution of Rs.1,000/- Annadanam would be provided to 15 persns on any selected day of the year by the devotee.

By contributing Rs. 25,000/- Annadanam would be provided every day to one person.

Contributions by the devotees are eligible for INCOME-TAX REBATE UNDER SECTION 80(G).

Donations may be sent by demand draft in the name of Executive Officer, Sree Veera Venkata Satyanarayana Swamy Devastanam, Annavaram on any Nationalised Bank.



I.V. RAM KUMAR
Heriditary Trustee &
Chairman

N. SOMASEKHAR
B.Com., B.L.
Executive Officer,
Regional Jt. Commissioner



fledged container terminal with the installation of container handling equipment and container quay cranes with private participation.

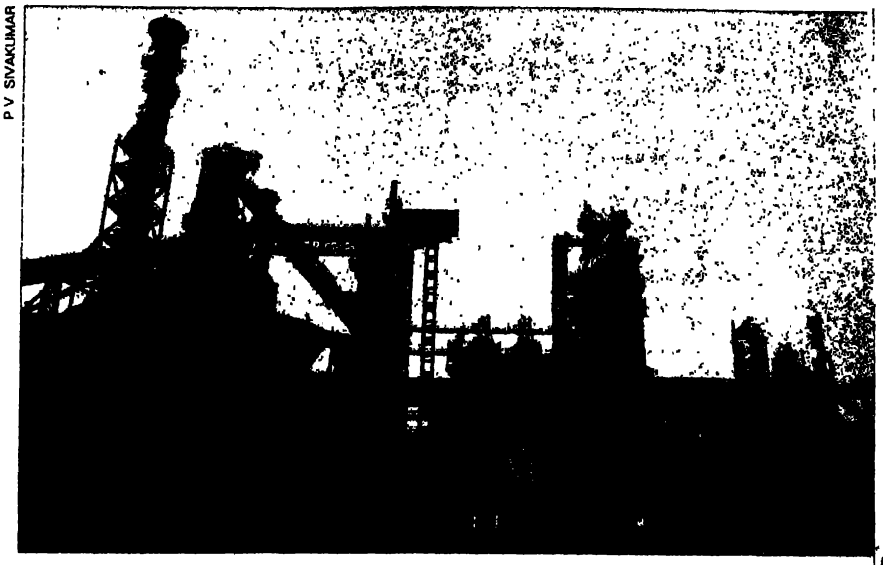
The liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) jetty, complete with modern fire-fighting equipment, in the outer harbour will be ready by the end of March. This is expected to give a boost to LPG traffic through the port, particularly with the Visakh Refinery going ahead with its expansion programme. The VPT lags only in the construction of the four multi-purpose berths – two of them under a build, operate and transfer (BOT) scheme and two as captive berths for private users – in the inner harbour. The authorities are now considering taking up the construction of these berths in order to step up business.

In fact, Visakhapatnam is fast emerging as a nodal importation point for the distribution of LPG in south India. Besides the VPT's LPG berth, the city has the first and only private storage facility on the eastern coast in East India Petroleum Limited (EIPL). Another major development is the setting up of India's first underground LPG storage facility. The $50-million LPG cavern, located 145 metres underground, is coming up as a joint venture of HPCL and TotalFina of France. The company was registered in November as South Asia LPG (SALPG). This 60,000 tonne-capacity project is expected to be completed by 2003.

SALPG is discussing with Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) the distribution of LPG through pipelines.

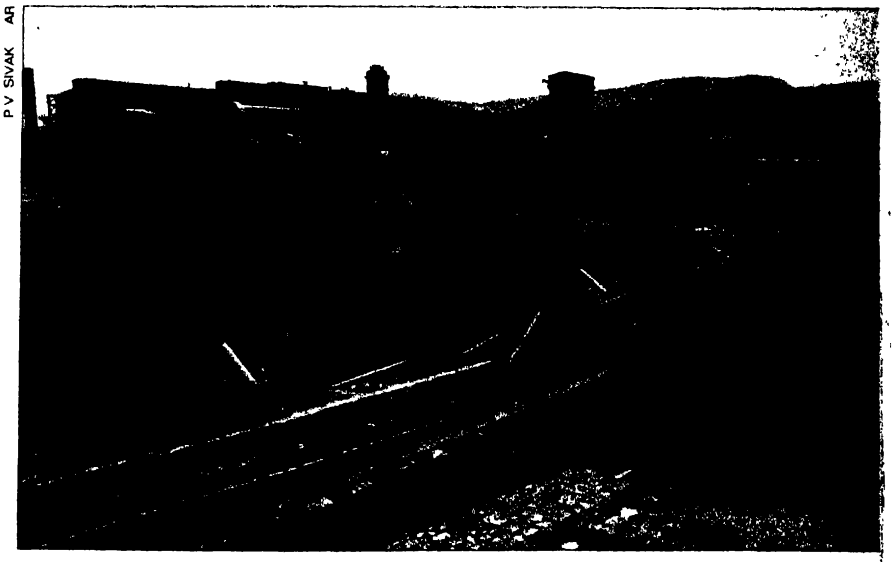
The port has also been billed as a promising trans-shipment and distribution centre for fertilizer thanks to the high level of productivity that has induced ship owners to offer concessional freight rates of two or three dollars per tonne when fertilizer ships are nominated to this port.

P V SIVAKUMAR



At the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

P V SIVAK AR



At the Essar Pelletisation Plant, conveyor belts transporting pellets.

POWER generation also is set to improve with two 1,000 MW units each of the Hinduja National Power Corporation of the United Kingdom and the National Thermal Power Corporation's (NTPC) Simhadri Plant getting ready in Visakhapatnam district. An added feature is that the latter is a fully dedicated plant, with 100 per cent of the power generated being supplied in Andhra Pradesh. A number of small power generation units are also coming up in the region. These will meet the requirements of units located in northern Andhra Pradesh.

Another area poised for further development is the mining sector. Andhra Pradesh has the second largest bauxite reserves in the country after Orissa. But it has recorded zero production. While Orissa accounts for 44 per cent of the total production of aluminium. Bihar has a 22 per cent share, while Gujarat and Maharashtra have 11 per cent each and Madhya Pradesh has 10 per cent. The rest of the production is shared by Tamil Nadu, Goa and Karnataka.

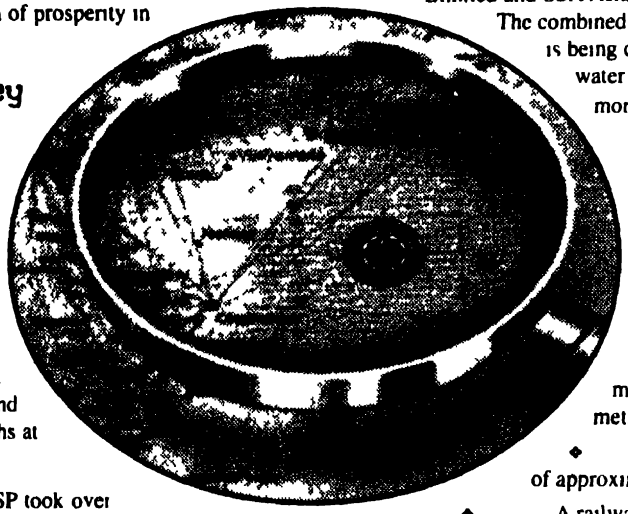
The bauxite reserves are located in Krishna Devi Peta near Narsipatnam in Visakhapatnam district along the Eastern Ghats, which link up with neighbouring Orissa. The bauxite reserves will contribute significantly towards the economic growth of the region, particularly in the area of production of aluminium and certain salts of aluminium. It would aid the growth of other industries such as those involved in refractory bricks, ferric and non-ferric alum, abrasives, high alumina cements, refining of kerosene, paraffin wax and sugar.

One company that has posted all-round growth is Hindustan Zinc Limited. HZL has embarked on an ambitious programme for further growth through expansion, modernisation and greenfield projects with an investment of Rs.2,500 crores in the next five years. The company's performance so far during 1999-2000 indicates yet another "satisfy-

DESTINATION..... KAKINADA

Kakinada Deep Water Port (KDWP) The Rising Force in Eastern India

The fertile and industrial coastline of Andhra Pradesh, now holds the key to a more prosperous and productive future Kakinada, which until now was known only for its lighterage operations, will now rise from the eastern waters to become one of India's foremost Deep Water Ports With state-of-the-art handling systems that are being implemented, Kakinada Deep Water Port is all set to usher in a new era of prosperity in the Coromandel coast



Privatisation - The Key to Prosperity

On the 19th of March, 1999, the Government of Andhra Pradesh opened the doors to privatisation at Kakinada And Cocanada Port Co Pvt Limited, a special purpose company of International Seaports Pte Limited Singapore, was assigned the tremendous task of operating, maintaining, sharing and transferring the existing three berths at Kakinada Port

And since the 1st of April, after ISP took over the deep water port operations, the Kakinada Port has attracted more ships than ever before, handling as many as 23 ships within 30 days

Being a privately operated port Kakinada offers a unique package of specialised services and provides individual attention to all its clients

The private management also ensures faster loading and unloading time And the port now functions with enhanced vitality

International Seaports Pte. Limited The Global Giant

International Seaports Pte Limited is a joint venture between Larsen and Tourbo Limited Precious Shipping Public Co Limited and SSA Asia Inc (A Washington Corporation) The combined expertise of these three companies is being channelised to ensure that the deep water port at Kakinada will be the most mordern port in the country

Key Features of the Deep Water Port

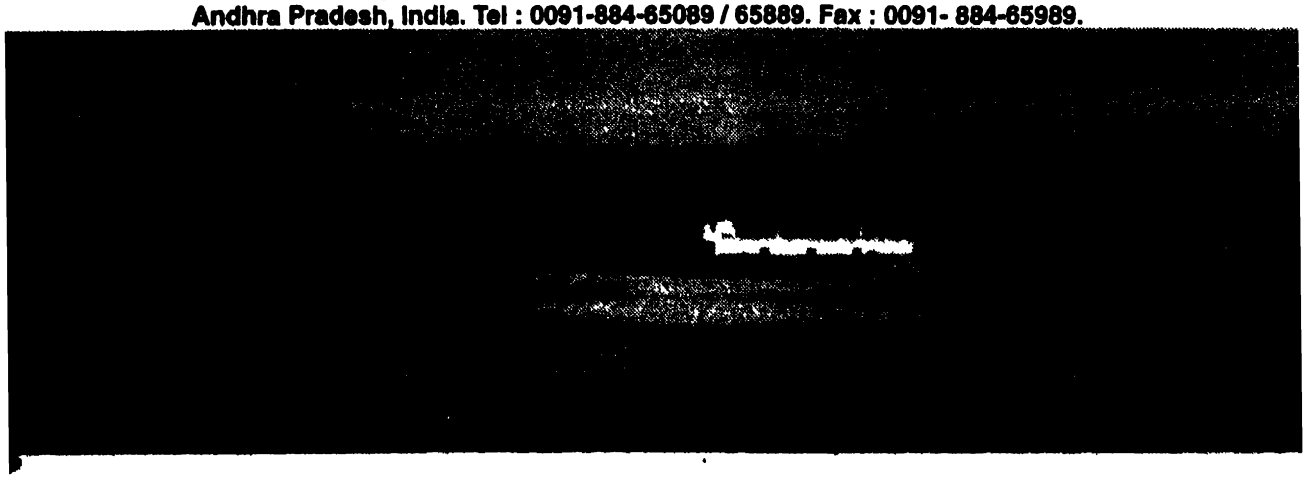
- 610 metres of berth length with a wharf 25 metres wide
- A channel which can allow ships with a draft of 9 5 metres is being deepened to 12 metres
- Partially developed back up area of approximately 120 acres behind the berth
- A railway line, just 3 kms away
- A covered warehouse on the wharf measuring 130 metres x 40 metres
- Piping infrastructure on the wharf to evacuate both edible oils and liquid petro products
- The best security any port can offer

CPC

Cocanada Port Company Pvt. Limited

(A member company of International Seaports Pte Ltd Singapore)

2nd Floor, South Wing, Port Administration Building, Beach Road, Kakinada - 538 007.
Andhra Pradesh, India. Tel : 0091-884-65089 / 65889. Fax : 0091- 884-65989.



For the tourist, and the pilgrim

G. NARASIMHA RAO
in Visakhapatnam

In Andhra Pradesh, comprising Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and East Godavari districts, enjoys a special place in the history of the State. The region, bounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, has played a crucial role in the socio-political development of the State right from the pre-Independence days. Reformers and writers from here helped transform society and also change the course of Telugu literature.

In Rajahmundry in East Godavari district, Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu defied existing social norms and was ostracised for propagating social reforms. He continued to fight for the uplift of women through his social organisation, Hitakarini Samaj. Bulusu Sambamurthy gave up a lucrative legal practice in Kakinada in East Godavari district, as also his wealth, to join the freedom movement at the call of Mahatma Gandhi. He led an austere life and died a simple man although he was one of the top Congress leaders of the time.

VISAKHAPATNAM owes its current enviable position with regard to industrial activity to Tenneti Viswanatham, one whose moral stature and integrity could be matched only by Andhra Kesari Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu. Tenneti dedicated himself to the freedom movement, and later played a role in the development of free India. The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant can be said to owe its existence to Tenneti, whose slogan *Visakha ukku, Andhrula hakku* (Visakha steel is Andhra's right) did not go unheeded.

Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram witnessed the evolution of radical philosophies that contributed to the enrichment of Telugu literature. Two prominent [illegible] literary luminaries, Sri Sri and Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastry (Ravi Sastry), gave a new direction to Telugu writing. [illegible] of Vizianagaram questioned the orthodox views in his *Kanyasulkam* (Price of the Bride), a hard-hitting satire on the practices of child marriage and suppression of women. Puripanda Appala Swamy and Chaganti Somayajulu (Chaso) of Vizianagaram reflected in their writings the sufferings of the underprivileged. They espoused the cause the poor.

Another author, Kalipatnam Rama Rao (Kara), who lived in Visakhapatnam for many years, has since moved to Srikakulam, where he runs an organisation whose objective is to preserve literary masterpieces and improve Telugu language and literature.

NORTH coastal Andhra was witness to several milestones in the freedom struggle. But the Manyam Pituri (rebellion in the agency area) slogan raised by Alluri Sitarama Raju in the Visakha tribal belt, is considered by the Telugu people to be a landmark. Disgusted by the harassment and exploitation faced by the tribal people at the hands of the British, Sitarama Raju gathered the tribal people and launched an armed struggle against the English. Ultimately Sitarama Raju was captured and executed, but his life inspired many a Telugu.

The region is dotted with several samasthanams and zamindaris, which continue to command respect. Descendants of the Vizianagaram royal family, particularly the late P.V.G. Raju, the last coronated king in India, still contribute to the development of education in their areas.

Yet, it was in this region that an armed extremist uprising took shape after the formation of the Andhra Pradesh State. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Srikakulam witnessed naxaline struggles against exploitation. The movement spread to Visakhapatnam district. (Vizianagaram was then part of Visakhapatnam district.) The government put down the naxalite movement with an iron hand and followed it up with socio-economic reforms. The extremism is now concentrated in the Visakhapatnam region and along the tribal belts of north coastal Andhra.

The region abounds in pilgrim centres and places of tourist interest. The shrines of Srikakulam, Simhachalam, Annavaram and Draksharama draw thousands of devotees every day.

The Veera Venkata Satyanarayana Swamy temple atop Ratnagiri hill on the banks of the Pampa in Annavaram (East Godavari) is unique in that the shrines of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara are ensconced in a three-tier structure here. The worship of Satyanarayana Swami, which is common in Andhra households, in Annavaram is considered auspicious.

Annavaram is situated along the Chennai-Calcutta National Highway 5 and the trunk railway line, making it accessible by road and rail.

Srikakulam district, with a 193-km coastline and a vibrant rural landscape, offers a variety of options for tourists. A rare sun temple is located at Arasavilli, 15 km from Srikakulam town. At the Kurmanatha temple, 10 km from town, Vishnu is worshiped in the form of the tortoise. It is the only temple dedicated to this, one of the 10 incarnations of Vishnu.

Salihundam on the banks of the Vamsadhara is a Buddhist site. Situated 18 km from Srikakulam, it offers a breathtaking view of the river's mouth at the Bay of Bengal. The place is said to have flourished as a Buddhist centre after the Kalinga war.

The tribal belt of Srikakulam district and the Sitampeta area offer a glimpse into the lifestyles of Girijans.

Although the region has immense tourism potential, this is one sector that is yet to be tapped fully by the State Government.

In order to popularise the tourist spots of Vishakapatnam, the district administration has been conducting a Visakha Utsav every year. According to J.S.V. Prasad, the Visakhapatnam District Collector, Visakha Utsav '99, which should have been conducted in December, has been shifted to February 2000 to make it the Visakha Millennium Utsav. Similar festivals are being held at Bheemunipatnam and Araku

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Places of tourist interest

Port town Visakhapatnam : Come, discover the history behind this bustling commercial Visakhapatnam City. Walk on miles and miles of golden sands.



Simhachalam : Drop by at Simhachalam's famous 11th Century Temple dedicated to Lord Narasimha (Chandanayatra Festival (Mar - April).

Borra Caves : Step into the fascinating Borra Caves-about 90 kms from Visakhapatnam- A million years old, these caves have magnificient stalacitite and stalagmite formations. Truly worth seeing.



Buddhist Heritage Sites Sankaram, 41 Kms from Visakhapatnam
Bavikonda : 16 Kms from Visakhapatnam
Thotlakonda: Close by Bavikonda

Excursions : Simhachalam, Bheemunipatnam, Sankaram, Bavikonda, Thotla Konda, Kondakarla Bird Sanctuary, Araku valley, Borra Caves



For Further Information, Contact
Tourist Information Officer
Regional Tourist Information & Research Dept
Dr. Lankapalli Bulli Raju Complex, Siripuram, P.O.
Visakhapatnam - 4



Dolphin's Nose : Traipse down to the southern part of Visakhapatnam. You'll be suprised to see the rock looks like a dolphin!
Kailasagiri : 30 Acres of sprawling majestic Hill top garden over looking the bay.

Araku Valley : Move on to the sights and sounds of the lush green Araku Valley. Journey upto this picturesque valley at an altitude of 3100 feet on the Eastern Ghats in a train.



Bheemunipatnam : Drive along one of the longest beach roads in India from Visakhapatnam to Bheemunipatnam. A good 24 kms away. Go back to the 17th century. Discover the remains of a Dutch settlement, ruined fort, armoury and the oldest Dutch cemetery.

ANNUAL TOURISM EVENT

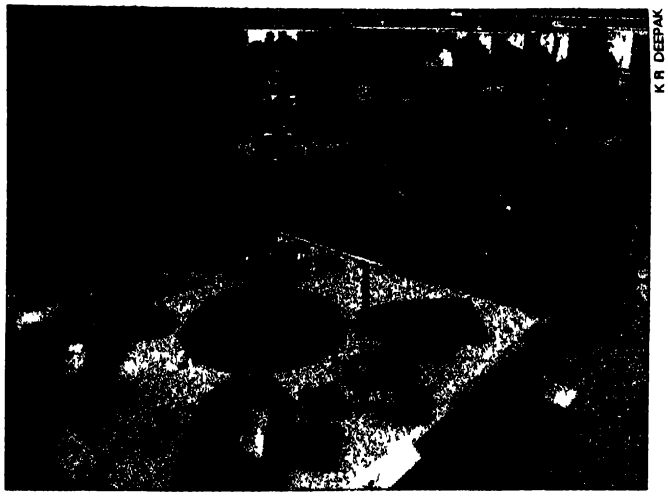
Visakha Utsav

A three day festival every year brings to life the arts, crafts culture & cuisine of Visakhapatnam.
February 18th to 20th, 2000

ing year" with the financial results for the first seven months indicating a net profit of Rs.113 crores and a sales turnover of Rs.826 crores. The company is also diversifying into the fertilizer sector by tapping sulphuric acid from the greenfield zinc smelter, for a 850 tonnes-a-day di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) plant in Rajasthan. HZL's plans for the next five years entail the expansion of the existing zinc metal production capacity by 20,000 tonnes.

Bharat Heavy Plate and Vessels and the Essar Pelletisation plant are moving ahead. LG Polymers Ltd., the erstwhile Hindustan Polymers which has been taken over by the LG Group of South Korea, has recorded a turnaround.

The mini-cement plants, which were operating basically as grinding mills, largely appear to be winding up. They have been unable to penetrate the market as bigger players are providing quality products at competitive rates.



K R DEEPAK

Inside a diamond processing unit in the Visakhapatnam Export Processing Zone.

The Visakhapatnam Export Processing Zone (VEPZ) has opened a new corridor with well-developed plots and standard design factories on renewable long-term lease at low rates. VEPZ provides adequate water and power supply, telecommunication facilities with high-speed data communications to the units situated in the zone. According to K. Ratna Prabha, Development Commissioner, the Government has given several incentives and concessions for setting up 100 per cent export-oriented units in the zone. These include a five-year tax holiday, duty-free import of capital goods and exemption from excise and other levies.

The small scale industries (SSIs), despite enjoying excise and sales tax exemption, have largely failed to remain healthy. They had been complaining that they faced stiff competition from units in other States in the face of high rates of sales tax in Andhra Pradesh. With the introduction of a uniform sales tax structure throughout the country, hopefully they will do better in the coming years.

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For more Information Contact : The Development Commissioner

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Ministry of commerce, Government of India

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A tragedy without end

The 15th anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy marks another painful reminder of the survivors' struggle against an administration insensitive to their travails.

V.VENKATESAN
in Bhopal

ALONE watchman guards the entrance to the site of the abandoned pesticide factory of Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), the Indian subsidiary of the multinational, Union Carbide Corporation. Overhanging creepers and accumulated rust on the machinery have not erased memories of the disaster that struck Bhopal on the night of December 2 and 3, 1984. And angry graffiti scrawled years ago on the walls add to the poignancy of these memories.

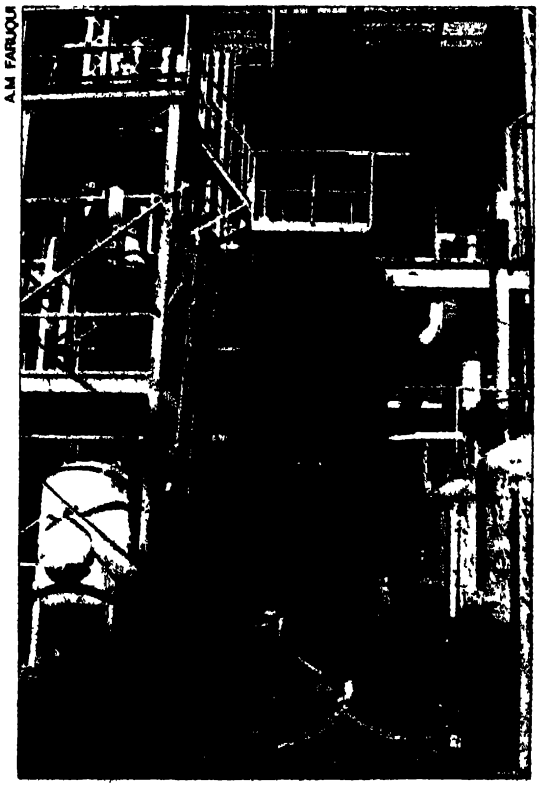
On that night, routine maintenance operations in the methyl isocyanate (MIC) plant went haywire and a large volume of water entered a storage tank containing 60 tonnes of the toxic gas. This triggered a runaway reaction, rapidly increasing the temperature and pressure inside the tank and resulting in the release of a lethal cocktail of MIC, hydrogen cyanide, monoethylamine and other chemicals into the night. A northerly wind carried close to 40 tonnes of chemical fumes across 40 sq km, like a shroud over the city of about one million people.

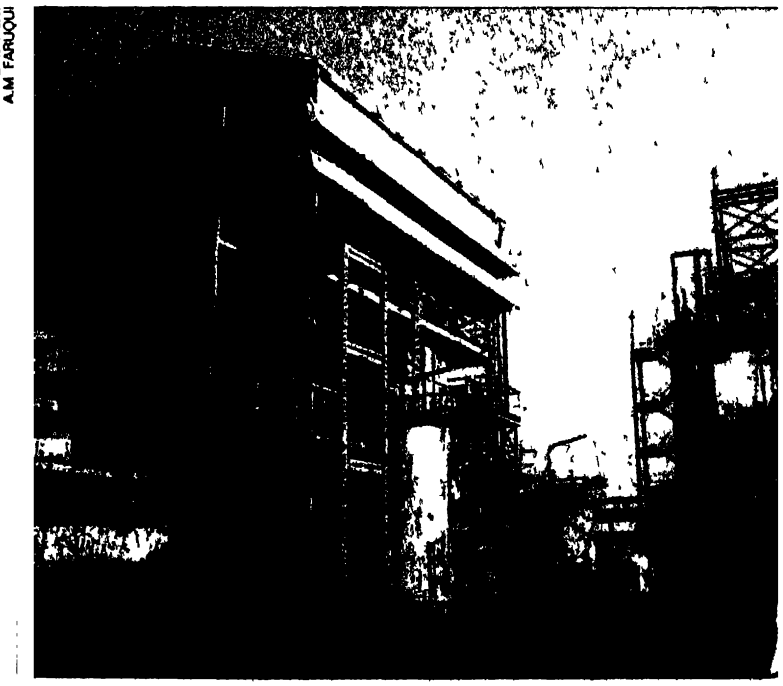
According to official figures, the disaster claimed 3,000 lives immediately and left thousands physically debilitated. Livestock lay dead, injured or infected. Unofficial reports, however, put the immediate toll at 8,000 and claimed that more than 16,000 persons died in subsequent years. It was estimated that more than 500,000 suffered injuries in the aftermath of the gas tragedy. Exposure-related complications reportedly claim 10 to 15 lives every month. The official agency for recording disaster-related mortality stopped its work in December 1992.

The gas impaired eye and lung tissues and the nervous system. Survivors silently suffer acute medical complications, which have been aggravated by the city's inadequate and inefficient health services. Breathlessness, diminished vision, loss of appetite, pain, recurrent fever, persistent cough, neurological disorders, fatigue, weakness, anxiety and depression are common symptoms among the survivors. An activist working among the victims aptly summed up the plight of the survivors as the "second Bhopal tragedy".

THE Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) conducted 25 research studies in Bhopal between 1985 and 1994, but several of them were terminated prematurely. The ICMR is yet to release its reports, but it has apparently conveyed its preliminary findings to the Central and State governments.

Sambhavna Trust, a non-governmental organisation, claimed that the ICMR established that the toxins from the UCIL factory entered the bloodstream of the people who were exposed and damaged their lungs, brain, kidneys, muscles and gastro-intestinal, reproduc-


A.M. FARUQUI


A.M. FARUQUI

The abandoned pesticide factory of Union Carbide India Limited in Bhopal. (Left) The damaged tank from which the toxic fumes of methyl isocyanate leaked in December 1984.

tive, immunological and other systems. The damage to the respiratory system, particularly lungs, was most acute.

State Government officials dispute the trust's claim that there has been a rise in the incidence of tuberculosis, cancers and infertility among the population exposed to the gas. Officials criticised a bid by the trust to raise funds by publicising (through a women's magazine) the alleged rise in the cases of irregular menstrual cycles among affected women.

D.S. Misra, Secretary, Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief Department (BGTRD), told *Frontline* that studies revealed that the general fertility rate was higher among the exposed population than among the non-exposed population. He claimed that the number of women in the childbearing age group with irregular menstrual cycles was 1.9 per cent in the exposed population and 1.54 per cent in the unexposed population. This degree of difference is normal, he argued. Scientific circles, he said, would consider as normal even instances of up to five per cent of the population suffering such problems.



PABLO BARTHOLOMEW/CORBIS

At the burial site of a gas-leak victim.

Activists, however, said that girls who had been exposed to the gas as infants had chaotic and painful menstrual cycles on attaining puberty. Several girls have three to four cycles in a month, and there are girls in their late teens who have not yet attained puberty, they said. According to organisations representing survivors, it is difficult to find marriage alliances for girls from the affected areas and many women, who had disorders of the reproductive system, were deserted by their husbands.

An epidemiological survey by an International Medical Commission (IMC) team, comprising 14 medical specialists from 11 countries, reported in January 1994 that the exposed population in Bhopal showed signs of affliction in multiple organs. Clinical examinations by the team showed significant levels of lung impairment, marked reduction in the control of limb movements, and reduced memory function. It is estimated that more than 120,000 children, women and men suffer a host of acute exposure-related medical complications.

The State Government, however, has apparently no record of the gas-leak victims or their diseases. It claims that it has been concentrating on the treatment of 7,500 chronically ill patients, 90 per cent of them with respiratory disorders. "We have computerised all these cases, and review their progress from time to time," Misra said. He said that about 1,200 patients were identified in the worst-affected wards of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, 13 and 20, where an official team has conducted a door-to-door survey. This survey, started in September, will be conducted every six months. The health of the patients identified will be monitored rigorously after clinical tests, he said. Asked why the government did not choose other wards – 36 out of 56 wards which were also declared affected, he said that the department wanted to start with the worst-affected wards.

PUBLIC health care expenditure in Bhopal is shared between the Central government, which provides 75 per cent of the finance, and the State Government. The latter implements health care services.

The State Government has primarily aimed to increase the number of hospitals, rather than ensure the delivery of appropriate medical care. As a result, many patients have chosen not to go to government hospitals where the treatment, though free, was insensitive and time-consuming. Instead they have opted for ill-equipped, expensive and sometimes less qualified private doctors. The number of private doctors in Bhopal has increased significantly. Doctors working in government hospitals that were established specifically for treating the gas-leak victims have not been restrained from setting up private practice.

The IMC confirmed in 1994 that therapies prescribed for ailing survivors were aimed at temporary symptomatic relief rather than any long-term amelioration of chronic diseases. The lack of information on the nature of MIC – owing to UCC's refusal to share information on the gas – is a problem for medical practitioners. There is no known antidote to MIC. Thus the State Government simply follows the ICMR's finding that treatment can only be symptomatic and that routine treatment methods should be followed.

Official records show that in the last six years about 4,000 patients visited government hospitals everyday. Yet there is no record of the treatment offered to these people and no information on its efficacy. Misra says that if patients have lost faith in government hospitals, the frequency of their visits would have declined too. Critics, however, turn this argument around – the fact that patients make frequent visits to government hospitals shows that the treatment they provide is ineffective and time-consuming.

The State Government has not fully met its financial obligations with regard to medical care, apparently owing to a



A.M. FARUQUI

A memorial for the victims in front of what was once the UCIL factory.

financial crunch A common complaint against government hospitals and clinics is that equipment are non-functional and medicines are out of stock The Pulmonary Medicine Centre (PMC), completed in 1994, provides specialised medical care to persons with respiratory disorders, but it is not adequately staffed For two-and-a-half years, the 30-bed PMC had apparently provided in-patient treatment to 1,061 gas-leak victims Against a requirement of 25 high-speciality doctors, activists say, the PMC has only 15, of which five are apparently on contractual employment Besides, the doctors with the required specialisation are few in number. Activists allege that some of the equipment in the PMC remain unused, perhaps because no one knows how to use them.

The Indira Gandhi Hospital for Women and Children was completed in 1994, but it started functioning only in August this year. Instead of the 150 beds planned, it has only 50. Work on a 540-bed Hospital (to be named after Kamla Nehru) began in 1987, but is yet to be completed. The expenditure incurred so far has been nearly three times the budgeted amount. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, which examined the operations of the BGTRD, pointed out gross financial irregularities in the construction of hospitals in Bhopal

The Kamla Nehru hospital is supposed to be a super-speciality referral hospital. The State Government sought Rs 27 crores from the Centre as a special grant to equip the hospital so that it could start functioning from mid-December this year Exclusively meant for the gas-leak victims, the hospital will be initially run by the BGTRD, though the executive control of the hospital may be eventually handed over to the Directorate of Medical Education (DME) Survivors fear that when the DME gains control of the hospital, it will become a general hospital without focussed treatment for gas-leak victims Official sources, however, affirm that the hospital would always cater to the gas-leak victims, irrespective of the nature of its management Activists have protested against the State Government jumping from one project to another, without completing any

Government hospitals meant for the gas-leak victims also cater to the general population also Organisations representing survivors insisted that the hospitals should be exclusively for the gas-leak victims and that other patients should go to the general hospitals This would ensure that the money being spent in these hospitals is used entirely for the treatment of gas-leak victims The government rejected the plea saying the all people living near the hospitals should also have access to treatment Official sources suggested that the government could consider asking such patients to pay for medicines

Bhopal has far too many hospitals today The ratio of hospital beds to population is probably higher in Bhopal than elsewhere in the country However, in the absence of focussed treatment for the gas-leak victims, based on information and research, hospitals do not offer effective care Without a system to record and exchange data among the government hospitals for the gas-leak victims, it is not possible to compare clinical and research data. The apparent lack of interest in advancing research in the area is attributed to the dependence of the Central and State governments on multinational companies.

Organisations representing the survivors have demanded creation of health records for all gas-leak victims in order to ensure that they get the best treatment in all hospitals and clinics. This will also save

V. VENKATESAN

THE battle to bring to book persons responsible for the Bhopal gas disaster carries on. On November 16, a petition seeking a jury trial was filed on behalf of the victims in a district court in New York. This move is a direct consequence of the failure of the Indian judicial system and government to bring the case to its logical conclusion.

Besides seeking appropriate compensation for themselves, organisations and individuals representing the survivors of the disaster have sought a decree from the U.S. court that the Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), a multinational company based in the U S., and its former Chairman Warren Anderson were fugitives from justice for deliberately evading the Bhopal district court's jurisdiction. They sought to invoke the jurisdiction of the same U S court that determined the question of "forum" in 1986, sending the Indian government's compensation suit for more than $3 billion back to the Indian courts on the condition that the UCC would submit to their jurisdiction.

The survivors held that UCC's conduct amounted to a violation of international criminal law, which prohibits widespread or systematic killings or other inhuman acts against a civilian population. They also accused the UCC of a policy of systematic racial discrimination, thus endangering their human rights.

There is substantial evidence to show that cost-cutting measures directed by UCC's headquarters at Danbury, Connecticut, led to the disaster at the Bhopal plant of UCC's Indian subsidiary, Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL). The measures approved and monitored by the company included the use of substandard construction material, retrenchment of workers and the survivors from irrational medication and improper medical consultation.

There has hardly been any systematic effort to document the social and economic impact of the disaster. Over 70 per cent of the exposed population are in the unorganised sector, earning subsistence wages as labourers or small-time traders.

About 50,000 of the affected people are estimated to be in need of alternative means of livelihood However, less than

Trials and tribulation

The disabling of vital safety systems. The refrigeration unit, essential to keep the toxic methyl isocyanate (MIC) at near-zero temperatures, was shut off to save about $50 a day. Senior company officials who were privy to a safety audit by U.S. experts, knew of 61 potentially hazardous incidents, 30 of them major and 11 categorised as "dangerous" in the phosgene/MIC units, at least two years prior to the disaster. Survivors have alleged that nothing was done to reduce the hazards.

With the cooperation of factory workers, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) presented a strong case in the Bhopal district court, linking key managerial decisions to the disaster. In 1987, the CBI pressed charges against UCC, its Asian subsidiary, Union Carbide Eastern in Hong Kong, UCIL and nine officials, including Warren Anderson.

The 12 accused were charged with committing culpable homicide, acts leading to the poisoning of animals and other serious offences punishable by imprisonment (up to 10 years) and fines. In 1996, in response to an appeal by the accused Indian officials of UCIL, the Supreme Court passed an order diluting the charge of 'culpable homicide' to 'death caused by negligence', thereby reducing the maximum sentence from 10 years to two.

Trials of the accused (Indians) are going on at an exeruciatingly slow pace before the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM), Bhopal. It is rare for a hearing to take place every month. And since the proceedings began, UCC and its officials have repeatedly chosen to ignore judicial summons. Anderson was served summons through the Interpol, and when he repeatedly refused to obey them, the CJM proclaimed him an absconder. A non-bailable arrest warrant was issued against Anderson. The court also attached the shares of UCC and UCIL. However, the Central Government did little to seek the extradition of the accused (foreigners).

The Supreme Court first agreed to a settlement between UCC and the Government of India to cancel the criminal charges against the company in exchange for a $470-million compensation. In response to a revision petition filed by the National Front government in 1990, the Supreme Court upheld the compensation package, but revoked the criminal immunity it had approved earlier.

Hearing an appeal against the attachment of the UCIL's shares, the Supreme Court allowed the sale of the shares and use of the proceeds to build a super-speciality hospital for the victims. This was to be administered through a new trust, the Bhopal Hospital Trust, with its office in London. By putting its own nominee in charge of the trust, UCC virtually escaped all norms of accountability. The hospital, which has been dubbed a public relations exercise by the UCC management, is likely to start functioning early next year.

ON August 4, Dow Chemicals, a U.S. multinational, announced its plan to acquire UCC. Both companies have long been part of the U.S. military-industrial complex. Dow's role in manufacturing the defoliant Agent Orange, which caused brain damage and birth defects on a vast scale in Vietnam, is well documented. Survivors of the disaster have launched a campaign named "Dow shall assume liabilities". They sent a memorandum to the Chief Executive Officer of Dow Chemicals, William F. Stavropoulos, reminding him of the UCC's liabilities arising out of the Bhopal disaster and seeking Dow's plan to discharge pending liabilities.

ACCORDING to official records, more than one million injury claims and 22,149 death claims were registered. Officials say that less than 100,000 injury claims remain to be decided. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief Department is hopeful of disposing of the cases before March 2000. Over 6,000 deaths were judged to be exposure-related but the majority of the death claims were "converted" arbitrarily into injury claims. Among those who received compensation, more than 95 per cent got Rs. 25,000 for injuries; in the case of the death claims the compensation was often less than Rs.1 lakh. Only about 7,000 claimants received Rs. 1 lakh as compensation and about 200 claimants received more than Rs. 1 lakh. A sum of Rs. 10,000 is routinely deducted from the compensation amounts to account for the interim relief paid by the government. The compensation is hardly adequate to meet the medical bills of the patients. None of the claimants has been paid any interest on the compensation amount. And no compensation has been paid to those who suffered mental disorders owing to the gas exposure.

While the real victims were paid less than what they deserved, many people unaffected by the gas received Rs. 25,000, by virtue of being in the city on the day of the disaster. Widows among the gas victims received a monthly pension of Rs. 200 from the State Government. This pension was stopped when their claims were settled. Typically the widows had to share the amount with other family members. Abdul Jabbar, Convenor of the Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sanghatan, said that there were cases of widows having been abandoned by family members and reduced to penury. He suggested that widows be given life-long pension. ■

100 gas-leak victims have found regular employment under the government's schemes. In 1987, a special industrial area comprising 152 worksheds, constructed at a cost of Rs. 8 crores, was started to train and employ over 10,000 survivors. Of these, only 16 sheds are functional, though partialy and 52 have been converted into barracks for the Rapid Action Force, which moved in after communal riots in 1992.

There is no official record to show whether any of those who received industrial training have been employed anywhere. A programme that offered women survivors jobs as tailors ran successfully from 1986 to 1992, employing 2,300 women and making a yearly profit of Rs. 1 crore. This programme was terminated apparently because at one stage, unsold stocks of clothes worth Rs.66 lakhs had accumulated.

Organisations representing survivors have urged the State Government to set up a special industrial estate to provide employment to the survivors. They have also demanded reservation of jobs for the gas-leak victims in the railway coach factory in Bhopal. They have also demanded that pensions be provided to persons widowed and orphaned by the disaster and to those who are so disabled that they cannot earn a livelihood. ■

The earth watchers

Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior comes to India as part of a tour aimed at creating awareness about hazardous wastes.

LYLA BAVADAM
in Mumbai

When the Earth is sick and the animals and plants begin to die, then the Indians will regain their spirit and gather people of all nations, colour and creed to join together in the fight to save the planet and they will be known as the Warriors of the Rainbow.

– prophecy made by "Eyes of Fire", an old woman of the Cree tribe.

ON its maiden voyage to India, as part of the Toxic Free Future Tour of Asia, the 55-foot, three-mast ship Rainbow Warrior of Greenpeace docked at Mumbai's Ferry Wharf in the last week of November. The tour, which began in South America last year and passed through ports in the northern regions of Europe and the Mediterranean, is aimed at creating awareness about the trade in hazardous waste and the export of technology that creates hazardous waste. The Toxic Free Future Tour was planned to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the disaster in the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal.

A report prepared by scientists Ruth Stringer and Kevin Brigden of the Greenpeace Research Laboratories was released in Mumbai on November 29. Titled "The Bhopal Legacy", it states that the disaster goes beyond the gas leak. "The disaster is continuing," says Stringer. "The environment is being polluted even today." On analysing samples of soil, water and waste from the factory site, Stringer and Brigden found that there was "severe contamination with heavy metals and toxic organic chemicals". Some samples had 12 per cent mercury, which is 20,000 to six million times higher than in soil elsewhere. The researchers allege that sacks of chemicals still lie around inside the factory and that these are leaking into the soil and contaminating the groundwater. They say that the drinking water has a contamination level that is 1,000 times higher than is acceptable. The toxic substances affect the liver, kidneys, intestines and the nervous system. According to them, the technology to destroy these chemicals exists, and all that is needed is funds and the political will.

Bhopal is a microcosm of what toxic pollution by persistent organic pollutants (POPs) will make the world in the long term. Disseminating information about POPs will be central to Greenpeace's tour of Asia. Nityanand Jayaraman, Greenpeace's Asia coordinator, said: "There are no safe levels of exposure to POPs. So we call for a cessation of their production. The industry, however, wants a regulation of these products."

Peter Willcox, captain of Rainbow Warrior, spoke about how he first came across POPs. "I became aware of toxic pollution in 1973 when working on the Hudson river in New York. Environmentalists there were patting one another on the back because the river was being rid of the petroleum and sewage pollution that was so easy to see. Then we learnt about poly chlorinated biphenyls or PCBs, that had settled on the river bed."

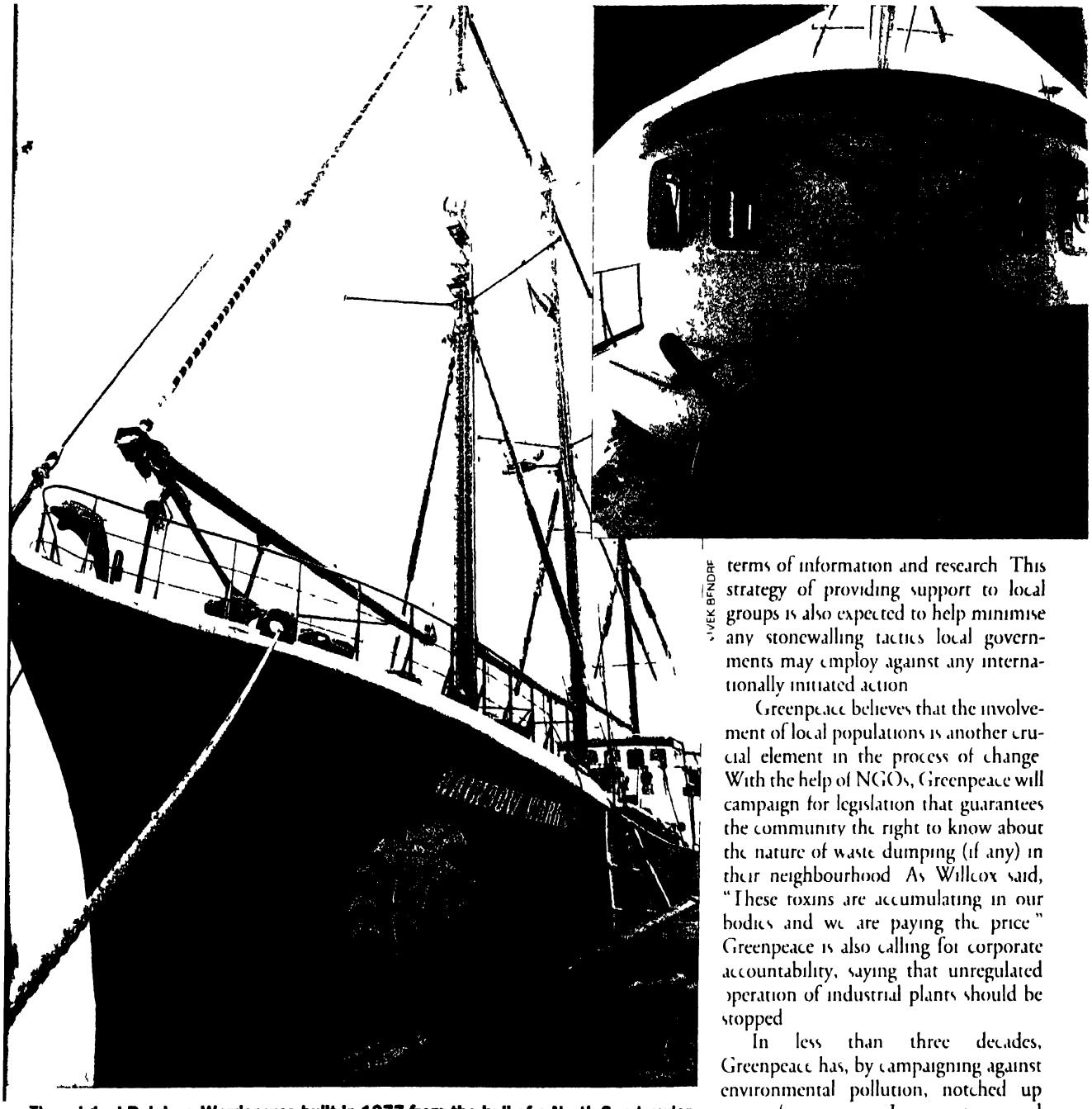
Greenpeace will continue with its basic strategy of campaigning against the abuse of the environment by lobbying with the relevant authorities and international conventions and promoting environmentally responsible technologies and products.

POPs, including PCBs, have a long life. They emit toxicity into the environment gradually by getting into all the life forms that come into contact with them. They survive in fatty deposits and float in the air, spreading toxicity. Since PCBs survive well in fatty deposits, their effect is severe on creatures at the apex of the food chain, such as human beings, whales and polar bears. "Today, polar bears have the highest concentration of PCBs," says Willcox.

Greenpeace is also targeting a group of chemical compounds called dioxins, which it treats as toxic pollutants. Dioxins are the byproducts of industrial processes such as PVC manufacture, pesticide production, incineration, bleaching of pulp and paper with chlorine, and smelting and recycling of metals. Like PCBs, dioxins too are transported across vast distances, even by air and ocean currents. Because of this, dioxins can be found in the tissues, blood and breast milk of humans in most countries.

Stricter environmental regulations in the industrialised countries have led to the transfer of old and obsolete technology to nations where regulations are weak or non-existent. The latter category of nations includes India. Quoting a 1989 government circular, Greenpeace states: "According to the Indian government, industries that engage in activities involving TCCD (the most toxic form of dioxin) have specific responsibilities such as assessment of major hazards, measures to prevent accidents and limit impairment of human health and environmental pollution, proper information for workers, emergency plans etc. Unfortunately, these requirements are not enforced and there are no known standards for controlling or reducing emissions of dioxin into air, land or water. Greenpeace knows of no certified laboratory in India equipped to analyse for the presence of dioxin."

With their tradition of peaceful and hands-on protests, Greenpeace activists have sailed into nuclear test zones, blocked toxic effluent pipes and manoeuvred themselves between whales and harpoons. While Greenpeace does not envisage such direct action immediately in the current context, the organisation will continue with its basic strategy of



VIVEK BENDRE

The original Rainbow Warrior was built in 1977 from the hull of a North Sea trawler. Its earliest campaigns included those aimed at protecting whales and seals, eliminating high-sea drift nets and opposing nuclear testing. In 1985, when the Rainbow Warrior was docked in Auckland, New Zealand, before sailing to the Pacific atoll of Mururoa for a peaceful protest against the nuclear tests being carried out by France in the atoll, French secret service agents attached limpet bombs to its hull. The ship sank, killing Greenpeace photographer Fernando Pereira. Greenpeace, however, was undeterred and bought another ship. A three-mast schooner was rebuilt on the hull of a fishing vessel called Grampian Fame. The present Rainbow Warrior, which was launched in 1989, is equipped with the latestelectronic navigation, sailing and communication equipment.

campaigning against the abuse of the environment by lobbying with the relevant authorities and international conventions, providing alternative choices and solutions in the form of studies and reports, and promoting environmentally responsible technologies and products

According to Willcox, in India Greenpeace "will network using NGOs (non-governmental organisations), offering them scientific information support." Local groups will be provided support in terms of information and research This strategy of providing support to local groups is also expected to help minimise any stonewalling tactics local governments may employ against any internationally initiated action

Greenpeace believes that the involvement of local populations is another crucial element in the process of change With the help of NGOs, Greenpeace will campaign for legislation that guarantees the community the right to know about the nature of waste dumping (if any) in their neighbourhood As Willcox said, "These toxins are accumulating in our bodies and we are paying the price" Greenpeace is also calling for corporate accountability, saying that unregulated operation of industrial plants should be stopped

In less than three decades, Greenpeace has, by campaigning against environmental pollution, notched up quite a few successes It was instrumental in bringing about a ban on dumping toxic waste into the sea and on the export of hazardous waste from industrialised to industrialising nations. In India, Greenpeace's efforts to ensure that Asia does not become a dumping ground for hazardous waste led to the 1997 Supreme Court order that banned the import of such substances

Summing up the danger posed by toxic pollutants, Willcox said "If I have learnt one thing about POPs in the last 26 years, it is that they represent a very serious threat to our health And the longer we wait, the higher the cost we will pay for producing them" ■

Prejudice as 'education'

The Sangh Parivar has intensified its efforts to promote communal hatred through its "intellectual violence" and by rewriting the standards of school curriculum revision.

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS



PRAFUL BIDWAI

IF Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi has his way, our children and grandchildren will grow up believing that "Hindu culture", as the Sangh Parivar defines it, is the sole influence that has shaped India since the Vedic times. This culture, they will learn, has remained unchanged since time immemorial. All other cultures, civilisational influences and traditions are extraneous, "impure", alien, not part of the Indian "heritage". They are at best only marginal to the values relevant to us. In this view, "Bharatiya culture" is mankind's highest achievement. It is at once all-encompassing, but also infinitely tolerant (never mind the contradiction between the hegemonic ambitions of being "all-encompassing", and respect for other views).

Among the other "truths" and "values" that textbooks will teach our schoolchildren:

★The Aryans were India's original inhabitants; they never displaced or colonised Dravidians or indigenous tribal people and forest-dwellers.

★ According to the Ramayana legend, Sri Lanka was an opulent "city". It had "excellent houses, decorated with wonderful... jewels, golden archways, pearls, diamonds, gems, silver, etc.." But it was not "cultured". In "refreshing contrast, Ayodhya was both civilised and cultured. People were learned, free from greed, truthful and with no proclivity towards stealing or petty-mindedness".

★There was no contradiction between Hinduism, on the one hand, and Buddhism or Jainism, on the other – despite rich evidence on the hounding and banishment of these faiths and their followers. Hinduism merely "absorbed" Buddhism.

★ Indians are "a race". More, they have "a mission" as a race. This race must understand "the destiny it has to shape, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations..."

★ Hindu and Muslim "periods" clearly mark the relevant watersheds in Indian history.

★ It is "a fundamental postulate of Hindu thought that every way of life has its own contribution to make..." But "the ultimate reality" is defined by Krishna alone. "He proclaims a doctrine which is fundamental to all Hindu thought. . Owing to this approach we are reinterpreting our own doctrines and doing readjustment (sic.) For example, we have absorbed Buddhism..."

★"Our concept of the joint family is a unique contribution in the history of mankind. Generation after generation we have developed it." The break-up of some of the oppressive structures of the joint family is thus not progressive, but a setback!

★India, irrespective of who ruled it, has never tried to dominate or subjugate other people, cultures or lands – never mind our marauding kings, brutal rajahs or the fact that whole ministries were once assigned by "Hindu" kings to the specific task of destroying and looting temples!

★"Bharatiya culture is the only culture which has understood the life problems (sic) in their totality and has made a continuous effort to solve them. In the history of the world, it is the only effort to see the science, philosophy, religion, psychology and social life in an integrated form." (sic)

★ "Spirituality is the core of our culture. We have tried to see the reality or truth hidden in the material world. This is the theme of Bhartiya life work. It is the backbone of her existence, the foundation of her being – the spiritualisation of the human race" (sic).

★ The "spirit of Bharat" and "Bharatiyata" is Dharma. This is "the ultimate source of all values of human society". In the Vedic period, "there existed no state, no king, no penalty and no criminal, all protected one another by virtue of Dharma". The best description of Dharma is naturally to be found in the Manusmriti, "which gives ten characteristics which are related to human conduct .."

★ "Naturally, Bharat excelled in every branch of Science – Mathematics, Astronomy, Chemistry, Sculpture, Pharmacology, etc. Our sages realised reality lying in every sphere of life" Naturally, all of them, from Charak to Bhaskaracharya, were Hindus. Also, "in each and every field of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, dance, drama and music, we were the leaders". Our temples "...may perhaps be said to be infinitely superior to the cumulative achievements of our artists" (sic).

★ "When the central idea driving and inspiring the way of life ceases to exist, a culture dies along with its adherents The cultures of Greece, Rome and Egypt died the day the representatives of those lands failed to find fulfilment in living up to its values. So it is our duty to preserve our ancient heritage..."

★ "We firmly believe in the Vedantic concept that each soul is potentially divine... We have to reach the concept of 'I am God'..." The basic task of education today is to inculcate this knowledge.

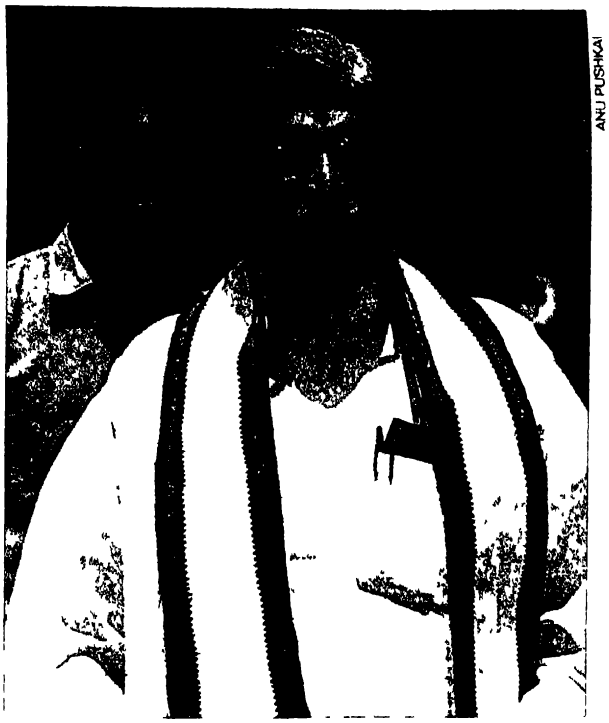
These ideas form the core of the "discussion papers" being prepared by some of the principal institutions that draw up school curricula, including the National Open School (which has over a million pupils, and from whose document the verbatim quotes are taken here). Other bodies such as the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) are also about to adopt a similar approach to defining "Bharat" and promoting "Bharatiyata" through education. These papers not only stipulate the general objectives and goals that educational

ourses must achieve, but also ubstantially lay down some of heir core content. The emphasis s on Hindutva with its exclusivist, chauvinist notions of nationalism.

All future writers of our textbooks will have to conform to these values, objectives and content descriptions. In practice, this will apply not just to the Central elementary schools and the CBSE systems, but to educational institutions at the State level too. Most of these participate either in the donor-driven District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), or the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which Joshi has just inaugurated to consolidate all non-formal education - even as he has more or less dismantled the National Literacy Mission. These include the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and the Vanvasi Shiksha Kendras set up by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pracharaks, schools run by Friends of Tribals Society of Sangh sympathiser P.D Chitlangia, and other non-governmental organisations of the saffron variety. Joshi is also deviously using the coming amendment to the Constitution making education a fundamental right as a shield beneath which to promote the Sangh agenda.

This adds up to a massive brainwashing programme – to be accomplished through the simple device of an administrative fatwa issued by the Human Resource Development Ministry for curriculum revision. No one has ever attempted anything one-tenth as ambitious as Joshi has actually ordered into existence. Earlier, textbooks, especially history textbooks, were manipulated to introduce a communal bias. There have been many instances of extravagant claims about India's achievements and arrogant or disdainful statements about other cultures and peoples. But this is the first time that the whole curriculum for Classes X to XII is being so comprehensively rewritten. This is not revision with a view to updating it. It involves violent recasting and radical changes – in particular, changes in values and ideologies.

These "discussion papers" are reminiscent of the fatwas issued in Hitler's Germany to inculcate the spirit of "nationalism" among schoolchildren, and to specify in the minutest detail what constitutes authentic "German culture", why the idea of racial purity, and the sacred nature of the Aryan "master race" must never be questioned. They come on top of many discrete measures that the government has taken over the past 18 months to alter the character of institutions such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the NCERT, besides setting up the J.S. Verma Review Committee on school syllabi. Another round of senior appointments is now coming up with the impending retirement of the Vice-Chancellors of some of our best-known universities, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Jamia Millia Islamia, Aligarh Muslim University, and Santiniketan (founded by Rabindranath Tagore).



ANU PUSHKAL

Human Resource Minister Murli Manohar Joshi.

Institutions are vital to democracy. Running them well means appointing first-rate people committed to inclusivism and pluralism, and open to new ideas.

MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI is clearly the most dedicated hardcore RSS Minister in the present government. An RSS insider has been quoted as saying, "We think Joshiji has done the best work. He is the most frequent to come here to consult RSS organising secretary K. Sudarshan. We know that our project of nation building cannot be accomplished without basic education". Joshi is certainly a pillar of Hindutva. But not to be left behind are Ananth Kumar, Minister of State for Culture, and Arun Jaitley, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting. Ananth Kumar is threatening to bring in legislation to protect India against "cultural invasion" from the West – read, promotion of traditional hierarchical values, along with grotesque forms of rampant consumerism and "VJ culture". Arun Jaitley has already shown his true colours by destroying the whole edifice of autonomy in Prasar Bharati through a single administrative fatwa, arbitrarily removing Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav from the board on the specious ground that there is a provision for retiring a third of all members by rotation.

This "retirement" makes a complete mockery of the idea of autonomy. Autonomy means, quite simply, that the government has no business to interfere with Prasar Bharati's day-to-day working or its overall management. Legally, it is not empowered to remove or appoint directors. But it brazenly targeted two *individual* members. Under the principle of rotation, an *objective criterion* should have been applied, like drawing lots – a procedure the Prasar Bharati Board itself proposed. The government deliberately zeroed in on Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav, saying that the board needs more professional journalists. (It later contradicted itself by pleading for a "broad-based" board). The action was obnoxious, and was rightly termed as "intellectual violence" by former Information and Broadcasting Minister S. Jaipal Reddy. It was aimed at moving those members who put up a lot of resistance to the BJP's depredations and its attempt to take over Doordarshan and All India Radio.

THERE is a clear pattern to the BJP's appointments – whether in Prasar

Bharati, or in educational and research institutions. This pattern goes beyond "Left vs Right" divides. Thus it is irrelevant and improper to term Romila Thapar a Marxist historian or an "ancient Indian historian with Marxist inclinations, and link this to her removal. The pertinent point is that she is a historian of exceptional eminence whom any university in the world would be honoured to have. Whether or not she is a Marxist is as irrelevant as Anthony Giddens' appointment to the London School of Economics (LSE) is. Everybody knows that Giddens is Tony Blair's guru, the theorist of the Third Way, and yet no one has sought to remove him from the London School of Economics or question his intellectual eminence on this ground. Romila Thapar was removed not because she is a Marxist, but because she is an independent minded intellectual who brooks no nonsense, and who truly believes in media autonomy.

The government and its apologists are deliberately misrepresenting the issue, thereby confusing the non committed or undecided even as it appoints unreconstructed Hindutva Right wingers marked by intellectual mediocrity (and worse) to sensitive positions. This is *not* a contest between Right and Left. It is not as if the preceding 50 years were marked by some peculiar official fondness for the Left. What they did witness was a degree of (eroding) autonomy for many institutions and a certain porosity and openness, often combined with respect for quality. Whatever one might say about Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Pupul Jayakar or Kapila Vatsayan, it is undeniable that they were genuine scholars and serious institution builders. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) is being attacked for utterly despicable, petty, reasons by those who loathe and dread autonomy.

Institutions are vital to democracy. Running them well means appointing first-rate people committed to inclusivism and pluralism, and open to new ideas. Handing them over to bigots, philistines and people with sectarian and exclusivist agendas is the surest recipe for ruining them. That is why it matters less that M L Sondhi is right-wing than that he is a mediocrity, who will damage the ICSSR with his agenda. Again, if B R Grover of the ICHR had some decent publications to his credit and a half-way respectable academic record, his sympathies for the communal school of history writing might have been easier to forgive. As it happens, the man has nothing but Hindutva prejudice to show for himself.

It is not often (at least in India) that the Right produces distinguished intellectuals. People like Girilal Jain are rare exceptions. The run-of-the mill right winger, especially of the saffron variety, is insecure and paranoid, and far too vengeful to want to run any institution in a consensual, open, democratic way. He is unreceptive to new ideas. For the most part, his intellectual foundations are traceable to the early years of the century, and to V D Savarkar, M S Golwalkar and Jadunath Sarkar. Most communal historians, for instance, remain untouched by the new schools of historiography that go beyond the colonial and nationalist divides and, as Romila Thapar says, involve a paradigm shift. In this shift history is treated not as information laid out in a chronological order but an exploration and analysis of society and the past, all of which are deeply influenced by a range of ideologies. For communal historians, the *very purpose* of their (rigid) discipline is to glorify India.

It is of such stuff that Hindutva's education and culture project is made. This project is far more dangerous and insidious than the construction of the Ram temple. It involves manipulating minds, infiltrating hatred into them, encouraging them to think smugly in stereotypes, and making people's self-identity dependent on bigotry and false pride. Ultimately, the project means yoking the mind to a hateful, communal, nationalism – for generations to come. Textbooks are not revised frequently. The last major curriculum revision was way back in 1976. What happens to today's battle over school curricula will influence a whole generation. That's why Murli Manohar Joshi's despicable Project of Prejudice must not be allowed to prevail ■

There is a clear pattern to the BJP's appointments – whether in Prasar Bharati, or in educational and research institutions. This pattern goes beyond "Left vs Right" divides.

■ COLUMN

PREOCCUPATIONS



JAYATI GHOSH

The euro's short life has already been a very eventful one. When it was introduced on January 1, 1999 by 11 European nations as the currency of finance (even if not yet of daily use), the euro was celebrated as the crowning achievement of European economic and financial integration. Because it represented an economic bloc even larger than the United States, it was also seen to present a major threat to the U S dollar in international financial markets.

But the fledgling currency seems to have confounded its supporters by shrinking rather than growing, over the past year. In the 11 months of its existence, it has declined about 15 per cent against the dollar and more than 30 per cent against the Japanese yen. And on the closing day of trading in the first week of December, it actually fell below what many had seen as the important psychological barrier of 1:1 parity with the dollar.

As in so many movements in international currency markets, it is very hard to explain the euro's fall in the recent weeks with reference to the so-called "fundamentals". There is now clear evidence of accelerating growth in the hitherto sluggish European economies, and there has even been a recent increase in the benchmark interest rate set by the European Central Bank (ECB).

If despite this the euro has continued to fall, it has largely reflected what can broadly be called "unfriendly market sentiment". Hardly anyone really knows what forces determine this vague and frightening term, but at least this much is clear: private financial markets always react adversely to any talk of new taxation, or even the mildest of official statements regarding public intervention to save jobs or to meet other social criteria within any

Singing the euro blues

The European Union's currency continues its slide against the dollar, even as Europeans wonder whether the euro was worth all the effort.

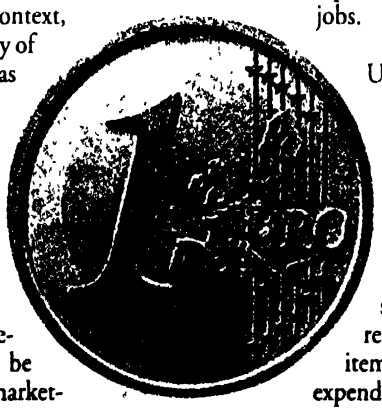
country.

The governments of developing country "emerging markets" have long come to accept this unpalatable fact, and those governments that remain keen to keep foreign investors happy at all costs (such as in India) have come to be obsessively careful to avoid any remote possibility of new taxation or even increases in socially relevant government intervention. But now, even OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) governments have been forced to deal with the consequences of this pressure from international finance.

Thus, apparently the latest run on the euro has come about because private markets are unhappy with the "leftist" sentiments that have recently been expressed by several European leaders. The current anger of the market is directed against the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, who had earlier tried to present himself as the darling of international capital, in the process demolishing the domestic political support base of his own party.

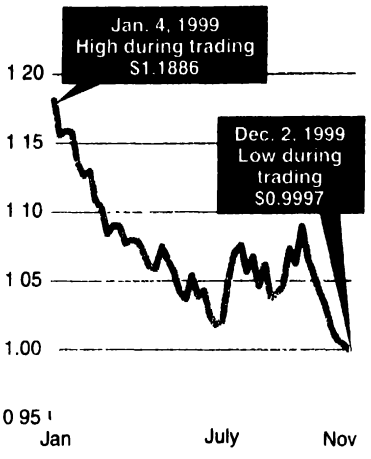
Germany has been the sick economy of the European Union for some time now. It accounts for one-third of all euro-zone output, but in growth terms it has been lagging behind almost all its euro-zone neighbours, especially France. Even the German Government's council of economic advisers has predicted that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth next year will be only 2.7 per cent, after remaining at 1.4 per cent this year. Meanwhile, the eastern region continues to stagnate, and unemployment continues to increase.

In this uneasy context, even the slight recovery of the past few months has done little to dispel social disaffection within Germany which is now putting more pressure on the German Government. Two recent moves by Schroeder have therefore been such as to be classified as "market-unfriendly".



Falling euro

The plummeting euro dropped below the dollar for the first time ever on November 9. Here are the weekly closes for the euro since its introduction on January 4, 1999.



Source Compiled from AP research **AP**

FIRST, the German Chancellor decided to use state funds to bail out Philipp Holzmann, a troubled construction company which accounted for a large number of workers. This has been interpreted by international financiers, who have typically viewed continued unemployment more favourably than employment generation, as a sign that the German Government does not want to carry out major "reforms" of the labour market that would put many more people out of jobs.

Second, the European Union has been trying to agree on a cross-border withholding tax on savings which is obviously unpopular with private capital markets even though it is widely seen as necessary both to raise resources for important items of government social expenditure and to put some limits on volatile capital flows. Recently, Schroeder indicated that if the E.U. failed to reach an agreement on this, his government would consider imposing such a tax unilaterally anyway. This has created much angst among financiers (especially those in the City of London) who had been lobbying to stall the process at the E.U. level, and this is cited as the proximate cause of the euro's latest slide.

It is indeed ironical that Germany, which had been the chief champion of the euro from the early stages of the process, may find that it stands to lose the most from the loss of autonomy in national decision-making that monetary integration has involved. Germany has among the lowest rates of growth of GDP and the lowest rates of inflation in the euro-zone. This means that it also faces the highest real interest rates as a consequence of the uniform monetary policy. This in turn hampers growth further. Meanwhile, the U.S. dollar continues to soar, rising on a wave of confidence in the apparently endless U.S. boom. This creates a complex problem for Europeans.

WHATEVER may have been the public pronouncements to the contrary, there is no doubt that a large part of the earlier enthusiasm for the euro was based on the expectation that it would emerge as a major rival to the dollar and allow Europe some of the benefits of becoming finance's favourite destination. That expectation has so far been belied.

Meanwhile, any positive impetus to trade and import substitution that could come from the depreciation of the currency has been more than outweighed by the constraining role played by the E.U.'s stability and growth pact, which effectively prevents the use of fiscal stimulus to activate economic growth. As a result, the economic policymakers of the E.U., and especially of the largest country in it, Germany, now appear caught in a cleft stick of their own making.

They had subjugated their domestic interests at the altar of the common currency in the hope of being able to exploit the patterns of international capital flows, but it is now clear that they are still subject to the pressures of whimsical and demanding international financiers. And this means that they are even less able to meet the legitimate demands of their own citizenry. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that more and more Europeans are questioning the way in which the entire of monetary integration has unfolded so far. ■

A scholar remembered

M.N. Srinivas, 1916-1999.

PARVATHI MENON

M.N. SRINIVAS, India's most distinguished sociologist and social anthropologist, died in Bangalore on November 30 from complications arising from a lung infection. He had turned 84 on November 16. While India has lost a keen observer and interpreter of contemporary social change, the city of Bangalore, where Srinivas and his wife Rukmini spent the last 27 years, will feel the loss of an ardent campaigner for the city's civic and environmental betterment. The genial visage of the internationally acclaimed scholar with his leonine shock of white hair had become a familiar sight for the residents of the city he was so involved with.

Srinivas' last public lecture, which he gave on October 7 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, was titled "Obituary on Caste as a System". It may have appeared ironic to many that Srinivas, the first Indian sociologist to anticipate the persistence and longevity of caste in modern India, should, towards the end of his life, have written a requiem for that very system. Indeed, he did nothing of the sort in the lecture, its provocative title notwithstanding. His talk was an exploratory foray into the changing contours of caste, and on how emerging rural economies were transforming caste as a system. It is perhaps fitting that in what was to be his last talk, Srinivas should have returned to the theme that forms the *leit motif* of his scholarship spanning over five decades. His death cut short a line of enquiry pregnant with new insights on one of India's most complex social institutions.

The hallmark of Srinivas' scholarship was its accessibility and its firm roots in the Indian reality. He was among the earliest social anthropologists in India to break out of the confines of textual authority on which the discipline had till then rested. His social laboratory was the village, factory, classroom and home, where people lived, worked, and in general played out a multiplicity of social and cultural roles. "Srinivas' scholarship was not marked by high flights of theory," said T.N. Madan, a noted sociologist and Srinivas' friend for over three decades. "He had the rare gift of conveying insightful observations in simple language. The term 'vote bank', the notion of the 'dominant caste', or the concept of 'sanskritisation' have become part of common speech. His scholarship was remarkable for its accessibility."

Srinivas is perhaps best known for having coined and elaborated on the concept of "sanskritisation", the process by which castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes. He first propounded this theory in his book, Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India (1952). Written for his D.Phil degree at Oxford University, the book is an ethnographical study of the then little known Coorg community. It was a path-breaking study for several reasons. To begin with, it validated fieldwork as an essential methodology of the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology. Secondly, it offered a ground view that challenged the colonial notion of caste as static and unchanging. Through terms such as "sanskritisation", "dominant caste", "vertical (inter-caste) and horizontal (intra-caste) solidarities", Srinivas sought to capture the fluid and dynamic essence of caste as a social institution. Thirdly, it rejected the idea of a rigid, pan-Indian caste system, widely upheld in scholarship then. Instead his study asserted the importance of the regional dimensions of caste and the "little traditions" of Hinduism. At a time when an influential section of India's intelligentsia optimistically believed that caste would disintegrate under the march of modernisation, it was both prescient and brave of Srinivas to have argued to the contrary. Caste, he firmly believed, would continue to find expression in the public and private lives of Indians. Srinivas, however, never supported caste-based reservation as a programme to alter unequal caste equations.

The Remembered Village (1976), a socio-anthropological study done in 1948 of the village of Rampura near Mysore, remains Srinivas' finest monograph, one that he considered his best. It was this book that won him international recognition and established his scholarly reputation. How Srinivas lost his precious Rampura field notes in a fire at Stanford University and reconstructed the book from memory has become part of sociological lore. This tragedy later brought its own rewards. Friends and colleagues of Srinivas agree that the insights, readability and novel-like sensibilities of this outstanding work of ethnography derived from the quality of recall that Srinivas put to effective use in writing it. (This was not Srinivas' last encounter with fire, nor indeed with being called upon to "remember". In 1972, while shifting from New Delhi to Bangalore, the container which carried a large number of his books and papers caught fire as it was being transported by train. And then, in December 1998, he gave an extensive interview to anthropologist Chris Fuller for the journal *Anthropology Today*. Fuller lost the recording a day later when his suitcase was stolen from a train. Fuller notes that "with great sympathy and patience", Srinivas agreed to redo the whole interview a few days later.)

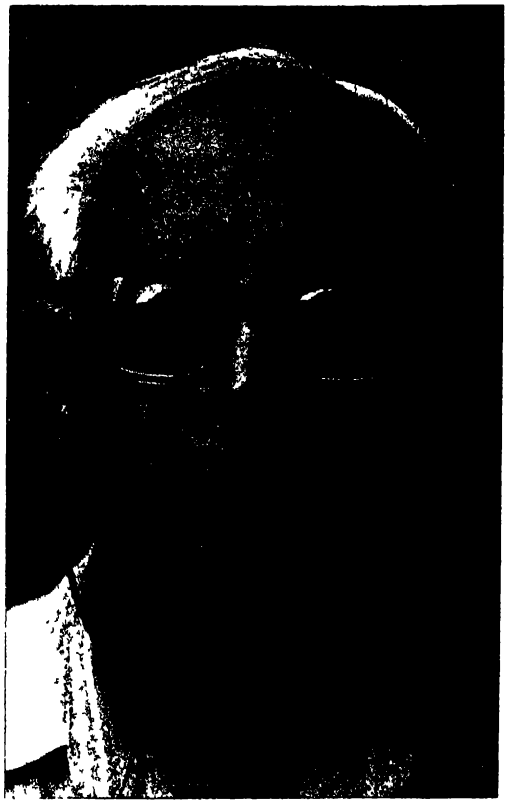
MYSORE NARASIMHACHAR SRINIVAS was born on November 16, 1916 in Mysore, although his parents were from Arakere, a village 20 miles (32 km) away. Srinivas, the youngest of four sons, studied in Mysore. He took an honours degree in social philosophy from Mysore University, "an ambitious programme, covering an immense variety of subjects, which would have daunted any undergraduate anywhere" he recalled in his interview to Fuller. Srinivas has written about how, as an "overprotected Brahmin boy", he experienced his first "culture shocks not more than fifty yards from the back wall of our house... The entire culture of Bandikere was visibly and olfactorily different from that of College Road. Bandikere was my Trobriand Islands, my Nuerland, my Navaho country and what have you. In retrospect, it is not surprising that I became an anthropologist, an anthropologist all of whose

eldwork was in his own country."

From Mysore, Srinivas moved to Bombay and later to Oxford University. He did his Masters under G.S. Ghurye, during which he did a dissertation he later published as *Marriage and Family in Mysore* (1942). Srinivas would later recall that the seeds for his ideas on sanskritisation were sown during his fieldwork for his M.A. dissertation. At Oxford, Srinivas worked under the two leading anthropologists of the day, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and E.E Evans-Pritchard. In his interview to Fuller, Srinivas speaks of this period as one of both intellectual excitement and growth.

Srinivas returned to India in 1951, and joined the Department of Sociology of M.S. University, Baroda. He formulated a new syllabus for the department and built it into a reputed centre of socio-anthropological teaching and research. In February 1959, he was invited to Delhi University to establish and head the Department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, which was recognised as a centre for advanced study in 1968. Srinivas attracted the best talent to the department and built it into one of the leading departments in the country in the field, combining sociology with social anthropological approaches. Its competitor at the Delhi School was the Economics Department which had an array of distinguished economists such as K.N. Raj, Amartya Sen, Pranab Bardhan, Mrinal Dutta Chaudhuri and others on its faculty. In his interview to Fuller, Srinivas hints at the competition and tension between these two strong departments. "Marxism was the dominant ideology of the economists – Marxism and macro-economics. They laughed at the kind of things we were doing. We were studying kinship, caste, villages, religion, and they looked upon us as backward people," Srinivas told Fuller.

In 1972, Srinivas returned to his home State and joined the Institute for Social and Economic Change set up by V.K.R.V. Rao in Bangalore as Joint Director, a position he gave up in 1979. He joined the National Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS) as the J.R.D. Tata Visiting Professor in 1992 and started a unit of sociology and social anthropology in 1997. He and R.L. Kapur set up the Women's Policy, Research and Advocacy Unit at the NIAS. His interest in issues relating to gender began with his participation in the Status of Women in India Report, 1975.



T.A. HAFEEZ

After shifting to Bangalore, Srinivas continued to write on those themes that flowed from his early anthropological work – caste, modernisation, sanskritisation, social change, gender, the practice of social anthropology, and so on. His most recent publication, *Indian Society through Personal Writings* (1998), dedicated to his old friend, novelist R.K. Narayan, is a collection of essays – some biographical, some on caste disputes in Rampura, an account ("idiosyncratic, if not capricious") of Bangalore, and so on. Interestingly, in the book *Village, Caste, Gender and Method* (1998), he also included two short stories.

Srinivas had for some time been working on his autobiography. He believed that an autobiography could become a productive tool of sociological research. He wrote in a recent book about how and why sociologists in India have not tried to use their own lives as ethnographical data for analysis. "It is my plea," he wrote, "that the movement from studying one's own culture or a niche in it, to studying oneself as an ethnographic field, is a natural one... Sociology of the Self should be a rich field, given the diversities and unities which the members of Indian civilisation are heirs to."

As a commentator on current trends in Indian society, Srinivas was surprisingly reticent on the impact of the growth of Hindu fundamentalism in recent years. T.N. Madan, however, says that Srinivas was, in fact, "deeply worried about the political link between religion and politics, between the mindless use of religion by Hindu communalists and its equally mindless rejection by the secularists." All of this he felt had led to the "decline in the serious study of religion". Srinivas had been involved in coordinating an international seminar on religion to be held in September 2000 at the NIAS. According to Madan, he was also critical of sections of the English press for allowing their anti-Bharatiya Janata Party sentiments to often turn into a sweeping anti-Hindu position.

Yet Srinivas was remarkably outspoken in his defence of the Indian media from the pressures of globalisation. He participated in the public debate on the entry of the foreign media into India with a forceful plea that it be kept out. He did not oppose this on the narrow grounds of "westernisation", but on the grounds that it would compromise and distort the independent news agenda of the Indian press. He became increasingly interested in issues relating to Information Technology and had helped draft the Bangalore Declaration during IT.Com, 1998, held in Bangalore.

Srinivas and his wife Rukmini, a geographer teaching at the Aditi Mallya International School in Bangalore, have had a large circle of friends, students and colleagues. Their two daughters, Lakshmi and Tulasi, live in the United States. Lakshmi has a Ph.D in Sociology from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and is now on its faculty. Tulasi is doing her doctorate in Anthropology at Boston University.

H.Y. Sharada Prasad and R.K. Narayan count as two of Srinivas' oldest friends. Talking to *Frontline* from New Delhi, Sharada Prasad recalled several of Srinivas' personal qualities. "He had a tremendous range of interests," he said. "He was a keen observer of individuals, their lives, thought processes, stories and problems. It was so easy to converse with him. There was no pedantry or boast in him... amazing for a scholar of his international standing." Chuckling at the memory of their last meeting at NIAS a few months ago, Sharada Prasad said of his friend, "Everything was so unstructured about him. He did not stand on a pedestal and say 'Behold, here I am'." ■

The self as institution

A.R. VASAVI

HE gave the academic world the terms "vote bank", "dominant caste" and "sanskritisation". And they became part of our common lexicon – terms used in everyday speech and popular writing. It was this, his astute understanding of the everyday life of the nation and his ability to render academic jargon into common parlance, that gave Professor M.N. Srinivas the stature of a people's sociologist.

Eschewing the purely abstract and theoretical study of India's cultures and societies, he charted a new terrain in which intensive fieldwork became the central methodology, and the representation of the lives of people in accessible writing the key responsibility of researchers.

In his personality was blended the culture of three different places, namely, princely Mysore where he was born and studied till his Masters, nationalist Bombay where he received his doctorate, and Oxford where he came under the influence of anthropologists A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and E.E. Evans-Pritchard. But as he often wrote and said, he also carried with him the sensitivities and sensibilities learnt in Rampura, the other 'university' about which he wrote in the now classic monograph, *The Remembered Village*. He considered himself privileged to have known and won the affection of village residents, and regretted that he had not had the time to write more about them. Although he was popularly known as an authority on caste and its multiple *avatars*, Professor Srinivas was also concerned with rural India and its myriad problems. He often wished that he had had the time to write a more definitive essay on India's peasants, which he wanted to call the "Moral Universe of the Indian Peasantry".

Of the departments and the institution he helped establish and built – the Department of Sociology, M.S. University, Baroda ; the Department of Sociology, Delhi University; the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; and the Sociology and Social Anthropology Unit at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) – he was most proud of the Sociology Department at Delhi University. He would speak of its faculty as a proud father would of his children, keeping himself updated on its courses and publications, and taking immense pride in it becoming one of the best Sociology departments in the world. His institution-building capabilities drew on a sense of purpose, perseverance and foresight. He also had the skills, indispensable for institution- builders in India, to negotiate the fault lines of status, power, ego and personal idiosyncrasy.

He was not only a student and scholar of Indian society and its complexities, but was also an adviser who counselled many, including this writer, about ways to make sense of our personal lives in a society in which family, gender, kinship, caste and class often took pernicious and punitive social forms. He vociferously objected to purely negative portrayals and representations of India, and firmly believed that the nation had several achievements to its credit, and that with time, would overcome its many vexing problems – of poverty, caste, gender bias and so on. He objected to the very idea of a caste census, which the present Government plans to conduct in 2001, believing that the complexities of *jatis* and sub-*jatis* could never be authentically recorded.

We often discussed and argued about the state of academia in the country. An issue of recurring concern was about ossified institutions invoking outdated rules to exclude talented scholars, while patronising mediocrity. He himself was a stickler for institutional regularity and academic standards and was most intolerant of anything he considered lax. He was alarmed at the dismal quality of certain types of foreign funded social research, and at a recent symposium organised by an international development agency, he publicly chastised the researchers for oversimplifying and even caricaturing the lives of village residents.

Although vigilant about keeping pace with recent anthropological literature, he tended to dismiss trendy, theoretical work as "academic mantra-tantra". He once took me to task on my paper written for an in-house seminar on "Theory in Anthropology", as he was offended at my criticism of cultural particularism. Sometimes, such differences made for strained relations, but he would relent after a few days and make amends by offering me a piece of *mysore pak*, some *sonepapdi* or even a "mint-with-a-hole"! He did not always take academic suggestions easily. For me it seems both ironic and sad that after a heated discussion we had about his last public lecture on "Obituary for Caste as a System", he conceded to my suggestion that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings had substantial academic and anthropological worth.

The list of what he wanted to write and do was long. But what he discussed the most and looked forward to eagerly was completing his autobiography. This, he joked, he would auction to the highest bidding publisher, just as celebrity novelists did these days! I now think that he would have wanted this, a likely magnum opus, to be dedicated to "Rukka", his wife Rukmini. Theirs was a special relationship of camaraderie, support and understanding. He also wanted the autobiography to be read as a text as he considered the study of the self to have sociological validity. Indeed, in his case, he developed the self as an institution, adhering strictly to what he believed to be norms of correct social conduct, interaction and protocol. His daughter Lakshmi believes that for him work was the most meaningful part of his life. Yet, MNS, as he was known, was a person of many interests and passions. He delighted in the small and beautiful things of life – the shrikes and bulbuls that visited their garden, the fish in the lotus pond, the new fruits and nuts available in the market, fancy stationery, and details of the latest films in town.

Professor Srinivas' last working day, November 10, at the NIAS, was both typical and special. He arrived later than his usual and very punctual 9.10 a.m. and took several people to task for the office car having been sent late. Although he looked tired, he addressed a workshop on "Socio-Anthropological Approaches to Educational Research" and delivered an impromptu and passionate lecture on the need to see education not only as an important issue but as an issue vital to the nation's progress. At tea-break, he was all charm to the participants, asking each of them about their home State and responding with an anthropological observation on each region. As he prepared to leave, he shook hands with every participant. Back at home around 4 p.m., he had a cup of tea and then donned the cap of the concerned public citizen. He rode in the Bangalore City Corporation's jeep, indicating to the ward officer the many areas that required cleaning, clearing or redoing.

Twenty days later, Professor Srinivas was ready for a different anthropological journey. On November 30, for this, his last field trip, his daughter Tulasi thoughtfully placed his favourite items beside him – a copy of *The Remembered Village*, his reading glasses, and a pen. ■

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CHAMU

"So one of my last (long-time) friends has gone," noted R.K. Narayan, 93, on being informed of the passing of M.N. Srinivas, 83, a friend of six decades and more. The writer counted him, on the fingers of one hand, among "my constant friends," people who, for him, never changed in their qualities, their attitudes, and their closeness. Ten days before his death, brought on by pneumonia, in Bangalore, the pioneering social anthropologist had visited the great novelist in Chennai. "He looked well and spent quite a bit of time chatting with me," said Narayan, adding: "He had evidently come to say his farewell."

Srinivas – "Chamu" to his friends – was an important figure in Narayan's life as a writer. He was, as Narayan notes in *My Dateless Diary*, "the first reader of my first book" (*Swami and Friends*, in typescript) and "a critic and adviser on many unwritten ones."

In October 1956, Narayan made his first serious foray beyond the "triangular boundary" of Mysore, Coimbatore and Madras – a visit to the United States, lasting nearly nine months, at the invitation of the Rockefeller Foundation. This coincided with an extended academic stay in the United States of Professor Srinivas and his wife.

We reproduce here excerpts from *My Dateless Diary: An American Journey* (published in 1960). Narayan's diary entries relating to 1956-57 convey the flavour of a remarkable friendship that originated in Mysore of the 1930s:

Chicago

BETWEEN Singer, Redfield, and Shils, eminent Professors whose knowledge of India was profound and who had each spent at least a year in different parts of India, my stay in Chicago was most rewarding Between them they unobtrusively took care of my food, shelter, and movements

On the morning of my arrival while talking to Redfield in his room, Milton Singer came in to say that Chamu was arriving from New York next day Let no one be puzzled about the identity of Chamu He is Dr M N Srinivas, an eminent Indian sociologist of Oxford, Baroda, Bombay, Manchester and Delhi, who was a great friend and neighbour of mine in Mysore

Years ago when I wrote my first novel *Swami and Friends*, and found none to read it, a very young college fellow came forward to go through the manuscript he read and certified it as readable, which was very encouraging That was Chamu He was then a college student, now he is a senior, respected professor – many academic activities and distinctions having come his way His research and studies constantly took him out of view, if not to another corner of the world at least to another part of the country

However I always had an annual glimpse of him, when he came down for a couple of weeks each year to see his mother and brothers in Mysore Our literary contact started years ago with *Swami* continued. He always goaded me on to write my next and not to waste my time, whenever I saw him I discussed with him the subject I had in mind for a new novel, and through his reaction I always got an objective view of anything I might plan to write. So he continued, through years, to be not only the first reader of my first book, but also a critic and adviser on many unwritten ones

Now I was happy to know that I should be seeing him next day, not only because I longed to speak Tamil to someone but I also hoped he would be able to give me a small quantity of betel-nut to which I am addicted I had exhausted my own stock of it weeks ago, above all I wanted to speak to him about my new book and the problems connected with it

* * *

Overload

When I reached Chamu's room in the hotel, his wife, Rukka cried through the bathroom door, "So you have come! Don't go away I must talk to you ' I liked the mystery and menace of her tone The moment she was ready to meet me she said with considerable warmth, "Did you want to work off a grudge against us by mentioning our name to Mr – of Mysore before leaving? A nice situation you created for us after you left!"

I understood what she meant On the eve of my leaving Mysore, with a dozen things to do by way of getting my papers and baggage in order, a man locally employed in a scientific institution clamoured to meet me although I repeatedly sent word that I was too busy He said he wanted only a few minutes with me, that he would very much like to say goodbye to his favourite author

No author is so hardened that he cannot be won by such an approach, and so I found for him a quarter of an hour on the day of my departure I settled him in my study, offered him a cup of coffee as usual, and he told me for exactly the space of five minutes how much he admired my Sunday *Hindu* articles (which anyone may talk about even without reading), and then mentioned his real business with me. He had his daughter and son-in-law studying in a University in New York State, he wanted me to carry a hamper of condiment, chilli powder and spices for them He assured me that the whole thing could not weigh more than a pound, but I excused myself all the same, being an air passenger, explaining that if I had space for another pound I should probably take a woollen sweater or some such thing He looked as if I had refused to carry some life-saving drug to one in dire need And so I said (this is where Chamu comes into the story)

'If it is so urgent why not try and send it through Dr M N Srinivas who is coming to the States by boat?"

The man brightened up immediately and said, Oh, I know that family so well His brother was my classmate His aunt was – was good to us when we were in Kolar, his cousin has married my nephew, and so on and so forth He found so many approaches to Srinivas that I felt at the rate of a pound per kinship, he could ask Srinivas to carry a whole shipload of sweets and spices The next part of the story is best presented through Chamu

"That man got at me through my brother with whom he renewed his acquaintance He had been a cricket player once upon a time and you know how my brother melts at the sight of an old cricketer I told him to send his package along next day

"Next day, when I returned home at night I found the passage of our home choking with a wooden chest, the sort of

Excerpted from R. K. Narayan, My Dateless Diary: An American Journey, *1964, India Thought Publications; Mysore, Penguin Books India, 1988.*

thing the thirteen pirates sat on, a burlap sack, apparently filled with coconut, a smaller trunk containing sweets judging from the swarm of ants, a basket containing possibly brinjals and cucumbers, and three more nondescript bundles. I had come home at midnight from a farewell dinner, and the sight of this luggage upset me.

"I summoned the man next morning and lectured to him and said that unless he reduced the bulk of his gift to his son-in-law by seventy per cent I would leave it behind. He again started off on how his cousin was married to our nephew, how devoted he was to my cricket-loving brother, how he had watched my Oxford career with pride and satisfaction but I was adamant. He had to take them away.

"Later in the day they were ready in the passage again, for me. All that he had done was to substitute a steel trunk for the old pirate's chest, the other articles remained unchanged. It was too late to do anything about it now. You may imagine our plight as we lugged all this around, the trouble we had at Bangalore, Bombay, Southampton, London, Manchester, every port, custom, and railway station, porter's tips, vigilance, counting and recounting, in addition to the problem of our own baggage.

"This trip was completely ruined for us thanks to your introduction, and by the time we arrived at the New York port our patience was at an end; just when we were hoping to be rid of the whole thing we found that the man's son-in-law had not arrived to collect his baggage as promised. The port was in the throes of a dock strike. I had to spend eight hours trying to get help to move the goods to my hotel.

"Finally I had to dump them in the hotel corridor because they were too unwiedly and large for any normal check room. I wrote to his son-in-law, telegraphed, and finally called him on the telephone, because I was leaving New York but still none turned up, I waited as long as I could and finally left the goods just in the hotel corridor and came away. I don't know or care what happened to them... I have only to thank you for all this travail."

* * *

Westward bound

On the (rail) road to San Francisco, with Chamu and his wife in another compartment, four doors off. Life in train for the next [redacted] hours. Food in the train, bath in the train, and neighbourly visits to and from Chamu, with many occasions to narrate my new story, and discuss it with him. It is so comfortable that I enjoy having an illusion of being a permanent dweller here, and so arrange my little possessions around on that basis. Find a comradeship with all and sundry, – including the very fat, crew-cut, teen-ager, always tottering with drink. He is a nuisance, as he pushes the door of every compartment in the corridor and peeps in, much to the consternation of Mrs. Chamu.

Our life is punctuated by movements to and from the dining car at various intervals – pushing and pulling the heavy doors all along the vestibule. Our biceps are greatly strained. Chamu and I have divided the labour, each doing it one-way. We march along as everyone in the lounge stares at Rukka's colourful sari, with open-mouthed wonder. We notice, however, a red-haired girl and two others being exceptions, who never look up, maintaining a concentrated gaze on their beer-glass all day. The steward is proud of being able to give us rice and buttermilk, and watches over us, as Rukka produces from her handbag South Indian condiments and spice-powder to help us through our meals. We form such a close community (although lasting only forty hours) that even the drunken teen-ager begins to say, "Good morning," "How do you do?" and "Excuse me," every time we pass.

I plan to do some writing but the hours pass unnoticed.

* * *

Berkeley

Tuesday. Arrive Berkeley. We decide to get down here rather than go up to San Francisco. We climb down by means of a step-ladder. Professor David Mandlebaum and his wife are there to receive Chamu and wife and take us to a hotel. I have a feeling of being an intruder, the real expected guest being Chamu. I have got down here because Chamu is here, otherwise I should have gone to San Francisco and then on to Palo Alto which was really my original destination. But I never get there.

I think Chamu is the luckiest house-hunter in the world. Over lunch at Mandlebaum's he was suggested a house at Albany, a suburb of Berkeley. After lunch David went upstairs to his study and Ruth drove us to Albany. 1050, Peralta Avenue (the name attracted us). This was practically to be my second home in Berkeley for the next two months. Rukka saw the house, liked it, Chamu endorsed her view even without looking at the house, on hearsay, and there they were ready to move in as soon as the lady of the house who had recently lost her husband and was going to live with her daughter in New York was able to move her things out. I never saw anyone make such a quick decision about a house.

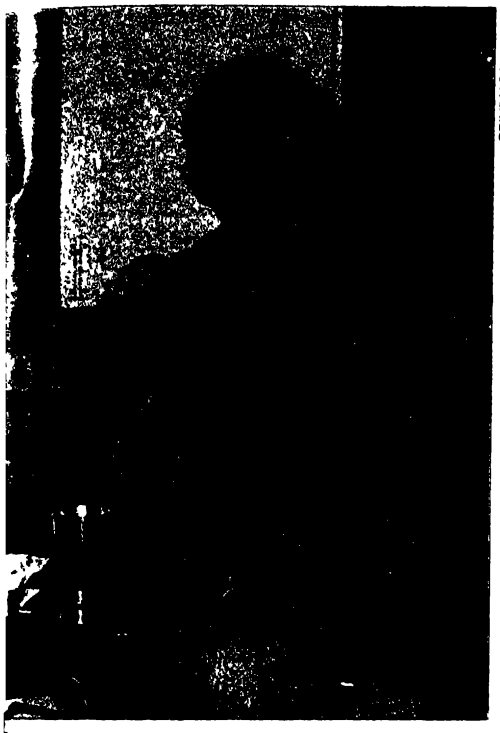
Chamu is a philosopher and a logician, a man who can specify what he wants. I sometimes envy him his clear-headedness and luck. What a contrast to my own management of my affairs.

* * *

Sunday Excursion

Half the Sunday spent in finding my way to Chamu's house at Peralta Avenue in Albany. In this process came across a number of places with picturesque names, such as Euclid, Scenic, Cedar, Spruce, Sonoma, Pomona, Carmel. Felt tired. Finally managed to reach Albany. Mrs. Chamu was good enough to keep rice and curry and curd for me. Evening John came down to take me for the Diwali celebrations at the International House. I resisted going there at first – afraid of the air of fraternity. But yielded for want of a better occupation... The air was so heavily, deliberately Indian that I felt oppressed and persuaded John to come out...

At the book store John met a friend – a Dr. Schurman, an expert in Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, who proposed that we



SRINIVASA MURTHY

R.K. Narayan and M.N. Srinivas in Chennai, mid-November 1999: "constant friends" over six decades and more.

adjourn for a drink somewhere. He drove downtown in search of 'Lemon and Cat' or some such well-known 'quiet' pub It was as usual dim-lit, 'atmosphere-ridden', but so full that we had to get out again and search for another place; finally he drove us to his flat, where he could provide us fruit juice and beer. I was impressed with this man's knowledge of Eastern languages. For light reading he read Chinese literature in the original, and Greek and Hebrew when he wanted to bite into harder stuff. Being a woeful failure at learning languages, not knowing any except Tamil and English, I was definitely impressed and wanted to proclaim that he should be the grand moderator in the Tower of Babel. We dispersed at midnight.

Picked up by John at noon, and then on to Chamu's for a South Indian lunch. Chamu, the saviour! After lunch, John drives us over the Berkeley Hills, Tilden National Park, Grizzly Peak, and Redwood forests, till sun-set – all through wonderful mountain scenery.

I was getting obsessed with the thought that I was not putting my camera to good use. So brought it out today and exposed a few rolls – delicately framing each picture around huge elms and redwood, and with Chamu, wife, and John in each spot. I took so much time to compose each picture that the others became impatient. I begged them to stand still. But unfortunately I forgot to readjust the shutter from where John has set it for time exposure under the Golden Gate Bridge the other evening, and so no one turned up in a recognisable shape when the films were later developed; thus lost a chance of immortalising the magnificence of the scenery and company that we enjoyed that afternoon.

End of a guest

Another day of house-hunting, having firmly decided to stay in Berkeley rather than at Palo Alto in order to write my novel... My preference is for Albany because of Chamu's proximity...

While browsing around the campus bookstore I suddenly look up and notice Hotel Carlton staring me in the face, never having noticed its presence before. Walk in and find Kaplan, the manager, extremely courteous and full of helpful suggestions – he's willing to give me a room where I may use a hot plate for cooking my food, daily room service, separate bed and study, ideal in every way, the perfect hotel for me. And it costs seventy-five dollars a month...

For the first time a settled place where I don't have to keep my possessions in a state of semi-pack. I am able to plan my work better. I am enchanted with the place, everything is nearby, two cinemas, three or four groceries, and any number of other shops, I can walk down and buy whatever I may need and peep at the Campanille clock to see the time, its chime is enchanting.

A Party

After dinner picked up by John to join a party on the Hills at Ed Harper's...

I looked about and saw Chamu engaged in an earnest conversation with a young professor, in the quiet seclusion of the fire-place. I approached them with a feeling of relief at finding someone to talk to; but they stood with their backs to the assembly and were engrossed in their own talk. I overheard Chamu say, "Tell me, do the Australian Aborigines correlate copulation with population?" I asked Chamu later why he should bother about the question. He said, "Oh, anything to keep his mind engaged. Otherwise, he would have bothered me to explain the caste-system in India."

Writing *The Guide*

Nothing much to record, the same routine, I have got into the routine of writing – about one thousand five hundred to two thousand words a day anyhow. I have the whole picture ready in my mind, except some detail here and there and the only question is to put it in type. Some days when I feel I have been wasting my time, I save my conscience by telling Kaplan at the desk, "I am going to be very busy for the next few weeks trying to get on with my book." A restatement of purpose is very helpful under these circumstances.

Graham Greene liked the story when I narrated it to him in London. While I was hesitating whether to leave my hero alive or dead at the end of the story Graham was definite that he should die. So I have on my hands the life of a man condemned to death before he is born and I have to plan my narrative to lead to it. This becomes a major obsession with me. I think of elaborate calculations: a thousand words a day and by February first I should complete the first draft. In order to facilitate my work I take a typewriter on hire, after three days of tapping away it gets on my nerves, and I lounge on the sofa and write with my pen. Whatever the method my mind has no peace unless I have written at the end of the day nearly 2,000 words. Between breakfast and lunch I manage five hundred words, and while the rice on the stove is cooking a couple of hundreds and after lunch once again till six, with interruptions to read letters and reply to them, or to go out for a walk along the mountain path, or meet and talk to a friend.

Telephone from Chamu to say that his neighbour, an elderly man, who often used to invite him to watch television died suddenly of a heart-attack while shaving in the morning. Chamu and his wife terribly shaken. In the United States death sounds unreal. The man had said "How do you do?" from the road as I was waiting for Chamu to open the door on the previous evening. Chamu's landlord had also died similarly three months ago. So a feeling of insecurity about Peralta Avenue itself...

Having written the last sentence of my novel I plan to idle around Berkeley for a week and then leave on my onward journey. I have lived under the illusion that I would never have to leave Berkeley. Berkeley days were days of writing, thinking, and walking along mountain paths, and meeting friends. And so, when the time comes for me to plan to leave, I feel sad.

(Copyright © R. K. Narayan)

Orissa

The picture feature on Orissa ("After the storm," December 10) depicted the tragedy better than any number of words could.

A.D. More

Nashik

★ ★ ★

My heart goes out to the victims of the 'super cyclone' in Orissa ("Killer cyclone," November 26). We must appreciate the Army and the Air Force for having played a leading role in the relief work.

It is rather unfortunate that a tragedy of such magnitude has been politicised. The BJP president's statement criticising the Congress government's "inefficiency" in tackling the situation appears to be politically motivated. We have to respond to the situation as one nation. Also, it should be declared a national calamity.

Onkar Chopra

New Delhi

AIDS

In the Special Feature on AIDS prevention and control (December 10), the articles and the interview with Dr. P. Krishnamurthy, Project Director, AIDS Prevention and Control Project, were informative and educative. In this context, it is to be noted that when there is no known cure for AIDS in the allopathy system, alternative medicine does have a positive answer.

K. Ramadoss

Chennai

E-governance

Implementing the concept of e-governance without a proper infrastructure is like putting the cart before the horse ("Towards e-governance," December 10). For instance, often the telephone lines are so bad that even a simple e-mail cannot be transmitted or received in one attempt. The service providers of e-mail and the Internet have still a long way to go before they can offer quality service consistently. Another neglected area is the training of computer operators.

The people want quick redress of their grievances. How does e-governance change the situation if we continue with the same old systems and bureaucratic practices? We should not go overboard in introducing e-governance, which will be a drain on our resources. Instead, the concept should be introduced gradually and effectively.

D.B.N. Murthy

Bangalore

Bofors

It is clear that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had a hand in the Bofors scandal ("Know Your Bofors", November 26). The whole country is waiting to know who the culprits are. If the truth comes out, the credit must go to the CBI and the press.

S. Thamizhselvan

Karuppampulam, Tamil Nadu

★ ★ ★

The picture on the cover is not that of a Bofors gun. You ought to know your Bofors too.

R.P. Agarwal

Received on e-mail

Reservations

The findings of the committee set up by the Tamil Nadu Government ("Denial of rights," November 26) should serve as an eye-opener to all those entrusted with the task of implementing the reservations system for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The committee's report confirms the fact that the benefit of reservations does not reach these sections as per the legal provisions. It also negates the government's line of thinking that reservations alone can put an end to the social discrimination and exploitation of the S.Cs and S.Ts. There is need to set up a national-level commission to go into the issue.

Sanjai Kumar

Hazaribagh, Bihar

Saffron education

The tactics of Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi of packing important academic institutions with RSS men ("Agendas and appointments," November 26) must be a matter of concern to all those who take pride in calling ours a pluralistic tradition.

The basic aim of the BJP-led Government in this game is to rewrite history in its own perspective and present it as the real thing to the younger generation. The BJP has already done this in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. As many as 13,000 Vidya Bharti schools, controlled by the RSS, inculcate "Bharatiya culture" in the youth.

The NCERT, which used to evaluate textbooks and which had once criticised the Vidya Bharti's choice of books for their 'communal approach', is now headed by a member of the Sangh Parivar. I request Murli Manohar Joshi not to steal from children their innocence and open-mindedness which alone will help them make India great in the 21st century.

Ahmad Ali

Unsar, Uttar Pradesh

The Pope in India

The Pope made it clear that his goal is the evangelisation of Asia. This was stated in the document "Ecclesia in Asia", issued during his visit. However, your report ("The Pope in India" November 26) ignores this and, instead, calls such "interpretation" of his visit (as if an interpretation was needed) mischievous. I think that even the Vatican would have trouble agreeing with the writer's innovative spin.

Prashant Rao

Michigan, U.S.

★ ★ ★

It is not as if only Asia needs a large infusion of evangalisation as exhorted by the Pope. In the United States, attendance in the churches of various denominations is rapidly declining and some of them have even closed down. This has alarmed philanthropic Christian institutions such as the Arthur DeMoss Foundation, which has spent about $25 million in the past one year distributing booklets free of cost to people living in a country which is basically Christian.

Most organised religions are on the decline in many parts of the world as religion is becoming increasingly personal and non-denominational. The Pope has done his job exceedingly well, for which he is widely admired.

Kangayam R. Rangaswamy

North Carolina, U.S.

★ ★ ★

It is time the right to convert to any faith, an inalienable right under the Constitution, is debated in our secular nation. If conversion was a taboo right from the beginning of human evolution, religions would not have evolved and we all would be only practising animism. Religion has evolved for the better. As a result, civilisation has progressed more in certain parts of the world than others. India has evolved now into a semi-modern society because of education. Like Europe, it will one day evolve into a modern society whose religious values will naturally undergo a change for the better – a superior religion and a superior civilisation. If Hinduism does not evolve to meet

is social and spiritual progress, it will turally become obsolete like many ropean cults of yesteryear.

R. K. Anand

Mysore

Christian population

The article "A numbers game" (December 10) sheds light on the issue of religious conversions.

In an effort to implement its "hidden agenda", the Sangh Parivar, with the support of a section of the media, seeks to distort history and facts. The graphics showing the decadal growth in population establishes the fact that the hue and cry over conversions is but much ado about nothing. In a context in which Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee himself called for a national debate on conversions, the figures provided in the article should be an eye-opener to everyone.

Justin Jayaraj

Kozhikode, Kerala

Nyerere

Julius Nyerere ("A socialist and a visionary," November 19) believed in world peace, African unity and the welfare of the underdog. One of his great accomplishments was to have kept Tanzania united under one-party rule with no internal strifes. The country achieved more than 80 per cent literacy. And with aid from Scandinavian countries he completed a number of power and water supply schemes, besides establishing a rail link to the Zambian copper belt in record time with China's help. The employment of Indian, Canadian and European teachers enabled the country to impart modern education at the school and university level.

A high level of economic development was offset by a costly war with Idi Amin, rehabilitation of refugees from Rwanda and military help to southern neighbours like Angola and Mozambique. The new capital project was also one, with a high cost. Revenue collection was poor in all the nationalised properties.

Nyerere's personal integrity was remarkable. As a President, he stayed in a small cottage by the side of the presidential palace, rather than in the palace itself.

B. Ramachandran

Chennai

Diesel prices

The government is grappling with the problem of deficit in the oil pool account. Tinkering with the price of kerosene would hit the poor directly, while increasing the price of petrol and diesel would fuel inflation, again affecting the poor besides the affluent. The one product where the price hike will not hit the poor is LPG. Your story ("The burden of diesel price," November 19) says that the demand for LPG is likely to touch 7.9 million tonnes by 2002. This works out to some 411 million household cylinders. The subsidy for LPG is a whopping Rs. 140 a cylinder. If this subsidy is totally withdrawn, the savings will amount to Rs. 57.5 billions (Rs. 5,750 crores). This is the most humane solution that will leave the poor unscathed and help contain inflation. LPG users, who generally belong to a higher economic stratum, will be able take this hike in their stride.

As for the adulteration with subsidised kerosene of other petroproducts by unscrupulous dealers, petrochemical engineers should think of some distinct colouring agent or flavour that would enable even untrained people to detect adulteration.

R. Rajaraman

Chennai

Narmada

M.U. Purohit, Consulting Engineer, Sardar Sarovar Project, has criticised H.M. Desarda and "those who campaign against the so-called unsustainable development of natural resources", whom he patronisingly calls well-meaning activists ("Of development and deprivation," November 19).

Purohit accuses Arundhati Roy of exaggerating the number of victims of large dam projects. Surjit Bhalla, he says, has 'proved' that dams have displaced only five to eight million people in India. The Sardar Sarovar Project itself will take the land of at least 3.2 lakh people, many of them tribal people. It would help Purohit if he reads the report of the Morse Commission of the World Bank, whose study of the rehabilitation problem and the dam's disastrous effects is more thorough and independent than that the three State governments concerned have ever attempted.

The government's land-for-land rehabilitation programme has been deceitful. The people of Gadher, for example, were taken to a prospective site for resettlement. The land they saw was flat. It had water nearby, the soil was rich, banana trees grew all around. The government assured them that it would build a school and a health centre, lay roads and provide electricity and water. The people signed on the dotted line. But when the day came to move, they were taken to a different site, an expanse of wasteland, with no water source. And, of course, no health centre, no school.

Secondly, the projected costs and benefits of the dam had been fudged. Even the water potential was heavily exaggerated. World Bank experts reported that the project would be able to deliver only half as much irrigation water as had been stated, and that the dam would silt up twice as fast as was being assumed. The costs projected ignore the rise in salinity in the river's lower reaches, destroying one of India's most lucrative fishing grounds. The World Bank also reported a rise in the incidence of malaria. The project was "taking malaria to the doorsteps of the villagers", it said.

Shockingly, Purohit asserts: "All the affected families need not necessarily be displaced. In fact, of the 33,014 affected families in Madhya Pradesh, 18,890 have opted to stay on as they will only be temporarily affected by flood backwaters. They need to be only temporarily shifted to nearby higher ground when such floods occur." In her 1996 book *Masters of Illusion*, Catherine Caulfield writes: "The progress of such schemes as Sardar Sarovar is entirely rational in view of the opportunities they present for their backers to enrich themselves at the public's expense... Engineers and bureaucrats can look forward to kickbacks from those whose land they overvalue for compensation purposes or purchase at inflated prices to resell to oustees, as well as from contractors who increase their profit margins by using shoddy materials or simply not doing the work at all."

J.B. D'Souza

Mumbai

America

"Another America" (November 19) gave a matter-of-fact account of the situation in a much-acclaimed 'utopia'. However, the problems mentioned are not exclusively American. Any state's success depends on the extent of employment generation, which alone can eradicate poverty and give a sense of belonging to the people. One per cent of the population holding 40 per cent of the national wealth is not a problem as long as every citizen is assured of a job. No economic system in the world seems to have realised this.

Pushpendra Singh

Rewa, Madhya Pradesh

Rumblings of a revolution

Iran is on the verge of a sea change.

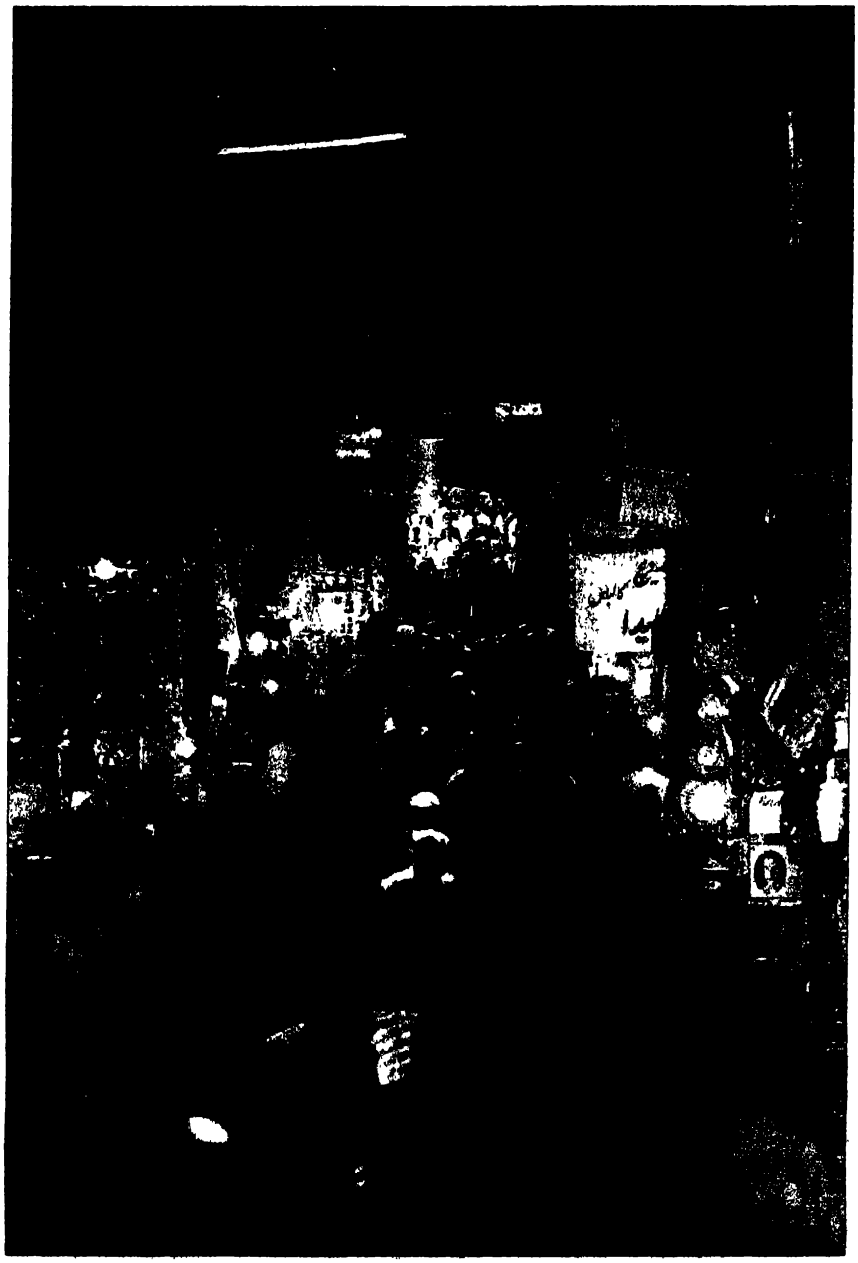
KESAVA MENON
in Teheran

EVEN the most ardent of pro-changers in Iran will not admit that they smell a whiff of 1979 in the air. It is only hope mingled with fear about the course developments could take in the next few months that prevents them from acknowledging what every sense tells them is the objective reality. Nearly 20 years since the overthrow of the Iranian monarchy, the Islamic regime that took its place is fast losing its last shreds of legitimacy.

By February next year, the various tendencies jostling for supremacy within the clerical regime could finally acquiesce to the growing public demand for democracy, and effectuate a smooth transformation of the power structure into a truly democratic one. If developments take such a course, Iran can emerge as a liberal society enriched by a revolutionary morality. That is the hope. Alternatively, elements of the clergy whose interests are entrenched in the *status quo* could battle other clergymen and the vast majority of Iranians whose views they espouse. There is no small danger that some *status quo*ists would be prepared to destroy Iran in order to save the revolution. Therein lies the fear.

The objective reality in Iran today is that the Islamic Revolution as a political system has run its course. It is over. As a system where the higher echelons of the clergy directed the praxis of society with overwhelming support from the people, it no longer exists. The top clergyman continues to issue directives to the people and his loyalists are ready to silence those who show defiance. But they are no longer the vanguard of a revolution which draws sustenance from the people; only a junta clinging to dictatorial powers. The smarter clerics – the reformers – realise that the Iranian people have decided to take control of their own lives and that the clergy in this deeply religious society can best contribute through guidance and advice.

Three years ago, the position of the Wali Faqih (the Supreme Religious Jurisconsult), Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, had seemed unassailable. It was impossible to find any Iranian who would openly criticise the Leader or even question the judgment he exercised in particular instances. There was some talk of differences in outlook between Khamenei and President Hojatolleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani but it was not only politically incorrect but revolutionary anathema to talk of any split or duality in the clerical hierarchy. It was no secret that there were different tendencies within the clerical establishment but there was a sustainable myth that the clergy would successively resolve their differences and do so in the interests of Iranian society as a whole. This often went beyond the level



JEROME DELAY AP

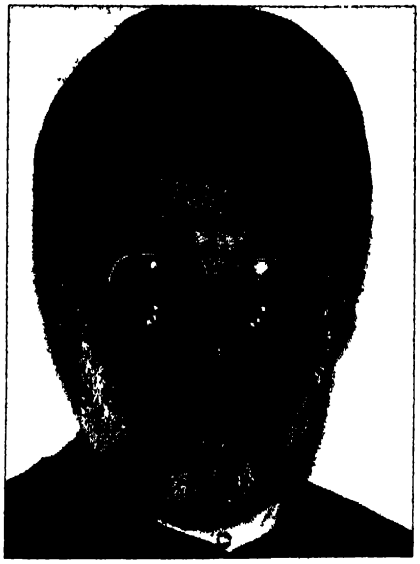
Shoppers at a Teheran souk. Over 70 per cent of Iranians now want their society to be pluralistic and multi-sectoral.

f mere pretext. Most Iranians seemed repared to make the effort to believe that ıey were participants in a process and also omponents of a system uniquely esigned for Iranian needs.

Today even the mildest of controversial statements by Khamenei invites a barrage of criticism in the liberal press. In the public regard, he often comes across as a fool and sometimes as a charlatan, while Rafsanjani is almost universally considered a ruthless and amoral politician. Hard-core conservatives, such as the Janatis and the Yazdis who were once admired for their anti-imperialist boldness, are now feared for their fanaticism. The language used against the conservative clergy, whether the conversation takes place in private, in offices or in the street, is usually strong, often unprintable. As for the Vilayat-e-Faiqh – the post-revolutionary system wherein the Wali Faqih is the ultimate source of authority – the dominant opinion is that it must transform itself into something like a constitutional monarchy if it is to continue to have any relevance. The "Us-Them" duality is the fundamental precept in the Iranian political lexicon now.

Until recently, it was difficult for an external observer to assess concretely the balances within the Iranian system. Right from the beginning of the revolutionary epoch, it has been evident that there were a host of competing tendencies within the establishment. Different viewpoints on civic, economic, strategic and social issues were fused with ideological teachings from all manner of sources and the whole was further catalysed by the tenets of Islam to produce a smorgasbord of political agendas. But all this was within an establishment that was overwhelmingly clerical. Political agendas bereft of a scriptural underpinning were either banned altogether or allowed to rot in the margins. Now there is a fundamental change.

While the most prominent actors in the unfolding Iranian drama are garbed in clerical roles, they are merely actors, no more the playwrights. The dominant themes in the unfolding Iranian situation are now scripted by people outside the clerical establishment: liberal journalists who make their newspapers function like, and thereby substitute for, political parties; student, labour and professional groups, and the huge mass of working women and educated girls who find that the clerics' intellectual meanderings have no relevance to their sectoral requirements; and professors of theology like Souroush, "the Iranian Luther".



REUTERS

President Mohammed Khatami. His role in the new Iranian revolution has been to keep its pace steady so that too hasty a push does not produce a backlash.

When so many groups start articulating their separate aspirations, all at the same time, a cacophony could be expected. Paradoxically Iran is in a rather fortunate situation in this respect because each of these groups realise that they are in the initial phase of self-definition. If various institutions are to function in harmony, they have to set out the ground rules to demarcate their respective spheres. If emerging institutions have to work within their legitimate sphere, so do existing institutions. A net result is the demand that every social institution be limited to its appropriate and legitimate sphere. Since in the Iranian scheme of things until now religion was the social institution which subsumed all others, the common demand now is that the role of religion in society be henceforth restricted.

THE overall development has not been as neatly linear as set out above, but the point is that across a wide swathe of public opinion the majority demand is for restriction in the role of religion while only one segment stands for the *status quo*. This has resulted in the demarcation between the "us" and the "them". The demarcation might not have mattered much if the majority of the people had not been so obsessed with religion that they supported the "them" against the multitude of other institutions. But what became clear during the presidential election of 1997 and was subsequently re-confirmed by the elections to the local bodies last year, is that over 70 per cent of the Iranian populace now wants their society to be a pluralistic and multi-sectoral one.

There were elements within the clerical hierarchy – such as Syed Mohammed Khatami, Abdollah Nouri, Mousavi-Koeniha – who were able to respond to this fundamental change in public beliefs and aspirations. The leadership they have provided has been no small factor in this mass shifting of social aspirations. Khatami hammered away at the importance of the "rule of law" – that all systems and processes must function according to clearly established rules – during his election campaign of 1997. The "rule of law" was a euphemistic expression to convey that the various components of the clerical establishment – including the office of the Wali Faqih, and the constitutional and administrative bodies under his control – should be just as subject to the law as any other social institution.

Khatami's role in the new Iranian revolution has been to keep its pace steady so that too hasty a push does not produce a backlash. The job of pushing the envelope has been left to others and none has done it to such devastating effect as Abdollah Nouri, Managing Editor of the *Khordad* newspaper. Nouri made one foray after another into subjects not considered *kosher* by the dominant elements of the clerical establishment. Sections of the Koranic criminal code that provide for recompense to victims of aggression were questioned for their lack of contemporaneity. *Khordad* also published articles that expressed the views of the National Front for Iran and the Freedom Movement of Iran – organisations which had contributed to the overthrow of the Shah, but had subsequently been de-legitimised by the clergy. That was only the prelude.

Nouri was arraigned before a special clerical court on charges that the *Khordad* had published libellous material and spread lies. Himself a Hojatolleslam (a theological scholar whose grade is just below that of Ayatollah) and a member of the "family of the revolution", Nouri went before the court and blew up a virtual philosophical landmine beneath the clerical establishment. In a legal defence that is bound to become one of Iran's most important historical documents, Nouri blasted almost every single taboo which has constrained the nation. He questioned the legitimacy of the court; when told that its legitimacy was unquestionable since it had been set up by the Leader, Nouri retorted that the Leader's action was itself illegitimate since he had never been vested with limitless authority.

On relations with the United States, something that Khamenei rails against in and out of season, Nouri demanded to know why the issue could not be discussed exhaustively in public when secret parleys were going on. On relations with Israel, Nouri wanted to know why Iran must have such a closed mind when the Palestinians were beginning to look after their own affairs. On the house arrest imposed on Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri (Imam Khomeini's chosen successor until he was superseded by Khamenei) Nouri wanted to know why one of the most important religious scholars in the country was being denied the right to communicate with his fellow citizens. On the National Front and the Freedom Movement, Nouri wanted to know why they were proscribed when the Imam himself had praised their contribution to the Revolution.

Nouri was sent to jail for five years and banned from practising journalism for another five. But by the time he had finished, he had set off a philosophical earthquake. A week later, its tremors were shaking Qom, the citadel of the Ayatollah's power. Leading theologians had joined publishers, students, academics and ordinary citizens in questioning the legitimacy of not just the court which tried Nouri, but the entire establishment that it had come to represent. When the revolutionary establishment punished Nouri, one of the intellectual firebrands who had helped create it in the first place, it exposed itself as a beast which devours its own offspring.

THE mistakes committed by the *status quo*ists have contributed as much to the decline of their standing as the attacks by the pro-changers. At almost every stage of the confrontation that has been going on since Khatami's election, the conservatives have opted for iron-hand methods. Their refusal to confirm some of Khatamis choices for the Cabinet, or endorse the impeachment of others were among the milder rebuttals of the conservatives. To the Khatami Government's efforts to make the national debate as wide as possible by liberally issuing licences for new publications, the conservatives retaliated by using the plethora of courts at their command to close one after the other.

Several secular but moderate intellectuals were killed by a group of supposedly "rogue" intelligence operatives. Enquiries into the killings have not been concluded but dark rumours abound that the killings were pursuant to *fatwa*s issued by conserv-



HASAN SARBAKHSHIAN/AP

Abdullah Nouri, Managing Editor of the *Khordad*, who was sentenced to five years in prison by a special clerical court on November 27 for spreading "anti-Islamic propaganda".

ative theologians. Students protesting against the closure of a liberal newspaper were set upon by the Ansar-e-Hizbollah, the conservatives' strong-arm brigade. While several of the protesters were sentenced to imprisonment, not a single Ansar has been punished for the murderous assault. Ansar chieftains are openly talking of procuring arms to "defend the revolution", and there is no indicationthat any action will be taken against them.

In earlier instances the conservatives could fall back upon the Leader, whose stand on various issues was left ambiguous. This enabled Khamenei to step in and sort out differences whenever the conservatives boxed themselves into a corner. Khamenei's interventions almost always helped the conservatives, but not to such an extent that he lost all legitimacy to mediate on the other side. But of late, Khamenei had begun miscalculating, and not surprisingly, his impartiality was exposed to be a hoax in the Nouri trial.

Iranian conservatives are today on a slippery path to nowhere. Some of them genuinely believe that the viewpoints they espouse are sanctified by religion. Others have a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* since they have reaped the monetary benefits the revolutionary set-up has thrown their way. Whatever their motivation, they realise that they are set against the tide of history, and their only real hope now is that a flash-flood of violence will somehow stymie the inevitable. There is genuine fear amongst the reformers and the public that the conservatives will provoke a violent confrontation, and that too, very soon.

Time-wise there is a definite span within which the Iranian developments have to pan out. Parliamentary elections are due on February 18, 2000 and it is almost a foregone conclusion that with the momentum so much in their favour the reformists will sweep the slate. Once, or if, they do, they are certain to transform completely the clerical establishment even if they do not legislate it out of existence.

For the moment the conservatives can draw relief from the fact that they control the apparatus, the Council of Guardians, which decides who should be allowed to stand for election. But this power is also limited in practical terms because if the conservatives do prevent the pro-changers from putting their first, second or third choice candidates on the ballot paper the turn-out will be so poor as to make a mockery of the electoral process. Large-scale abstention from the ballot booths will be just another indictment of the conservatives' illegitimacy.

The next two months will be testing times for Khatami. There are murmurs of dissent within the pro-changer ranks, especially among the students, at his perceived pusillanimity. The more ardent among them feel that Khatami should have been far more outspoken in his critique of the conservatives. The President has so far succeeded in counselling the dissenters that patience will bring its rewards; he has enough supporters among the sober-minded citizenry to help him hold the ranks together.

As one leading woman pro-changer put it, the current situation in Iran could be seen in either of two metaphorical terms. It could either be viewed as a huge pool of petrol waiting for a spark. Or it could be seen as a balloon which can be blown up some more before it reaches the bursting point. Either way an explosion looks inevitable unless some inconceivable outlet can be found to let out the pressure.

So far, the clerics of the *status quo* have not bent to the ideas of the reform advocates. The conservatives' belief in the legitimacy of violence could lead to a blood-bath. If so, they will only prolong the death throes of the Islamic revolutionary system. Something even more profoundly disturbing for the religious hardliners could happen sooner than they think. Beneath the sober commentary and grim analysis there is another sound to be heard on the streets – the sound of bubbling laughter. The tragedy that the Revolution has now become could in time be turned into a farce by the people. ■

A message in Malaysia

The ruling coalition headed by Mahathir Mohamad secures a two-thirds parliamentary majority in the Malaysian general elections, but concedes some ground in the Malay heartland to an Islamist party.

P.S. SURYANARAYANA
in Kuala Lumpur

MALAYSIA'S long-reigning Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, has overcome the challenge of the incumbency factor and led his party to a two-thirds majority in the 193-member Parliament. The timing of the tenth general elections, held on November 29, was Mahathir's choice, but the campaign was dominated by the Opposition's calls for political reforms. The polling took place in the glare of unprecedented international scrutiny that was laced with the moral sympathy of the West for the cause of political reforms.

Mahathir's sense of vindication is, however, moderated by a wake-up call of sorts. Beginning his fifth consecutive term as Prime Minister, Mahathir faces a new challenge: that of arresting the rise of political Islam. Mahathir is known for his ability to manage skilfully a multiracial political coalition in a society that is characterised by religious pluralism; he is well-placed to stem the "green tide". That political idiom describes the growing political influence of the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS), which made spectacular gains in the elections. But there is more to this than meets the eye.

In the post-election situation, given the perception that the PAS has seized the heartland of the majority Malays, ideologues in the ruling Barison Nasional (B.N.) alliance have begun to see the need for a reality check. The widespread belief is that there is much disenchantment with the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), first among equals in the 14-party ruling coalition. The PAS' political gains in this election are seen to be linked to UMNO's suspected alienation from sections of the Malay community. The PAS is also believed to have acquired political respectability on account of its association with a high-profile elitist Opposition group that is campaigning for reforms – the party that derives inspiration from Anwar Ibrahim, the imprisoned former Deputy Prime Minister.

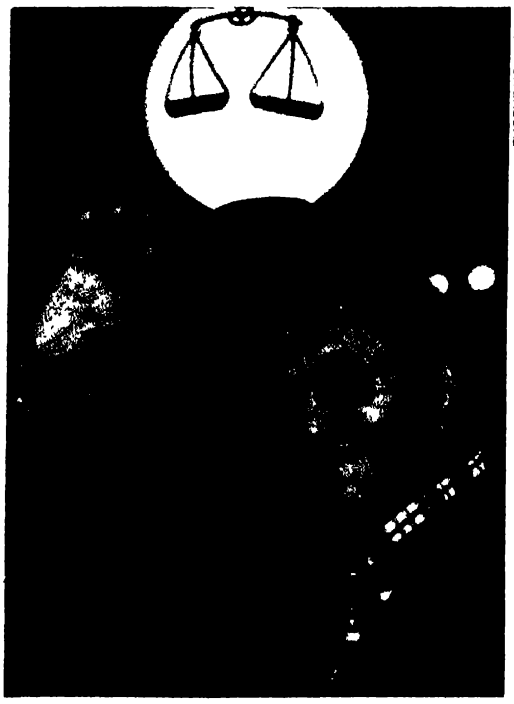
In the run-up to the elections, the main question was whether the 9.7-million Malaysian voters would opt for a paradigm shift away from 'Mahathirism' – a mix of nationalistic and pragmatic policies that stood for an economic revival without running to the International Monetary Fund for help, and an Asian dose of political liberalisation with an emphasis on the core values of peace and order. Two front-ranking Opposition units – the Parti Keadilan Nasional (PKN), led by Anwar's wife, and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) – in particular, campaigned for a vote against 'Mahathirism'. But a paradigm shift of a different kind may now take place unless Mahathir is able to reverse the PAS' entry into UMNO's citadel.

These trends, although discernible, are not self-evident in the election results. Of the 193 seats, the ruling B.N., which includes UMNO and the minorities-oriented Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), secured 148 seats, constituting a two-thirds majority. Of the 45 other seats that went to the Opposition, the regional Parti Bersatu Sabah won three, while the remaining 42 seats went to Barisan Alternatif (B.F.), a new four-party Opposition grouping. Within the B.F., the Anwar-inspired PKN secured just five seats; the DAP, which is known to have support among ethnic Chinese and among people of Indian ethnic stock, won 10 seats. The lion's share of the B.F's gains went to the PAS: the party won 27 parliamentary seats and can now lay claim to the post of Leader of the Opposition, so far held by the DAP.

The real measure of the PAS' success is the fact that it retained power in decisive fashion in the State of Kelantan and won comprehensively in the oil-rich State of Terengganu. The PAS has made headway in the Prime Minister's home State of Kedah too, but it has not done well enough to capture power there. Even taken together, these do not amount to an Islamic fundamentalist "menace" to the marginally Muslim-majority Malaysia. However, the PAS has, while making gains in the State elections, eroded UMNO's traditional support base at the level of the parliamentary constituencies.

If the B.N. still managed to secure a two-thirds majority – winning, as Mahathir pointed out, more seats than it did in 1995, when it won 132 seats – it is probably because of the demographic matrix of the national constituencies. According to initial estimates, the B.N. won about 56 per cent of the popular vote, and the B.F. about 41 per cent.

Ahead of the elections, the Opposition parties had accused the Mahathir Government of gerrymandering in order to benefit UMNO. Independent estimates have it that the ethnic Chinese, who constitute about 28 per cent of the population, could



EUGENE HOHIKO

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad after his victory on November 30. He now faces the new challenge of arresting the rise of 'political Islam'.



ANDY WONG/AP

Supporters of the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS) at an election rally in the northern State of Kedah. The party won 27 seats to become the biggest Opposition bloc in the new Parliament.

have influenced the result at best in 12 or 13 constituencies. Malay Muslims make up about 55 per cent of the population. Ethnic Indians, who are mostly Tamils but who also include people of Telugu and Malayalee origin, account for less than 10 per cent: they are in no position to tilt the scales in any single constituency.

WILL the elections and the verdict make a difference to how Malaysia is ruled? Harold Crouch, a scholar, had concluded in the mid-1990s that "the Malaysian electoral system has been organised in such a way that it would be difficult for the Opposition to defeat the government." But he argued at the same time that "the electoral process in Malaysia does contribute in an important way to making the Malaysian government responsive, to some extent at least, to pressures from the community." The question now is whether the "pressures from the community" on the government will centre on the need for political reforms, or rather the need to arrest the perceived rise of political Islam.

A view that prevails among UMNO ideologues is that the party, which has under Mahathir visualised the gradual emergence of "Bangsa Malaysia" or a pan-Malaysian nation subsuming but not negating the plurality of ethnic identities, should now guard against being soft on the Islamisation of politics, to the point of alienating the Chinese and the Indians and the parties in the B.N. fold that represent their interests.

The campaign this time was lacklustre; both the B.N. and the B.F. banked heavily on the support of the "silent majority" to see them through. In such a situation, the interpretation of the results has become much more dicey than at any time before. The near-collapse of the "Anwar phenomenon" as an election issue, despite his tactical refusal to be nominated as a candidate, disheartened the reformist sections of the Opposition. An Anwar loyalist, Chandra Muzzafar, said that he felt saddened by the possibility that the verdict "may well mean that Anwar will slowly recede into oblivion".

Relevant to the new context of Opposition unity is an earlier assessment of Anwar by Jomo K.S., an academic who recently filed a lawsuit challenging the alleged denial of voting rights to nearly 700,000 potential voters (many of whom were thought to be Anwar's supporters) by not registering them in time. In focus in this context is Anwar's "remarkable success in preserving his Islamic reputation despite making various compromises" during his association with UMNO.

At a different level, Malaysian political commentators such as M.G.G. Pillai argue that Mahathir may come under increasing pressure from within the ruling elite, if steps are not seen to be taken to retrieve the core ground that UMNO is seen to have lost to the PAS in the Malay heartland. ■

V.S. SAMBANDAN
in Colombo

THIRTEEN candidates have joined the presidential race in Sri Lanka, but the high-decibel contest is only between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and United National Party leader Ranil Wickremasinghe.

The campaign that is under way, is marked for the signals the two leaders send to the masses and the implications of their vote-catching slogans on the island's future political course. An issue that has dominated the political agenda of the two main rivals is the resolution of the ethnic conflict. The outlook of the two candidates on the military aggression between the security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could tilt the scales in the December 21 election to the Executive Presidency. Actually there is no wave in favour of any candidate.

In a clear shift from the 1994 election, the overwhelming support Chandrika Kumaratunga enjoyed at that time no longer exists. Left with mere blocks of votes, Kumaratunga and Wickremasinghe have to contend with the task of mobilising more support to expand further on their respective constituencies.

AN estimated 11.7 million voters are to exercise their franchise. The major groups include Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, plantation Tamils and Muslims. According to the latest statistics released by the Central Bank, Sinhalese constitute 74 per cent of the island's 18.55 million population. Sri Lankan Tamils constituting 12.6 per cent, Indian Tamils at 5.5 per cent and Moors comprising 7.1 per cent are the other major ethnic groups.

By religion, Buddhists constitute 69.3 per cent of the population, followed by Hindus (15.5 per cent), Muslims (7.5 per cent) and Christians (7.6 per cent).

In 1994, there was a cross-community backing for Kumaratunga's candidature as there was an island-wide euphoria in favour of peace. The response was particularly high in the northeastern area, which has a population of about 2.76 million.

Three weeks ahead of the election, there is an overall sense of dismay and cynicism over the polity and the approach of the political players to the issues confronting the nation.

The Sinhala vote, which has always seen a two-way split, is being sought by 12

A tough presidential race

The campaign for the presidential election in Sri Lanka hots up although there is an overall sense of dismay over the approach of the political players to the issues confronting the nation.

of the 13 contestants. Needless to say, the main tussle will be between three Chandrika Kumaratunga, representing the People's Alliance (P.A.), Wickremasinghe and Nandana Gunathilaka, a politburo member of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The JVP's entry into the fray makes a consolidation of the Sinhala vote a harder grind; this means that there is essentially a three-way split in the majority vote. Consequently, the main players have to either go all out to assuage Sinhala sentiments, or ensure that the majoritarian sensibilities are not ruffled.

The sense of alienation felt by the country's largest minority group, the Tamils, and the indications that they are not keen on exercising their franchise, provide the foundation for converting the election into an essentially southern (Sinhala) affair.

The mainstream Tamil political parties, which had initially exercised restraint, began in early December to spell out their stands. The former militant organisation have taken divergent positions on extension of support to either Chandrika Kumaratunga or Wickremasinghe. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) called upon the Tamil voters to reject both the candidates.

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which has been appointed by the P.A. as its polling agent in the northern Jaffna peninsula, was the first to declare its position. Douglas Devanada, the EPDP chief, reposed faith in Kumaratunga and extended the party's support for her candidature. He said: "We are confident that the President will resolve the Tamil issue. It may not be possible to do it at once. It has to be done in stages. But we are sure that she will meet our hopes and aspirations."

The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) has extended its support to Wickrem-asinghe, while the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), like the TULF, has distanced itself from the main contestants. The EPRLF leaders said that the party would "support any party which genuinely attempts to find a lasting solution to the Tamil national question with the active participation of a third-party mediator." The party's secretary-general, Suresh Premachandran, said that the party did not have "the moral right to request the Tamil people to vote for either of the two main parties."

It is in this ambivalent background that the LTTE supremo, V. Prabakaran, made his annual Heroes' Day speech on November 27. He accused the Tamil parties of Sinhala chauvinism, and in a detailed charge against Kumaratunga, described her regime as "the worst form of tyrannical oppression" against the island's Tamils.

While this harsh attack against Kumaratunga has the possibility of translating a hardline Sinhala-Buddhist consolidation behind her, Prabakaran's undiluted stance on the issue of a separate Eelam is also bound to agitate the majority south. Kumaratunga has already started to capitalise on the proposals made by Wickremasinghe, which involved talks with the Tigers and providing for an interim administration by involving them. She has told the southern voters that such steps would lead to separation. A map showing the northeastern region in red colour, was splashed on the front page of a recent issue of a State-run daily, was a case in point. Whipping up passions against "a larger enemy" is considered an effective mechanism to consolidate the southern vote.

THE campaign across the southern parts of the island witnessed its share of election-related violence. There have been reports of organised attacks on political opponents, intimidation of party workers and party flags being damaged. The police announced stern action to stem possible violent turn of events.

For his part, the Acting Commissioner of Elections has introduced a code of ethics for the contestants. He has asked them to exercise restraint in their speeches.

With the two main contestants facing death threats, there is increasing concern about a possible assassination attempt ahead of the election. There is an indication that the LTTE would give a clear direction to the Tamil voters in the north and east.

Until now, the call has been restricted to "not to trust Kumaratunga". This does not necessarily mean "trust Wickremasinghe". But, if such a direction were to come, the going will be more difficult for the President.

In addition, concerns abound about possible rigging in the Army-held areas of the north and east as well as in the polling booths to be set up in government-held areas for Tamils living in rebel-held territory. Such concerns gave rise to calls for inviting foreign election observers.

The two main contenders find themselves heading for a photo-finish. But, as in any marathon race, there is still time. But predictably, the acts of the LTTE would largely determine the outcome. ■



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

President Chandrika Kumaratunga.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

Ranil Wickremasinghe, the UNP leader.

The wooing game

In a changed perception of India, the LTTE leadership feels that whatever the past hostilities, there is no denying that India is the greatest friend of Sri Lankan Tamils, and by extension, of the LTTE.

D.B.S. JEYARAJ

ANTON STANISLAU BALASINGHAM, the 63-year-old political adviser of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), relocated clandestinely from the Northern mainland Wanni in Sri Lanka to Britain in the last week of May 1999. *The Hindu* was the first newspaper to report the move on June 9.

That report stated that the shift had two objectives. The first was to restructure the LTTE's international secretariat in London and spearhead a propaganda drive on a global scale. The second was to start initiatives seeking third-party mediation to revive negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. Balasingham's health had been deteriorating, and it was expected that he would avail himself of the medical facilities available in Britain.

The past six months have seen Balasingham living quietly in London. While the Sinhala extremist fringe in Sri Lanka was demanding aloud that he be deported to Colombo, Balasingham adopted a low profile in London. He never appeared in public but engaged in quite a lot of political activity of the behind-the-scenes variety. It was, however, common knowledge among Tamil expatriates in London that Balasingham was in town. On November 27, Balasingham deviated from his low-key lifestyle and went public with a splash.

The occasion was Maaveerar Naal or "Great Heroes' Day". It has been the practice of the LTTE to observe November 27 each year as a day to remember and honour those Tigers who had fallen in battle. The first LTTE cadre to be killed was Sathiyanathan alias Shankar of Kambarmalai in Jaffna district. He died on November 27, 1982. After that more than 15,000 Tiger cadres have died in combat. The LTTE has observed the day since 1989 both in Sri Lanka and abroad. It is the most looked-forward-to event in the Tiger almanac.

A highlight of the day is an oration by LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakaran, described in LTTE jargon as an "address to the nation". As Prabakaran is an elusive personality and is not accessible to the media, his annual speech is seen as a barometer of the political mood of the Tigers. The speech receives wide publicity nationally and internationally. It is treated more or less as a policy statement of the LTTE. Aspects of the speech, such as brevity and ambiguity, gives rise to wide-ranging interpretations with regard to the current LTTE policy as enunciated by the numero uno.

THIS year, however, there was a difference. Anton Balasingham, referred to occasionally as an "LTTE ideologue" and "theoretician", was in London. He and his Australia-born wife Adele were the guests of honour at the Great Heroes Day ceremony held at the London Arena. A crowd of nearly 7,000 people participated. Balasingham addressed the meeting for nearly an hour. What he did was to amplify and clarify the policy of the LTTE as outlined already by the Tiger supremo. Owing to the difference in the time zones, Prabakaran's speech, relayed over the LTTE radio in the Wanni "Voice of Tigers", had been broadcast in the West before Balasingham spoke. The LTTE political adviser also made it clear that he had spoken with his leader before attending the meeting and had been briefed on what he had to say.

Thus Balasingham's speech was in a sense an elaborated version of what Prabakaran had said earlier. It was more explicit on fundamentals and devoid of the deliberate ambiguity that characterises Prabakaran's speeches. There were also significant departures, with Balasingham touching on areas where Prabakaran was silent.

One such issue was the LTTE's relationship with India. The LTTE, which used to indulge in rhetoric about its having defeated the world's fourth largest army, has been conspicuously silent on that in the recent past. Moreover, it has been consciously wooing India of late and has been trying for a rapprochement with the Bharatiya Janatha Party-led Government. (*Frontline*, July 30)

Balasingham's London speech outlined clearly the LTTE perception regarding India. The past decade has seen Tamil ultra-nationalists on both sides of the Palk Straits indulge in vitriolic outbursts against New Delhi on its alleged bias against Sri Lankan Tamils. The difficult situation had been aggravated by challenges to Indian "hegemonism". But in contrast, Balasingham's speech was markedly restrained and a complete departure from the usual anti-Indianism uttered by others in the past.

Balasingham's comments on India were stated within the context of assessing the possibility of any foreign intervention. Sections of the media in India have reported that Balasingham was referring to India as a potential mediator.

But actually nothing of that kind was mentioned. Instead, what Balasingham stressed was that there was no chance of India intervening on behalf of the "Sinhala" government in Colombo as had happened in the past.

The LTTE political adviser poohpoohed the anxiety on the part of some sections of Lankan Tamils that there would be foreign intervention in Sri Lanka against the LTTE. After dismissing such a possibility, Balasingham went on to say that the only country that mattered to the Sri Lankan Tamils was India. Their only concern was about Indian involvement. Whatever the past hostilities, there was no denying that India was the greatest friend of Sri Lankan Tamils, and by extension, of the LTTE. India *engal nesa sakthi* (India is our friendly or allied force), Balasingham said amidst thundering applause.

Referring briefly to the sorry history of conflict with the Indian Peace Keeping Force, Balasingham said that the LTTE actually had no intention of confronting India militarily then. *Indiavode motha engalukku enna paithiyamaa?* (Are we so insane as to confront India?) he asked. But owing to wrong advice given to Rajiv

Gandhi, the fighting was necessitated. The Sri Lankan Tamil people, who regarded India as "god", were subjected to much hardship as a result of that conflict. Now India herself has realised the deficiencies and mistakes of the earlier policy towards Sri Lanka, he said.

There was now a new dispensation led by the BJP. Balasingham was of the opinion that this regime was favourably disposed towards the LTTE. Political parties and leaders who were concerned about the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka were part of this BJP Government. As such Balasingham ruled out the possibility of the present Indian government intervening militarily on behalf of the "Sinhala" government in Colombo. "That will not happen," he said.



SRIYANTHA WALPOLA

Anton Balasingham, the LTTE leader who relocated to London in May 1999, with his wife Adele.

At the same time, there were some doubts and misgivings on the part of India that were preventing it from supporting openly the aspirations of Sri Lankan Tamils. This had to do with erroneous perceptions regarding the LTTE. One was that the LTTE would interfere in Indian domestic politics and foment dissension within the Indian Union. Balasingham categorically stated that the LTTE would never ever try to interfere in the domestic sphere of India. All that it was concerned about was the liberation of its people from oppression.

Another fear related to the demonstration effect that the formation of a Tamil Eelam would have on Tamil Nadu and the consequent possibility of secession there. This fear was baseless, said Balasingham. The objective conditions were different. In Sri Lanka, the Tamils were compelled to fight for separation because of the oppression. They were killed, bombed, and shelled by the government. That is not the case in Tamil Nadu. There is a State government of its own there. There are political parties. There is Kalaingar (a reference to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister). The State is prospering. Why should Tamil Nadu separate from India? There is no need to do so," said Balasingham.

After describing India as a friendly force, Balasingham went on to say that when Tamil Eelam becomes a reality, the fledgling state would be India's staunchest ally in the region. It would revolve within India's orbit. "I have been authorised by *thalaivar* (leader) to make this pronouncement. I hereby guarantee openly that we will not cause any problem to India and that we will remain the staunchest ally of India in this region," announced Balasingham to a wildly cheering audience.

APART from the "India factor" much of what Balasingham articulated was by way of amplifying what Prabakaran had said. There were, however, four areas where Balasingham, through his amplifications and clarifications, improved on what his leader had stated in his address. These related to the aborted attempts to conduct negotiations, the presidential election, the military aims of the LTTE and the potential for peace talks.

Prabakaran, possibly by design, was reticent and ambiguous on these matters, thereby causing contradictory interpretations of the LTTE position. But Balasingham, being more explicit in his speech, placed the LTTE position on these matters in a better and more enlightening perspective.

First, Balasingham revealed that contrary to Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga's stated position that there would be no talks with the LTTE at this juncture, there had been three covert moves by her in this direction. Three channels had been made use of. "Bishops (he did not elaborate), Norway and the British Commonwealth Secretariat" were the emissaries, said Balasingham. The unacceptable aspect of these overtures was their clandestine nature, he said.

"Chandrika wanted secret talks in a foreign country within a short time-frame without anyone knowing. She did not want the Army, Cabinet Ministers and the people to know about these talks. Also, these were to be conducted without a ceasefire while the fighting was on. We declined because we did not want to do anything behind the backs of our people. Ours is a people's war. Whatever we do, it must be in the open and the people must be informed. Besides, while the war continues and our people get killed and maimed, how can we go to a foreign country, stay in plush hotels and talk pleasantly as if there was no war?" asked the LTTE ideologue.

Secondly, Balasingham spoke about the presidential election. (While Kumaratunga adopts a public position of being lukewarm towards the possibility of resumption of talks with the Tigers, the rival United National Party candidate, Ranil Wickremasinghe, has promised talks with the LTTE. This has led to the Kumaratunga camp accusing Wickremasinghe of striking a secret deal with the Tigers. There was also the expectation that the LTTE would indicate what Tamils are to do in terms of voting.) Balasingham dismissed specifically all talk about an understanding with the UNP. But he implied that Tamils should vote against Kumaratunga. What he said in essence was this:

"The past 50 years have seen the major Sinhala parties alternately discriminating against and deceiving the Tamil people. But as our leader said the last five years of Chandrika's rule have been the most terrible for Tamils. War, hunger, starvation, displacement, death, agony, and sorrow were everywhere. It had been a blood-stained, dark period. (Prabakaran was more severe in his speech calling it a curse on the Tamil people.) As far as elections are concerned they are to elect a new President for Sri Lanka. There is no practical benefit for the Tamil people. We are not concerned about this poll. It has not been our tradition to participate in such elections. We have no faith in them. In areas under our control there won't be any elections. But in other areas like Jaffna and

Batticaloa, the election will take place. The Tamil people there can do what they want.... They can vote for Chandrika or they can vote for Ranil. But there is one important thing that I must state here. If Chandrika comes to power again, it can only mean that the problems and hardships will continue. The tragic situation will prevail... We take no sides but the Tamil people know what to do."

Thirdly, on the military aims of the LTTE, Balasingham was boastful. He said that prior to the ongoing 'Unceasing Waves' campaign, there had been much pessimism about the military prowess of the Tigers. "Many Western nations thought the LTTE was a spent force. They thought Kumaratunga's 'war for peace' was succeeding."

"Even our own people were dejected. Jaffna was taken and the Army was advancing in the Wanni. 'What is the LTTE doing' was their question," said Balasingham. But Prabakaran was patient, he added. Preparations for the current operation had taken a year. There was intense training with live ammunition, resulting in several injuries during practice. Finally, the operation was launched. The martial ability of the LTTE was proved to the world. The ground situation has been transformed. Now there was a lull. But this was only to provide a brief respite to the cadres. The operation is 'Unceasing Waves'. Waves do not cease. They continue. We are yet to give *marunthu* (medicine) to *amma* (mother). The LTTE, according to Balasingham, was simply liberating the land from military aggression. The Wanni had been liberated but there were areas like Jaffna and Batticaloa. "We will go there also soon," said Balasingham amidst applause.

Fourthly, if liberation through armed struggle was the course of action, then what was the point in calling for talks? According to Balasingham, there are two reasons for doing so. Given the history, the LTTE does not trust any Sinhala government. The Tigers believe that the only durable solution would be a separate Tamil state – Tamil Eelam. It also does not believe that any government in Colombo could arrive at an equitable negotiated settlement. So the LTTE wants talks to expose the ulterior motives of the Sri Lankan government and prove to the world that no Sinhala government would grant Tamil rights.

There is also the need to avoid bloodshed and destruction. The LTTE, according to Balasingham, possesses the ability to drive the Army out of the Tamil areas. But it is offering an opportunity to the Army to withdraw peacefully. Before negotiations begin, a conducive climate must be created. For that the food embargo and restrictions on sending medical supplies to the Wanni and other areas must be removed. The Army of "aggression" must withdraw from the Eelam soil. Only then could meaningful discussions occur, Otherwise the war will continue and the Tigers will drive the Army away. Another important prerequisite for talks is that there must be third-party mediation. It could be a country or an international organisation.

GIVEN these "controversial" preconditions, there is scepticism over whether the LTTE is really keen on a negotiated settlement. But some analysts are optimistic. They feel that the Tigers are being maximalist in their stated pre-negotiation positions but could mellow if and when talks progress satisfactorily. In any case, given the obvious failure of Kumaratunga's war-for-peace strategy there is really no choice but to explore the possibility of talking to the Tigers, these sections feel. The presence of a third-party mediator could make a bindingly crucial difference this time, they say.

Others have their doubts, in view of the LTTE's track record. It would be another instance of the Tigers "talking" but not genuinely "negotiating", they say. Subjective and objective factors negate all chances of the LTTE ever coming into the mainstream of a "united" Sri Lanka, they say. Prabakaran's ideological commitment is firm and unwavering. Whatever Balasingham's semantics, in the final analysis that is the ground reality, they say.

That the LTTE wants to engage in talks with Colombo at the earliest has been made clear by another related development too. The Tamil United Liberation Front secretary-general and Member of Parliament from Trincomalee district, R. Sambanda, met Balasingham in London recently. The meeting was arranged through the efforts of the British authorities. It was held at the House of Commons building in the presence of a Labour Party MP. At that the meeting Sambanda called for a resumption of talks with the government. Balasingham shot it down saying that there was no point in talking just before presidential election. "Let the Sinhala people elect a new President and if that person genuinely desires a dialogue we can consider it with the aid of a third-party mediator," he said. So all indications at present are that talks will begin after the elections. ■

■ WORLD AFFAIRS

JOHN CHERIAN

MORE than two months after the Russian forces launched a full-scale assault on the secessionist government in Chechnya, the battle in the northern Caucasus is far from over. Although the Russian troops have encircled the Chechen capital, Grozny, fighting is raging in other parts of the province.

Grozny has virtually been reduced to a ghost town, battered by shelling and air raids. Eighty per cent of the city has been destroyed. Most of the civilians have left, but Chechen fighters are holed up in the capital waiting for the final Russian assault. Some Russian analysts are of the view that the military has no imminent plan to invade the Chechen capital. The Russian authorities do not want a repeat of the 1994-96 war when thousands of Russians were killed in the course of an assault on Grozny.

This time the Russian military's aim seems to be, in the words of a Russian commentator, to turn Grozny, slowly and methodically, into a "lifeless desert". With this goal in mind, Russian federal agencies are planning to cut off gas and electricity supplies to the Chechen capital. The Russian authorities are waiting for the civilian populace to evacuate fully from Grozny in order to implement these measures, and start non-stop artillery and air attacks on rebel positions there.

Chechen guerillas have engaged the Russian forces in fierce fighting during the two-month-old war. Russian authorities admitted that they have faced serious resistance from the guerillas. About 300 Russian soldiers have been killed, according to Russian Army officials. In the third week of November, a Russian reconnaissance patrol was ambushed and eliminated by a Chechen band. The going was comparatively easy for the Russian military in the first two months. Using air power to their maximum advantage, the Russian forces quickly seized the territory north of the Terek river, inhabited by Chechens traditionally loyal to Moscow. They also moved into Chechnya's lowlands from Dagestan and Ingushetia, on their way to Grozny.

With the harsh Russian winter having set in, the misery of the civilian population will grow. Civilians have been displaced in large numbers in what is officially described in Russia as an "anti-terrorist" drive.

The Caucasian cauldron

The Russian military offensive against secessionist elements in Chechnya reaches a critical point with the siege of Grozny and mounting pressure from the West to end the war.



Russian troops enter Achkhoi Martan, 25 km southwest of the Chechnyan capital of Grozny, on December 3. The Russian military, which has encircled Grozny, wants to convert Grozny into a mousetrap for the guerillas.

Western governments conveniently forgetting the havoc that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) airstrikes wrought on the civilian populace in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict have been quick in condemning the Russian military action in Chechnya which is part of the Russian Federation. In the last week of November, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) condemned the Russian offensive. Michael Camdessus the IMF Managing Director while addressing a workshop in Madrid said that negative reaction in the world to the events in Chechnya may put in doubt the question of extending Russia the IMF loans. The Chechen issue also occupied the centre stage in the OSCE summit in Istanbul where an attempt was made to make Russia the focus of criticism (see separate story). The West's blatant double standards has inflamed Russian public opin

IN the first week of December Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev described the rebels' position as hopeless but at the same time said that it could take another three months to crush them. The IMF has made it clear that as long as the military campaign in Chechnya goes on, Russia cannot avail of IMF credit. The Russian economy is badly in need of fresh IMF funding and it is no surprise that the West is crudely using the monetary body to blackmail the Russian Government to ease pressure on the Chechens. The Western pressure may begin to have an adverse impact on Russia if it does not bring the assault to a swift conclusion. Russia's discomfort has made the Chechen guerilla leaders want to make the conflict as long drawn out as possible. They scoff at the Russian military's plan to convert Grozny into a mousetrap for them and claim that the Russian troops themselves would get trapped if they enter Grozny as the Chechen fighters will retreat into the nearby mountains and mount a military offensive from the rear.

UNTIL a decade ago, Chechnya was a prosperous land. After the Russians were defeated in a civil war four years ago, Aslan Mashkadov was elected President of the breakaway territory. He proved to be a weak leader and dismally failed to arrest the widespread anarchy. Smuggling and hostage-taking became the order of the day. Shamil Basayev, a terrorist, is the most influential Chechen leader now. His writ seems to run more than that of President Mashkadov. Basayev rose to international notoriety when he seized a crowded hospital in neighbouring Stavropol and held the patients and doctors hostage. He along with another warlord, Khattab, were responsible for the military intrusion into neighbouring Dagestan (*Frontline* October 8, 1999), which sparked the present Russian military action.

It is said that the Chechen people's fight for independence has been influenced to a large extent by the injustices inflicted on them in the 1930s and 1940s by the Soviet Union. The entire Chechen nation was uprooted in 1944 on charges of collaborating with the Nazi forces and resettled mostly in Kazakhstan, where they enjoyed the same rights as other Soviet citizens. After Josef Stalin's death, they were resettled in Chechnya and the Chechen-Ingush Republic was merged with the Soviet Republic. A secessionist wave gained momentum in the province in the late 1980s when it became clear that the Soviet Union was on its last legs.

Chechnya's economic potential is immense. Besides its own oil resources, the republic is a corridor for oil and gas pipelines for the entire region. The fate of many important projects to pump oil and gas from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan depends on stability in Chechnya.

Chechnya's attempt to secede was spearheaded first by Dzokhar Dudayev, a former Major-General in the Soviet armed forces. In a sham election in 1991, in which only about 10-12 per cent of the Chechen population voted, Dudayev was elected President. Promptly thereafter, he demanded independence, and developed a well-equipped Army towards this end. But his push for independence was thwarted by the intervention of the Russian Army in December 1994. What followed was a bloody war that raged for 18 months and claimed thousands of lives on both sides. Dudayev himself was killed in the war. An agreement was signed between the Russian Government and the Chechen rebels in the summer of 1996. Under the agreement, the illegal Chechen paramilitary units were supposed to be disbanded and the federal forces withdrawn from Chechnya. A final decision on Chechnya's status was to be kept pending until the year 2001.

Moscow kept its part of the bargain and withdrew its forces from Chechen territory. But the Chechen guerillas started re-arming themselves with a vengeance and the "republic" became divided into zones of influence under the sway of warlords like Basayev and Khattab. Banditry and hostage-taking grew. In one instance, Chechen bandits stole 120,000 tonnes of oil from the Baku-Novorossiisk pipeline. Following this, federal authorities decided to close down the pipeline. The bomb explosions in Russian cities coupled with foolhardy incursions into neighbouring Dagestan were the last straw for the federal government in Moscow. The all-out offensive launched by the Russian army and air force is indicative of the mood of the political establishment in the country. The public response to the military initiative to bring the Chechen separatists to heel has been overwhelmingly favourable.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who was a virtual non-entity when he was appointed Prime Minister, is the most popular politician in Russia today. Seventy per cent of the Russian population want him to be President. Yevgeni Primakov, who was the favourite until October, has slipped in the popularity ratings.

But these are still early days. The tide could turn against the Government if the war drags on and the casualties grow. But given the fragile health of President Boris Yeltsin, the war could yield tremendous political dividends for a lucky few. And Putin being Yeltsin's designated heir-apparent, at least for the time being, could turn out the luckiest. ■

A forum for European interests

The OSCE summit in Istanbul underlines the West's ambition to emerge as a watchdog of democracy and human rights.

BISWAJIT CHOUDHURY

RUSSIA is a member of the 54-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and naturally, the Russian military's drive against guerillas in Chechnya dominated the OSCE summit in Istanbul. President Boris Yeltsin's response to Western criticism was to leave the summit before it concluded, after making a strong defence of a war that has popular support in Russia. In the Chechnya offensive, the Russians, taking a leaf from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's book, (NATO successfully employed the strategy of air raids against Yugoslavia earlier this year) have relied on aerial bombings in addition to heavy shelling. The Russian action has caused more than 200,000 Chechens to flee their homes.

The Western criticism was mainly on account of the excesive use of force, which – as U.S. President Clinton advanced in the way of friendly counsel – could even be counterproductive, considering Russia's objective of eliminating Chechnya-based terrorism. Clinton urged Russia to seek a political solution and to allow the OSCE a role to mediate in its conflict with the rebel republic in the Caucasus.

At the end of the two-day summit, the final declaration, while reaffirming support to the territorial integrity of Russia, called for a political and humanitarian role for the OSCE in Chechnya. This and the fact that Russia has agreed to a visit by the OSCE Chairman to the war zone are seen as major concessions by Moscow, which previously rejected any outside involvement in the military campaign that began two months ago.

The case for an OSCE involvement in the Chechen conflict was reinforced at the Istanbul summit by the signing of a Charter for European Security. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov signed the document on behalf of Yeltsin who had left. The Charter reaffirms the OSCE's founding principles, which commit the members to, among other things, a broad spectrum of provisions on human rights and democratic freedoms. It declares the implementation of these principles to be the legitimate concern of all member-states and not exclusively the internal affair of any one of them. Without naming Chechnya, the Charter thus establishes the principle that conflicts in one signatory state are the legitimate concern of all. This is to be the basis of the role for the OSCE in the 21st century, in a security environment that has radically altered in this decade with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE as a multilateral arrangement is in some ways unique among the security institutions in Europe. Its 54 member-states represent a vast area, which includes continental Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and North America, "bringing together", as the organisation puts it, "the Euro-Atlantic and the Euro-Asian communities from Vancouver to Vladivostok." Turkey has been a member since 1973; the Central Asian republics, which were part of the Soviet Union, joined as independent members in the 1990s. The organisation qualifies as a regional arrangement under the United Nations Charter and is therefore the primary instrument in all phases of a conflict cycle, "from early warning and conflict prevention to crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in its region".

THE OSCE has its origins in what began in 1972 as the multilateral Helsinki Process, designed to further regular contacts between the participating states, which were mostly European and were members of either of the two confronting military blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The aim was to establish a permanent channel of communication,



DAVID SCULL/THE WHITE HOUSE/AP

Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton meet on November 18 during the OSCE summit in Istanbul. Clinton urged Russia to allow the OSCE a role to mediate in the Chechnyan conflict.

reduce the threat of war in Europe and open the prospects for East-West cooperation. Thirty-five countries, including the U.S. and Canada, were the original signatories to the Helsinki Act in 1975. The Act defined the multilateral process initiated and its comprehensive approach to security. Known as the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the process was founded on the premise that security is indivisible and its various aspects – politico-military, economic and human – are interdependent. The CSCE, as a result, dealt with a range of issues, including arms control, preventive diplomacy, military confidence-building measures, human rights and economic cooperation, in the decades that followed its inception. Human rights, a sensitive issue between the blocs, was introduced as a legitimate subject of dialogue.

The idea of a pan-European conference first came from the Soviet Union in the 1950s as a way of confirming the existing borders in Europe and establishing a framework for East-West economic cooperation. But at that time, during the height of the Cold War, an idea that proposed a delinking of European and American security interests could not take off. It had to await the change in climate, which came about at the turn of the 1970s, with the East-West detente, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), and the Soviet acceptance of U.S. and Canadian participation. Neutral and non-aligned states in Europe, such as Yugoslavia and Cyprus had been more receptive to the idea.

In this sense, the Helsinki Process was an attempt at a qualitative change in the existing bipolar climate, determined by confronting military alliances, through a multilateral process that would involve neutral and non-aligned countries on an equal basis with the members of the two alliances.

The CSCE continued as a process without institutional structures until the collapse, in the 1990s, of the Communist regimes of eastern Europe radically changed European security concepts. The new environment, as well as the demands posed by new kinds of conflicts such as those in Yugoslavia, necessitated permanent structures, which the CSCE acquired on its way to becoming the Organisation for European Security. Its missions in Yugoslavia, however, proved too late and insufficient to prevent Europe's greatest military crisis since the Second World War. Yugoslavia's membership was suspended in 1992, by making an exception to the rule of consensus, on the grounds of human rights violations. On the other hand, the lack of international sanction for the NATO attack on Yugoslavia generated deep unease among the European public, and this was accentuated by imperialist penetration at times in the name of human rights.

Legitimation of the action by the U.N. came at the end, in the form of a U.N. role in concluding the war, and also a mandate for the multinational force now keeping peace in Kosovo.

This devastating break with half a century of peace has given a new urgency to stabilising the peace in Europe. The regions that are the most vulnerable are in the east where economic crises and social dislocations accompanied the fall of Communist regimes. In a bid to tackle the economic roots of the crisis, European countries have taken the lead to launch a Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, aimed specifically at Bulgaria, Romania, and the countries that once formed the Yugoslav federation. The goals of the Pact are the establishment of Western-style democracies and vibrant market economies in these countries, advancing thereby their prospects of joining the European Union (E.U.). Bulgaria and Romania are trying to speed up negotiations for their entry into the E.U., while Hungary and Poland are at present associate members. Others, like the Czech Republic, are ahead in terms of the parameters that decide admission. E.U. membership would bring them the benefits of economic integration.

Among other aspirants for integration with the E.U., Turkey's case will perhaps be the most important in the beginning of the coming century. Turkey was turned down on different occasions since 1987 on grounds of it not measuring up to European standards in the matter of human rights and democracy, particularly in respect of its handling of Kurdish secessionism. Turkey has also had to contend with Eurocentric doubts about its identity as an Asian and Muslim nation. Turkey's location at the crossroads of Europe, West Asia and Central Asia, however, makes it a key player in all the big disputes in the region, now and in the future. It has a stake in the conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Iran, Iraq, and West Asia. It also has a long history of dispute in the Aegean and over Cyprus with Greece, a fellow member of the OSCE.

As the host, for the last major international summit of the 20th century, Turkey had an occasion to underline its importance. ■

Death of Hsing-Hsing

HSING-HSING, the United States National Zoo's giant panda who for more than a quarter-century served as diplomat, research subject and sweet-natured delight to millions, died in Washington on November 28. Zookeepers gave the panda a lethal injection after deciding that irreversible kidney disease had made his life too painful to endure.


RON EDMONDS/AP

Hsing-Hsing (prounounced Shing-Shing) was 28, an extraordinarily advanced age for a panda. He and his longtime female denmate, Ling-Ling, who died on September 30, 1992, at the age of 23 of sudden heart failure, were gifts to the United States from Mao Zedong in commemoration of President Richard M. Nixon's ice-breaking trip to China in 1972. The animals came to symbolise a deepening but still-testy relationship between the world's most populous nation and its wealthiest.

The pandas mated frequently, on their own and with the aid of science, but left no survivors. They produced five cubs between 1983 and 1989, but none lived more than five days.

National Zoo officials said that Hsing-Hsing's health deteriorated markedly in the last week of November. He was unresponsive to his keepers, nearly blind, plagued with advanced arthritis and barely able to rouse himself to eat. His final meal, on the night of November 27, consisted of a large blueberry muffin, boiled yams, a bit of rice broth and some bamboo.

"Yesterday, after three very bad days, we decided to euthanise him," said the zoo's associate curator for primates and pandas. "We feel an immense sadness as well as an immense emptiness, as empty as the Panda House is now." A spokesman at the Chinese Embassy in Washington said that he was "sad and sorry" to hear of the panda's death.

"The Chinese Government appreciates the effort and care shown by the National Zoo and for their assistance in the preservation of this rare animal," he said.

From the first day that Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling were put on display in April 1972, when 20,000 people flocked to the zoo to see them, the animals were a huge draw. Zoo officials estimated that as many as 75 million visitors saw one or both animals during their long run in captivity.

Ling-Ling, at the time of its death, was the oldest giant panda living in a zoo outside China. The life expectancy for giant pandas in the wild is 15 to 20 years.

National Zoo officials said that McKinley Hudson, the zoo's deputy director, approved the decision to put Hsing-Hsing down after several days of discussions. "It was a momentous decision," Hudson said. "But at the end he was not the Hsing we all knew and loved. In the long run, it certainly was the best decision for Hsing." Scientists were conducting a detailed necropsy on the panda. His skin and skeleton will be turned over to the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, which also has custody of his mate's remains. The bear's organs and tissues will remain at the zoo for future study, officials said.

Pandas have become a globally recognised symbol of the plight of endangered species, a cuddly poster animal embraced almost everywhere representing hundreds of less adorable plant and animal species.

The empty Panda House at the National Zoo was open on November 28, but the entry bore a sign reading: "We regret to inform you that Hsing-Hsing died this morning, Sunday, November 28, 1999." Inside, his glass-fronted den was half-covered with get-well cards from schoolchildren. ■

New York Times Service

Miss World

IT was a sort of "victory" for India. At a beauty pageant in London on December 4, billed the last Miss World contest of the millennium, 20-year-old Yukta Mookhey from Mumbai won the crown. The second and third places went to Martina Thorogood of Venezuela and Sonia Raciti of South Africa, respectively.


SEA

"It is the best day of my life because I had this as a beautiful dream as a child and now it's come true," swooned Mookhey, after beating 93 other aspirants. Besides the bejewelled crown, she won $100,000 and year-long globe-trotting opportunities.

Mookhey is the fourth Indian to be named the Miss World. Rita Faria was the first to win the title (1962), followed by Aishwarya Rai (1994) and Diana Hayden (1997). Sushmita Sen was chosen Miss Universe in 1994.

Mookhey said that her role model was Hollywood actress Audrey Hepburn, whose "inner beauty, compassion and great aura" she admired. Proclaiming herself as an "ambassador for India", she said: "In India we have a whole network of cultures and I want to spread those beliefs in tolerance."

Among others, the Rajya Sabha promptly rejoiced, with its Deputy Chairperson, Najma Heptullah, lauding Indian women for bringing laurels to the country. Members duly thumped in appreciation.

The zoology graduate who impressed the panel of judges with, besides other attributes, her quick replies to questions, had some harsh words for feminists. "I have little time for feminists who say doing this degrades a woman's dignity," she declared. Those protesting "would not object to watching an obscene movie on television." She was referring to a group of women's rights activists protesting outside the Olympia Theatre venue with placards saying, "stop this sexist cattle market", "women's bodies are not for sale" and "Miss World, we are not cattle, we will shut you down, just like Seattle." ■

Verdict in corruption case

ON December 2, Nagoor Meeran became the first former All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) Minister in Tamil Nadu to be convicted and sentenced for acquiring wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income. The judgment followed legal proceedings in three additional courts in Chennai conducted by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC), Tamil Nadu. The DVAC filed charge-sheets against Meeran and his wife, Dr. Noor Jameela, on October 7, 1998.



V GANESAN

Special Judge S. Sambandham convicted each of them to three years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.10,000. Meeran was found to have amassed the wealth between February 1992 and June 1996 when he was a Minister in the AIADMK Government headed by Jayalalitha. The DVAC found that Meeran had made Rs.33.72 lakhs. He was charged under Sections 13(2) read with 13(1)(e) of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA). His wife was charged under Section 109 (punishment for abetment) of the Indian Penal Code and Sections 13(2) read with 13(1)(e) of the PCA.

Meeran's total wealth as on February 1, 1992 was Rs.26,990. The value of property owned by him and his family members had shot up to Rs.43,56,343 by June 30, 1996. The ill-gotten wealth amounted to Rs.20.25 lakhs.

In his 64-page order, Judge Sambandham rejected Meeran's contention that he had earned the money through legal means and the defence argument that Rs.1.6 lakhs had been earned from coconut plantations and other crops grown on about 3.5 acres, which was bought for Rs.70,000 during the period in question.



The Judge suspended the sentences till January 27, 2000 to enable them to go on appeal in the High Court. After the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) returned to power in 1996, 46 corruption cases were filed against Jayalalitha, her former Ministers and bureaucrats. Three additional courts were set up in April 1997 to try these cases. Eight cases of corruption were filed by the DVAC and Crime Branch-Criminal Investigation Department (CB-CID) against Jayalalitha.

This is the second corruption case in which a Special Court has delivered its verdict. In the first order on November 26, Special Judge V. Radhakrishnan acquitted E. Hariharane, former Director of Fire Services, and Mohammed Ziauddin, an industrialist, of any wrong-doing in a case relating to the purchase of fire tenders by the Fire Services Department. ■

T.S. Subramanian

Cracking the code of human life

AFTER a decade of preparation, scientists have for the first time decoded the information in a human chromosome, the unit in which the genetic information is stored.

The achievement, significantly by a public consortium of university centres in Britain, the United States and Japan, is a milestone in the human genome project, an initiative started in 1990 with the goal of deciphering all of human DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) by 2005.

The success in decoding the first chromosome, even though it is the second-smallest of the 23 pairs in every human cell, validates the approach chosen by the public consortium and bolsters the chance that it can complete the full human genome as planned. In the last 18 months the consortium's strategy has been challenged by a private company, Celera Corporation of Rockville, Maryland, U.S., which says it can sequence the genome faster by a different method.

"A new era has dawned – we have fulfilled the dreams of Mendel, Morgan, Watson and Crick, and Sanger, as we now have the essentially complete structure of the first human chromosome," said Dr. Bruce Roe of the University of Oklahoma, a member of the decoding team. He was referring to the principal architects of today's knowledge about genetics.

Understanding the human genome is expected to yield vast medical benefits, because almost every disease has a genetic component. The central feature of each chromosome is an enormously long DNA molecule. The chromosome on which the latest work was done is called Chromosome 22, which, small as it is, contains 43 million units of DNA, of which researchers have now decoded 33.5 million. Though there is still much left to be done, the Chromosome 22 team believes that it has sequenced all regions of major interest to biomedical researchers – that is, the regions that contain the protein-making genes.

The team working on Chromosome 22 also included scientists at Keio University in Japan and the University of Oklahoma. The team's leader is Dr. Ian Dunham of the Sanger Centre, where the bulk of the sequence was completed.

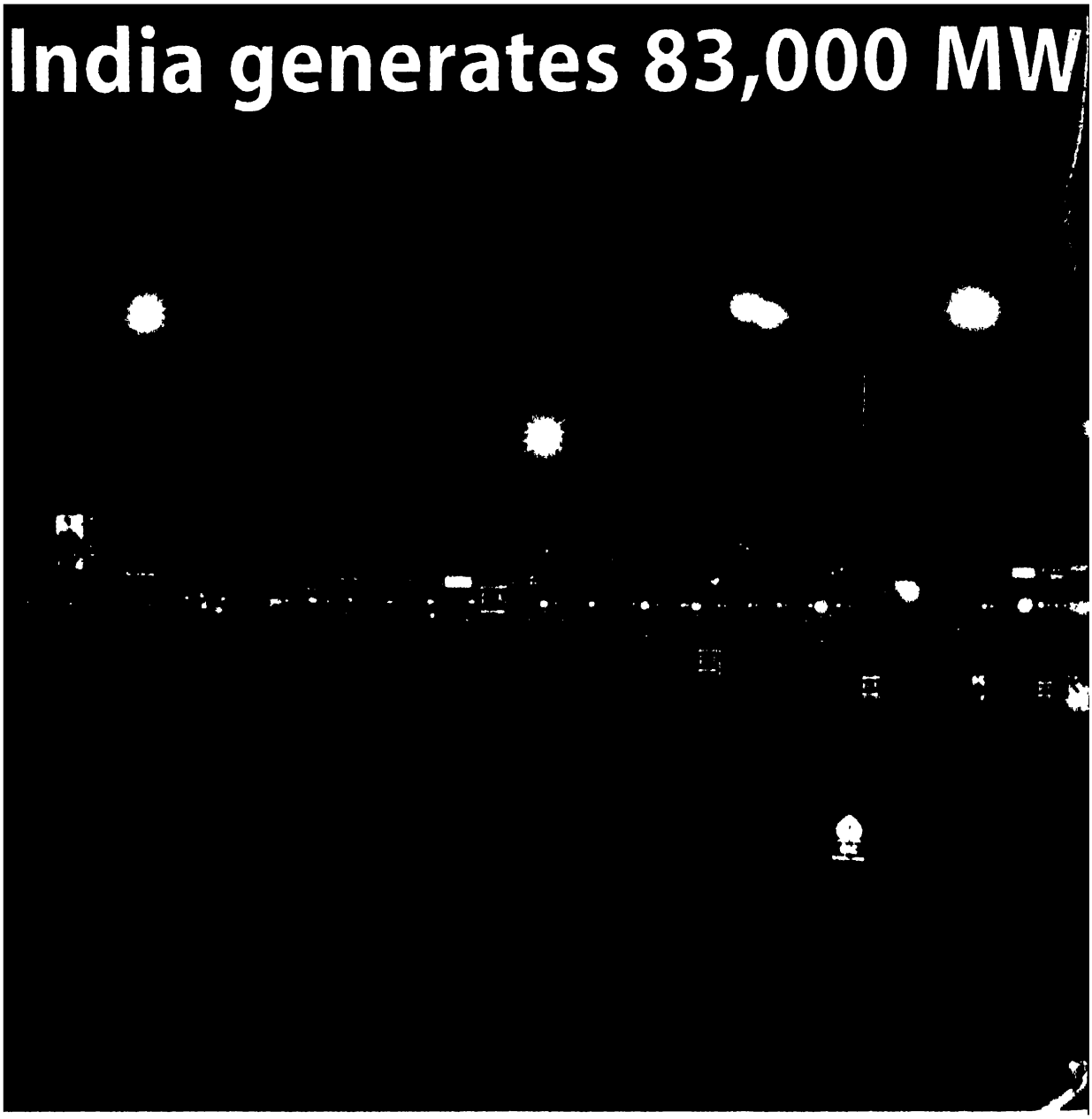
So far, the Dunham team has identified 545 genes – each of which is composed of thousands of chemical units – and altogether there are probably 1,000 or so genes strung out along the chromosome.

If there is a pattern in the types of genes nature has chosen to store on Chromosome 22, it has escaped the researchers. The genes appear to be a random assortment, including a large set of genes involved in the immune system and more than 20 genes that cause known human diseases when defective, such as DiGeorge and cat eye syndromes. In addition, one of the genes suspected of contributing to schizophrenia is believed to lie on Chromosome 22 but has not yet been identified.

Besides the interest in specific genes, biologists can also see, for the first time, the full architecture of a human chromosome. Their immediate reaction is, in some cases, pure awe at the daunting complexity of the structure and the distance yet to be travelled before its features are understood.

Although the goal of the human genome project is to sequence every one of the three billion letters in human DNA, the sequence of Chromosome 22 is not yet complete. There are 11 gaps, all of known length and fairly short. These are mostly regions that could not be cloned in bacteria, the standard way of amplifying long segments of human DNA for further analysis. ■

New York Times Service

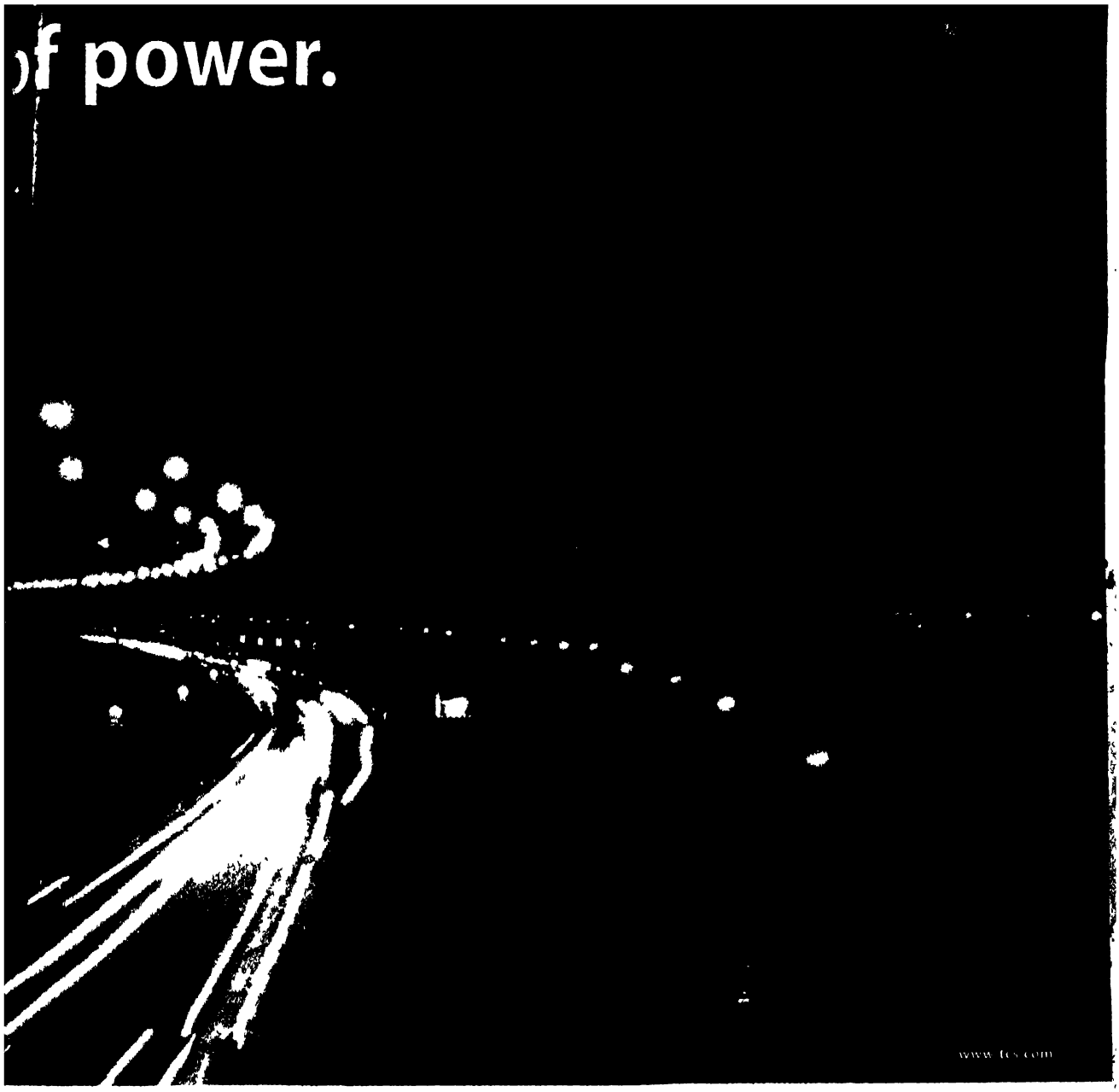


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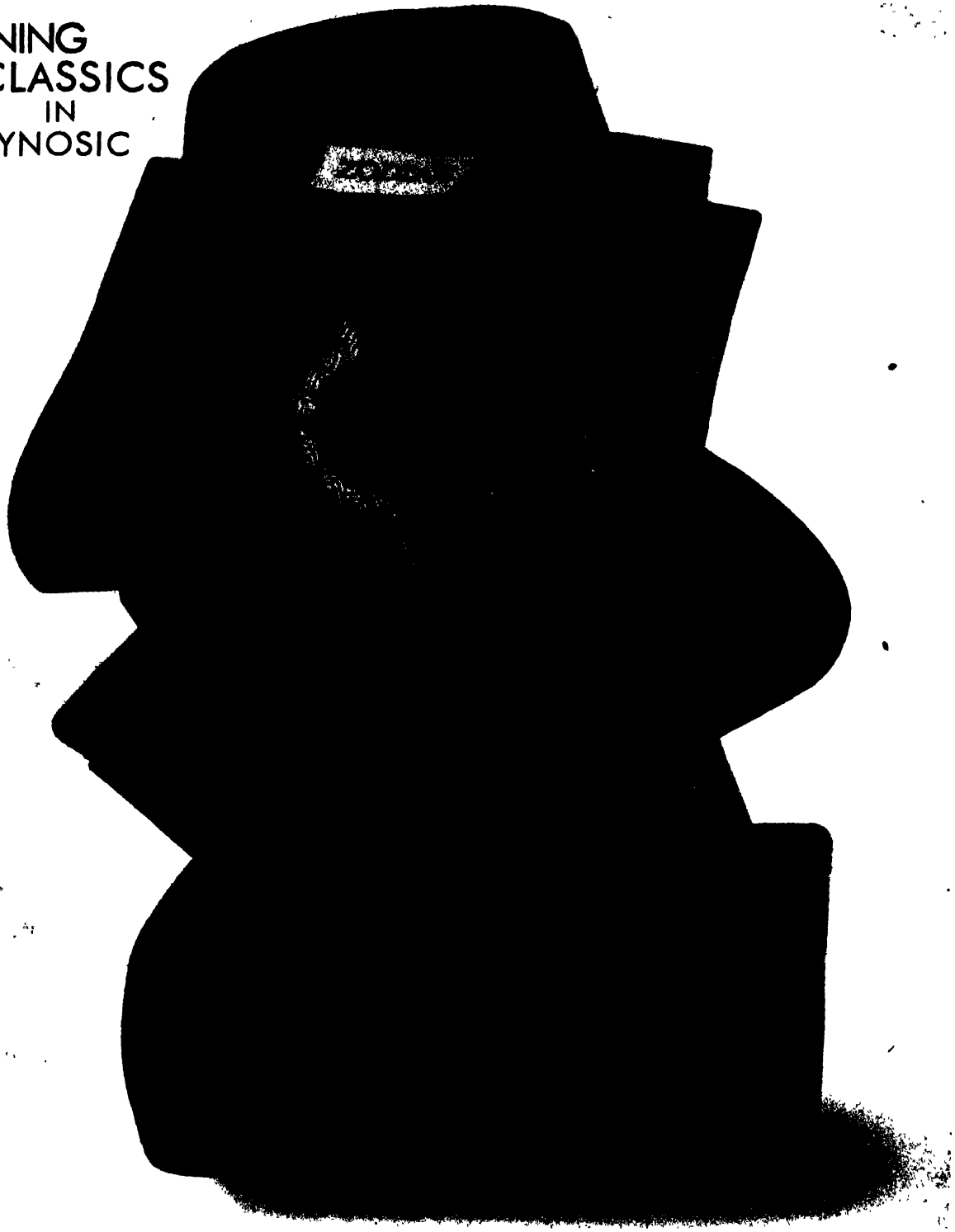
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